

Analysis on the Cultivation of Students' Critical Thinking Ability in Oral English Class

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Abstract. It is of vital importance to promote students' critical thinking ability in oral English class. Improving their ability to think can make students' oral expression more fluent and profound, more philosophical and logical. Based on the author's teaching practice, this thesis strives to explore the training strategies and practical steps in fostering students' critical thinking ability in English majors' oral English class in order to better serve the teaching.

Keywords: Cultivation of critical thinking ability; oral English class; English major.

1. The Significance of Critical Thinking and the Lack of Critical Thinking in English Majors' Oral English Class

Cultivating students' ability of critical thinking has become the crucial part in the reform of higher education, attracting the attention of scholars at home and abroad. In the course of teaching, teachers should help students improve their ability of critical thinking so as to make them jump out of the framework of textbook, comprehend by analogy, study creatively and apply practically. In this way, can students perform well in international academic exchange and ultimately achieve the goal of strengthening their international competitiveness. Domestic English education community also realizes the fact that simply cultivating students' language skills can no longer meet the needs of the society and the needs of students' development. Language teaching has changed from sole language skill training to developing language skills while cultivating English majors' critical thinking ability. As a representative of audio-visual courses, oral English teaching, if properly designed, can assist English majors in improving their ability of critical thinking, and make their oral expression more fluent and profound, more philosophical and logical, which in turn promotes their overall English competence. Therefore, it is necessary to cultivate English majors' critical thinking ability in oral English class.

However, the actual situation is: influenced by traditional teaching methods, English teaching often focus on "reception, repetition, review, and reproduction" of knowledge, which is not conducive to develop students' critical thinking. "When English majors encounter arguments that need to be justified, when writing articles that need to be elaborated, or when listening to lectures that need to be discussed, their minds just go blank and they have no idea of what to say; or once they have some ideas, they don't know how to organize their ideas in a logical way and don't know where to start." This is because English majors are prone to have "critical thinking absenteeism", which means "the lack of ability to analyze, synthesize, judge, reason, think and discriminate." [1] This is especially true in oral practice, where teachers and students tend to focus on the fluency of speech, grammar, and the fluency of oral expressions, while ignoring the logic and critical thinking of their spoken expressions. In the author's university, in many oral English classes, the focus of teaching is always the correctness of expression, while the improvement of students' critical thinking ability is rarely taken into account, which poses a big challenge in fostering the ability of critical thinking in oral English teaching. This thesis tries to explore how to cultivate and improve English majors' ability of critical thinking in oral English class.

2. Strategies of Training Critical Thinking Ability in Oral English Class

2.1 Adopt Innovative Teaching Methods

In order to cultivate students' thinking ability, teachers should bravely innovate in oral classroom teaching, adopt advanced teaching theories, and improve teaching methods. For example, the method of "cooperative learning" can be adopted, taking cooperative groups as the basic form of teaching, and obtaining the whole group into evaluation, so that students can discuss together and learn from each other in the course of study. This method improves the overall participation of students in the classroom, mobilizes their enthusiasm, and inspires students to think independently and seek different ways of thinking. [2] Another example is the use of "scenario teaching method" in teaching which creates targeted situations based on teaching contents to arouse students' inspiration, and guide students to form their own opinions through effective means of introduction. It enhances students' understanding of the teaching contents to achieve the purpose of stimulating and awakening emotions, thereby effectively improving the learning efficiency. [3] Students' self-learning ability should also be stressed. Teachers should not become the center of the classroom, but should become the "leader". They are expected to design and assign a great variety of activities after class to make up for the lack of time in the class, and use effective incentives to encourage students to participate in classroom activities to improve their oral English. This kind of teaching method establishes students' critical thinking ability on the teaching mode of self-learning, allowing students to participate and think actively. In addition, the influence of discipline crossing on critical thinking should also be considered. English majors should not only be limited to the knowledge of their profession, but should throw themselves into a broader range of learning. Teachers are supposed to take the initiative to guide, recommend, and encourage students to read and study classic works of humanities and even social sciences to enrich their knowledge reserve, and improve students' logical and critical thinking ability.

2.2 Make Effective use of Multimedia and Network

In the 21st century, multimedia and online teaching have gradually become important and effectively aids for teaching. All institutions of higher learning should make full use of multimedia and network technologies, and adopt a new teaching model to improve the original single-teaching model based on teacher-led teaching. The new teaching model should be supported by modern information technology, especially network technology, so that English teaching is not restricted by time and place, and it is developing towards personalized learning and independent learning. In oral English teaching, teachers should use multimedia means efficiently, and help students to use modern technology and resources independently to improve their oral expression and critical thinking. Multimedia technology presents the teaching contents to students in the form of film and television. This multi-dimensional and all-round teaching condition makes the oral materials visualized and lively. The vivid character image in the picture, the true and appropriate contextual expressions effectively arouse students' interest, and they can't help but enter the situation. Teachers and students are also no longer limited to the contents of books. Students are able to have access to many authentic oral expressions and they can analyze the way Westerners think. They can also improve themselves by imitating, comparing and correcting. The author once played a part of the American film "A Few Good Men" in class to let students understand the characteristics of court English, and guided students to analyze the thoughtful thinking process in the court debate, and then arranged role play for students. In the process of imitating film fragments and performing, students imitated the characters' phonetic intonation and demeanor, comprehended the relevant context, and deepened the understanding of the teaching contents.

2.3 Select Quality Teaching Materials

At present, the oral English textbooks used in teaching have deficiencies that "the language is not native, the scene is not real, and the model is not flexible", and these defects directly affect the cultivation and development of students' critical thinking ability. [4] Some textbooks are still based on examples, providing contextual templates for students to remember and practice. These oral

materials have a large amount of information and sentence patterns, but they are not conducive to practical application, and students will gradually shift the focus of learning from the practice of language to the analysis of English grammar, vocabulary and sentence patterns. According to the author's teaching practice, Contemporary College English: Oral English edited by Yang Limin and published by the FLTRP is highly recommended. Each unit of this set of textbooks provides a large amount of related information to increase students' input of language materials, and attaches great importance to humanity, thus solving students' problem of "having nothing to say". Furthermore, the focus of practice is also gradually shifted from the functional expressions related to daily life and the relatively easy questions and answers, retelling, and introduction to the discussion of various hot issues. All units in this set of textbooks are closely related to current events and they do not only provide a large number of set examples like traditional textbooks, instead, they arrange a large amount of reading materials for students to read and think, which aims to help students not only to speak, but also be able to organize their ideas in a logical way and make sense. [5] Let's take the first unit "Hero" of Book1 as an example. There are five passages relating to the topic arranged in this unit, all about heroic deeds and thoughts and insights about "what kind of person can become a hero", such as the introduction of Mahatma Gandhi, which provide students with language materials and lead students to think. By reading these materials, students think actively and have lots to share with others.

3. Practical Teaching Steps in Cultivating Critical Thinking Ability in Oral English Class

In the traditional oral English class for English majors, teachers usually adopt the three steps of "example learning", "key vocabulary and sentence learning" and "drilling". They first list several classic dialogues related to the theme for students to learn as models, then explain words with high frequency and difficulty from the examples and finally simulate a series of theme-related scenes and let students use the words and sentences they have learned to make up dialogues and practice in groups. This training mode attempts to achieve the purpose of transforming knowledge into skills through the imitation and repetition of language. However, its drawbacks are: first, students spend a lot of time in the classroom just to memorize and repeatedly practice vocabulary and sentence models. Second, some students only remember the models, and some even don't know how to speak besides models. Third, it fails to achieve the real transformation from knowledge to skills and ignores the cultivation of students' critical thinking.

In the actual oral English teaching, the author adopts the "three-step" method to cultivate students' critical thinking ability in class, including:

Pre-class preparation: Before each unit is talked about in class, the author gives students one week to prepare the relevant topics in groups. Taking unit 11 "What is Success?" in Contemporary College English: Oral English as an example, the author raises questions like "What is the definition of success?", "Who's the most successful person in your heart and why?", "How to succeed?", etc. for students to think and discuss. Students have to think actively, find information, and organize their ideas and language, therefore mobilizing students' enthusiasm and autonomy of learning in the process of completing tasks. With sufficient preparation, students will be more confident in speaking, and will lay the foundation for the second step of classroom presentation.

Classroom display: Since the students have been fully prepared before class, in the classroom, the teacher can simply lead in, and ask the students to display their ideas or opinions individually or in groups according to the schedule. The teacher corrects the errors and logical mistakes made by students, then makes comments and summaries, and gives examples for students to think about and learn. The examples given are preferably original materials displayed in multimedia form. Finally, the teacher can also organize debates on students' different opinions. For example, students can be divided into positive and negative parties on "Does making a lot of money mean success?" to debate. Through intense debate and the collision of ideas, not only has the classroom atmosphere been activated, students' ability to express has been improved, but also the logical thinking ability of students has been deepened.

Reflection after class: At the end of the course, the teacher summarizes and lists the main points of this unit and helps students to learn and memorize. This “three-step” teaching method takes into account the weak foundation and the lack of oral expression of some English majors in colleges and universities. Students can accumulate materials through adequate preparation, build confidence and think actively.

4. Summary

Cultivating students’ critical thinking ability reflects the nature of the “people-oriented” general education of humanities, and students will benefit from this “migratory skill”. English majors shoulder the mission of cross-cultural communication, and should strengthen their humanistic quality, expand their knowledge, and have critical thinking and innovative ability. The above is the author’s exploration gained through teaching practice. Due to the limitation of the author’s ability, there are still some disadvantages in the article, and further improvement is needed in the follow-up study.

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