
Research on the Cultivation of English Majors' Critical Thinking

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Abstract

In this information-swirling era, the significance of critical thinking far exceeds any other eras before. The public are soaked into the melting-pot of information every day by the aid of various technological means. As a matter of fact, the whole melting-pot is full of truth and falsehood. It is during these times where the fundamentality of critical thinking is highlighted. Critical thinking is a kind of ability that people need to find the truth in the mist as well as genuineness, kindness, and beauty in the mortal world. For the contemporary college students, critical thinking is extremely crucial, especially for the language major students who recite much more than thinking in day-to-day learning. Exactly, it seems to be more urgent for the language major students to acquire the ability of critical thinking. The essence of critical thinking, the effects of critical thinking on the modern college students, and the training ways of the English majors' critical thinking are analyzed in this article.

Keywords

English Majors, Critical Thinking, Cultivation.

1. Introduction

Critical thinking is actually a sort of way of thinking that makes a person lifelong be benefited. One can think precisely and integrally thanks to the ability of critical thinking. The improvement of critical thinking, in brief, is extending the depth and the scope of thought as well as cultivating the abilities of putting things in perspective and associating.

2. The essence of critical thinking

Critical thinking refers to the capacity of immense clarity of thought. The so-called thought is the movements of thought like analyzing, reasoning, and judging and so on; the so-called immense clarity is discriminant analysis to the conditions, the classifications, the reasons and other aspects of the things. Critical thinking is firstly a type of abstract thinking ability. It is really the philosophy that is isolated from social practice and concluded in the study through thinking, reasoning, and demonstrating abstractly. Robert Ennis has defined critical thinking as "the personal judgments of authenticity, accuracy, nature, and value of things one has learned". [1] The differences between the things can only be distinguished by identification; the connections between the things will be told by the dialectical eyes.

3. The effects of critical thinking on modern college students

First of all, the effects of critical thinking on the modern college students reflect intuitively on immense clarity of the professional knowledge, are helpful for the students to master the professional skills, and promote the improvement of ability of proper application to knowledge. Second, for the students' parts, the universities they are in lie at the connection point between the school and the real

society, and except mastering the professional skills, immense clarity to social problems is even more crucial for them. In fact, critical thinking is also a kind of ability of observing and studying the individual thinking or re-recognizing. On the one hand, it seeps the criticizing spirit, and contains the basic skills of thinking on the other hand. [2]Only these above can facilitate deep thinking about social problems of the students and their integrating with the society. Only in this way can their perfect outlooks on life, world views, and values be built in the most vital stage of their lives. Meanwhile, it will be easier for the students to make the right and the most suitable choices in the future.

4. Training methods for the English majors' critical thinking

The English majors in the universities are undoubtedly the students whose job prospect is hardly limited after graduation. However, the most valuable condition of the English majors after leaving the universities is not mastery of listening, speaking, reading, writing, and translating about the internationally used language--English, but the learning ability and ability of thinking and analyzing to obtain the new knowledge. In 2000, English Teaching Syllabus for English Majors in the institutions of higher learning(abbreviated as the syllabus) pointed out that the goals of cultivating the English majors in higher education are : "with the strong basic professional knowledge, a broad spectrum of knowledge, a certain of relevant professional knowledge, the significant capabilities, and the strong quality....Pay attention to cultivate the abilities of the students to master knowledge, think independently, and innovate." [3]Yet, the reality is that although there are even strong demands for talents of high quality in critical thinking today, the content requiring to remember in the cultivation plan of the English majors at the most universities is much more than the content needing critical thinking. "The English majors tend to rely more on remembering, imitating, reciting, and retelling in the learning process, but hardly think complexly about the challenging issues after accessing their majors. Accordingly, their ability of thinking is constrained in the condition for a long period, and cannot be well trained and developed." [4]Therefore, it is extremely urgent and important to cultivate the English majors' critical thinking.

4.1 Listening and reading in terms of thinking

As the two input channels of the English majors', listening and reading are obviously important to learning. The ocean of knowledge is boundless, and the students may be influenced imperceptibly to remember what they listen and see in the learning process, but not to question or think deeply. This wrong habit can not only weaken the students' critical thinking, but also make them keep firmly in mind what the wrong knowledge and opinions are, and build the wrong view of the world. More horribly, it can also let the students gradually forget their capacity of thinking and the connection between the world and themselves. As time passes, the students' good habit of thinking will be formed if there are more questionable propositions for the students themselves to think about, assume, and reason in the curriculum of the English majors'. Of course, the first prerequisite is that these propositions are written in English. So much so that the students can observe that English is not the dull letters, but the meaningful language, be used to thinking because of English, by English, and from English, and regard English as a kind of language, but not a knowledge point or a subject.

4.2 Speaking and writing in terms of analysis

Listening and reading are the input channels of the English majors', and then speaking and writing are the two output channels. Writing has been seen as a major problem for English learning. Actually, the key of the problem is having no ideas. Writing is very close to speaking. In other words, writing and speaking complement each other. Oral English class is not strange for the English majors at all, but most of the classes can only let the students make a speech themselves, instead of the intense debate among them. The lawyers always debate in the court. That's why they have the strong ability of critical thinking. They have rich law knowledge and flexibility of mind brought by the long-term

debate. If the students are encouraged to actively participate in the discussion of the issues during the oral course, freely express their views, and enjoy bounce around their own ideas, there will be a wonderful feast of thinking. Huge improvement of the students' critical thinking will follow. Besides, a variety of ideas can enrich one's vision and perspective. As for the students experiencing the intense debate, writing cannot be a difficult thing. In the long run, the students themselves will unconsciously think deep and make association without the limitation of thinking, even if there is no environment of group discussions.

4.3 Knowing about the world

The basis of critical thinking is the extensive knowledge. In addition, the learning of language cannot be achieved after mastery of listening, speaking, reading, and writing. To be honest, it is nowhere near enough. Most noteworthy, the teaching focus of the English major at the most universities today is still the basic language teaching, but barely the courses of other fields. This teaching system has no way to train general education talents. The wonder in the Chinese history of education---National Southwest Associated University during the Anti-Japanese War's timetable [5] of the English majors can tell.

The first year: Chinese 6 (credits), English 6 (credits), Biology 8 (credits), Economics 6 (credits), General History of the West 6 (credits), Logic 6 (credits). Total credits: 38.

The second year: English 6(credits), The History of Chinese Literature 6(credits), The History of European Literature 8(credits), English Prose 6(credits), English Poetry 6(credits), The First Foreign Language 6(credits). Total credits: 38.

The third year: English 6(credits), Novel 6(credits), Shakespeare 6(credits), Sociology 6(credits), Phonetics 6(credits), The First Foreign Language 6(credits). Total credits: 36.

The fourth year: English 8(credits), The Western Drama 6 (credits), Literary Masterpiece(Homer's Epic, The Bible) 4(credits), Literature 3(credits), General Philosophy 6(credits), The First Foreign Language or The Second Foreign Language 6(credits). Total credits: 33.

In this timetable, the English course only occupies a fifth of the whole course arrangement, and the rest of the whole is full of various courses. Only in this general studies can the general education talents be created. The talent is really the one who reads a great deal, knows about the nature and humanity, realizes the ancient and the modern, possesses the knowledge, acts as the occasion requires, has the grace to everything, and has a variety of talents. Frankly, if the current curriculum of the English majors' reduced those English courses the students can take in themselves and added some courses of other fields, particularly Chinese and History, etc, the knowledge base in the students' brains would be greatly enriched, and their ability of critical thinking would be strengthened, and eventually their competitiveness would be tremendously increased. Only when widely reading and carefully absorbing knowledge in each field can the English majors successfully complete their study and become the high-quality talents in English who are needed in new times and have good command of English.

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