

A Practical Study on Cultivating Critical Thinking Ability in Senior High School English Reading Teaching

Hai Shi

Shude High School, Chengdu, Sichuan Province, China

Abstract

Against the backdrop of the reform of basic education curriculum and the teaching oriented by core competencies, critical thinking, as the core of higher-order thinking abilities, is highly consistent with the cultivation goal of "thinking quality" among the core competencies of senior high school English. This paper addresses the practical predicaments existing in current senior high school English reading teaching, such as "teaching objectives weakening the orientation of thinking cultivation, teaching methods restricting the space for thinking development, and teaching evaluation ignoring the consideration of thinking processes". It systematically expounds the value implications of critical thinking cultivation in developing students' lifelong competencies, reconstructing the classroom ecology, and connecting with the evaluation requirements of the College Entrance Examination. Based on the research results of critical thinking at home and abroad and teaching practice experience, this paper constructs an implementation process for cultivating critical thinking in senior high school English reading teaching, namely "Prediction - Analysis - Questioning - Inference - Summary - Evaluation". Taking "A Boy's Best Friend" from the textbook published by Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press as an example, the paper details the specific application of this process in reading teaching. Teaching practice shows that the in-depth integration of critical thinking training and language learning can effectively promote students' transformation from knowledge receivers to independent thinkers, and realize the coordinated development of language ability and thinking quality.

Keywords

Senior High School English Reading; Critical Thinking; Core Competencies; Teaching Practice; Implementation Process.

1. Introduction

With the in-depth advancement of the new round of basic education curriculum reform, critical thinking, as a kind of higher-order thinking ability that emphasizes questioning, analysis, evaluation and creation, plays an indispensable role in the reform of basic education teaching. Critical thinking can be traced back to Dewey's "reflective thinking". American scholar Glaser formally put forward the concept of critical thinking. Based on a comprehensive review of domestic and foreign studies, Chinese scholar Wang Shiyun summarized it into the following thinking skills: formulating convincing arguments to evaluate and respond to rebuttals; examining concepts or facts from multiple perspectives; questioning arguments and assumptions to draw new conclusions; designing imaginative methods to solve problems; formulating and clarifying thoughtful and insightful questions; identifying themes or patterns and making abstract connections across themes [1]. The incorporates thinking quality into the core competencies of English, pointing out that thinking quality refers to the personalized characteristics of thinking manifested in the process of language comprehension and expression, including logicity, criticality, and innovation [2]. It can be seen that the core of

critical thinking is consistent with the cultivation goal of thinking quality required by the curriculum standards.

Reading is an important way to cultivate and develop thinking quality, and it is also a process of interaction between thinking and language. Cultivating students' critical thinking ability in English reading teaching and guiding students to actively construct knowledge systems and optimize learning strategies by using critical thinking can ensure that the educational goals of the curriculum standards are effectively implemented in senior high school English reading teaching.

2. Current Situation of Thinking Cultivation in Senior High School English Reading Teaching

In the practice of English teaching oriented by subject core competencies, the cultivation of thinking in senior high school English reading teaching is faced with many practical predicaments, which are most prominently reflected in the following three aspects:

2.1. Weakened Orientation of Thinking Cultivation in Teaching Objective Setting

Most of the reading teaching objectives are set around understanding the main idea of the article, extracting text information, and mastering key vocabulary and grammar, while ignoring the systematic cultivation of students' thinking abilities. This deviation in objective setting leads to reading teaching remaining at the level of knowledge accumulation. Students lack opportunities for critical thinking, analytical evaluation and innovative expression of the text, and it is difficult for them to form the thinking habits of independent thinking and rational judgment, which is far from meeting the requirements for cultivating thinking quality in the core competencies of English.

2.2. Restricted Space for Thinking Development by Teaching Methods

Teachers generally believe that they lack strategies in text deconstruction, question design, and thinking scaffold construction. In reading teaching, open question scenarios and interactive inquiry activities are often not fully created. Teaching methods restrict the activity and creativity of students' thinking. Students can acquire knowledge without in-depth thinking and cannot experience thinking processes such as questioning, analysis and evaluation, which restricts the space for thinking development and makes it difficult to cultivate higher-order thinking abilities that meet the needs of the times. When facing complex English reading texts and practical problems, they often lack the ability of independent thinking, find it difficult to put forward their own opinions, and even less able to use critical thinking to solve problems.

2.3. Neglected Consideration of Thinking Processes in Teaching Evaluation System

The current evaluation system of senior high school English reading teaching still takes test scores as the main basis, and the evaluation method is dominated by summative evaluation, ignoring the formative evaluation of students' thinking development in the reading process. This makes both teachers and students pay too much attention to test scores while neglecting the improvement of thinking abilities. According to the survey, teachers generally believe that they do not pay enough attention to the cultivation of students' thinking abilities, and students also lack the enthusiasm for critical thinking and innovative expression in reading. These factors further aggravate the lack of thinking cultivation in reading teaching.

3. Value Implications of Cultivating Critical Thinking in Senior High School English Reading Teaching

3.1. Developing Students' Thinking Quality and Shaping Core Competencies for Lifelong Development

The cultivation of critical thinking in senior high school English reading teaching takes reading texts as the carrier, deeply stimulates students' thinking potential, and helps them construct a core competency system adaptable to the future society. At the thinking level, by questioning, analyzing and evaluating English reading materials, students can break through the limitations of linear thinking and form a logical, dialectical and objective way of thinking. This kind of thinking ability is not only applicable to language learning, but also can be transferred to other disciplines and life practice, becoming a powerful tool for solving complex problems. At the competency level, the cultivation of critical thinking is highly consistent with "thinking quality" and "cultural awareness" in the core competencies of English. In the process of critically interpreting multicultural texts, students can not only improve their cross-cultural communication ability, but also enhance their cultural confidence and value judgment ability, laying a solid foundation for their lifelong development.

3.2. Promoting Teaching Innovation and Reconstructing Reading Classroom Ecology

Traditional English reading teaching has the drawback of emphasizing knowledge over thinking. The cultivation of critical thinking provides a new path for the reform of teaching mode. In terms of teaching objectives, it urges teachers to shift from single language knowledge imparting to the coordinated development of language ability and thinking ability. In terms of teaching methods, it promotes the application of interactive teaching methods such as problem-oriented and task-driven approaches, breaks the classroom pattern of "teacher-led", and constructs a new classroom ecology centered on students' active inquiry. At the same time, the cultivation of critical thinking requires teachers to change their roles from knowledge authorities to thinking guides, which promotes teachers to improve their professional quality and teaching innovation ability, thereby promoting the optimization and upgrading of the entire English teaching system.

3.3. Assisting Educational Transformation and Adapting to the Evaluation Requirements of the College Entrance Examination

Since the issuance of the in 2019, most provinces in China have implemented the new "3+1+2" College Entrance Examination model, and our province has also implemented the new College Entrance Examination this year. Through the study of English test papers of the College Entrance Examination in recent years, it can be found that the College Entrance Examination pays more and more attention to the examination of students' higher-order thinking abilities. In the proposition of English reading, the proportion of questions requiring in-depth logical analysis of the text and critical interpretation of the author's views has increased.

Cultivating critical thinking can promote senior high school English reading teaching to shift from text information transmission to thinking quality shaping, guide students to break through superficial understanding, actively analyze, question and evaluate the text, and realize the transformation from knowledge receivers to independent thinkers, which conforms to the demands of educational transformation for the cultivation of students' core competencies. Through the systematic study of the cultivation path of critical thinking, this research can help teachers accurately grasp the evaluation direction of the College Entrance Examination, optimize teaching strategies, enable students to improve their critical thinking ability in daily

reading learning, and then flexibly respond to complex reading tasks in the College Entrance Examination, realizing the in-depth connection between teaching and evaluation requirements.

4. Implementation Process of Cultivating Critical Thinking in Senior High School English Reading Teaching

Senior high school English reading based on critical thinking cultivation is a kind of in-depth reading, which requires students to learn to use critical thinking modes such as Prediction, Analysis, Questioning, Inference, Summary and Evaluation to deeply understand the text during the reading process [3]. Based on the interpretation of critical thinking by scholars at home and abroad and teaching practice experience, the author has constructed an implementation process for cultivating critical thinking in senior high school English reading teaching, which includes six parts: Prediction - Creating scenarios and activating prior knowledge; Analysis - Basing on the text and integrating information; Questioning - Developing problem awareness and processing thinking; Inference - Internalizing communication and transferring innovation; Summary - Inducing information and improving thinking; Evaluation - Reflecting on feedback and conducting evaluative criticism. Among them, "Prediction" belongs to pre-reading activities, "Analysis" and "Questioning" belong to while-reading activities, "Inference" and "Summary" belong to post-reading activities, and "Evaluation" belongs to assessment activities.

The construction of this process is a process based on the text, expanding the text, breaking through the text, and finally returning to the text. Its ultimate goal is to improve students' critical thinking ability through reading teaching, and to promote the thinking modes related to critical thinking ability.

4.1. Prediction: Creating Scenarios and Activating Prior Knowledge

Knowledge is not passively accepted, but actively constructed by learners based on their existing cognition. The "Prediction" link stimulates students' learning interest and forms cognitive expectations by creating scenarios related to the text theme. The background information provided in this process helps students establish connections between new and existing knowledge, making subsequent reading a dynamic construction process of verifying, revising and expanding predictions. At the same time, reasonable prediction tasks can guide students' thinking to the potential development level, stimulate their internal motivation to actively explore the text, and lay the foundation for the germination of critical thinking.

4.2. Analysis: Basing on the Text and Integrating Information

The "Analysis" link is a process for students to deeply encode and organize text information. Through reading strategies such as skimming, scanning and intensive reading, students perceive, screen and reorganize the language symbols of the text, and convert fragmented information into structured knowledge. This process requires students to decompose the vocabulary meaning, syntactic structure and textual logic of the text, identify the relationships between various elements, and then construct the overall meaning framework of the text. At this stage, students not only improve their language comprehension ability, but more importantly, cultivate their logical analysis and systematic thinking abilities, laying a solid cognitive foundation for subsequent critical thinking.

4.3. Questioning: Developing Problem Awareness and Processing Thinking

The "Questioning" link emphasizes the cultivation of students' independent thinking ability. True thinking needs to go beyond superficial understanding and question and evaluate the rationality of views and the adequacy of arguments. By designing a series of open questions, teachers guide students to break through the cognitive boundaries preset by the text, and use dialectical thinking to examine the author's views, writing intentions and potential cultural

value tendencies. Continuous questioning stimulates students' reflective thinking, promotes their transformation from passive receivers to active questioners, and cultivates their abilities of independent thinking and rational judgment in the process of weighing different views.

4.4. Inference: Internalizing Communication and Transferring Innovation

The "Inference" link is committed to applying the knowledge, skills and thinking methods acquired in the reading process to new scenarios. Based on text information and existing cognition, students conduct inductive reasoning, deductive reasoning and analogical reasoning, realizing the leap from specific texts to abstract laws. This process not only strengthens the in-depth understanding of the text, but more importantly, cultivates students' innovative thinking and practical application abilities, transforming critical thinking from a theoretical level to a tool for solving practical problems.

4.5. Summary: Inducing Information and Improving Thinking

The "Summary" link is a process of upgrading students' cognitive structure from concrete to abstract and from scattered to systematic. In the process of summarizing, students abstract and generalize the reading experience of multiple texts and construct their own reading thinking system. This process promotes students to actively explore the internal connections between knowledge, form a structured knowledge network, and thus improve their independent learning ability.

4.6. Evaluation: Reflecting on Feedback and Conducting Evaluative Criticism

The "Evaluation" link involves students' self-evaluation and self-regulation of language learning. In the process of evaluation, students not only conduct critical evaluation of the text content, but more importantly, reflect on their own thinking processes and reading strategies. This process helps to promote students' leap from lower-order thinking to higher-order thinking, and finally form thinking qualities with criticality, innovation and reflectiveness.

5. Teaching Practice of Cultivating Critical Thinking in Senior High School English Reading Teaching

Based on the above process, the author takes "A Boy's Best Friend" (from Developing Ideas of Unit 4 "A Glimpse of the Future" in the of the 2019 edition of the senior high school English textbook published by Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press) as an example to elaborate on the curriculum design and implementation of critical thinking cultivation in senior high school English reading teaching.

5.1. Prediction: Guessing Game and Discussion for Prediction

In the pre-reading session, the teacher designed a guessing game to guide students to answer the question "Which animal is a boy's best friend?" After initially stimulating students' learning enthusiasm, the teacher further inspired students' divergent thinking with the question "What are the qualities that make a dog a boy's best friend?" Based on this, the third question was put forward: "Will you choose a robot dog as your best friend if it has all the qualities that a real dog has?"

Design Intention: The guessing game introduces the most important role of the lesson - the dog, and stimulates students' learning attention. The second and third questions can stimulate students' divergent thinking. Through free talk, students think about and discuss this question, which naturally guides them into the thematic context of the text and predicts what choice the little boy will make when facing the robot dog and the real dog.

5.2. Analysis: First Reading to Summarize Story Elements

In the first reading, the teacher guided students to use the story mountain model to obtain the main content of the novel. Students sorted out the main plot of the novel according to the five links: Background, Rising Action, Climax, Falling Action and Ending, focusing on the different emotional attitudes of the little boy Jimmy and his father Mr. Anderson towards the robot dog Robutt. Specifically, Jimmy regarded Robutt as his best friend, while Mr. Anderson thought Robutt was just a machine, and only a real dog could establish an emotional connection with humans.

Design Intention: Using the story mountain model to guide students to sort out the story elements belongs to input-oriented reading, which lays a foundation for the cognitive reading of raising and solving problems in the next step.

5.3. Questioning: Independent Thinking, Raising and Answering Questions

Through a chain of questions, the teacher guided students to think: 1. Why do Mr. Anderson and Jimmy have different attitudes towards Robutt? 2. Do you think Jimmy loves Robutt? 3. Do you think Robutt loves Jimmy? On the basis of the teacher's questions, students were also encouraged to raise questions in groups and interpret whether the robot dog Robutt could be called the little boy Jimmy's best friend according to their own understanding.

Design Intention: The questions set in this link are designed to explain the hidden doubts in the text by triggering questioning, guiding the development of students' divergent thinking, reverse thinking and transfer thinking. In reading teaching, teachers stimulate students' awareness of questions by prompting them to discover or directly pointing out the doubts in the text, such as exploring the reasons for the different attitudes of the father and son towards the robot dog and whether the robot dog really loves Jimmy, through extensive, in-depth, multi-level and multi-perspective critical thinking.

5.4. Inference: Inferring the Subsequent Development of the Story

In the post-reading session, based on the understanding of the questions in the previous link, i.e., whether the robot dog Robutt was Jimmy's best friend, the teacher guided students to reasonably infer the ending of the novel. Students should work in groups to jointly determine whether Jimmy should choose the robot dog or the real dog as his best friend.

Design Intention: This link is the output session of the reading class. On the basis of understanding the main plot of the novel and clarifying the character traits and behavioral logic of the main characters, students should analyze and finally solve the problem, and share their ideas in the form of oral output in class. This is a story with an open ending, and students can express their opinions freely on the basis of conforming to the character traits. This reflects that in addition to guiding and presetting open critical thinking reading tasks, the teacher also encourages students to think freely and independently.

5.5. Summary: Refining What Has Been Learned and Viewing Problems Critically

After students' sharing, the teacher guided them to summarize what they had learned in the class, further understand the character traits, grasp the main contradictions of the plot, and think about the essential differences between humans and machines. Reflecting on why the little boy Jimmy regarded the robot dog Robutt as his best friend while his father Mr. Anderson thought only a real dog could be a best friend is also a process of cultivating higher-order thinking.

Design Intention: This link is the summary of the reading class. The teacher guides students to analyze the text from the overall perspective of the discourse, cultivates students' questioning

spirit and critical attitude, and guides students to conduct independent inquiry through a chain of questions.

5.6. Evaluation: Post-reading Continuation and Knowledge Internalization

In the post-reading session, students should further consolidate what they have learned in class. The teacher guided students to continue writing the ending of the novel based on the class discussion, and then teacher-student evaluation and peer evaluation were carried out.

Design Intention: Evaluating what has been read and written can improve students' sensitivity to language, cultivate their critical thinking, develop their individuality, and enhance their ability to comprehensively use language. Critical reading is not only the understanding of the author and the text, but also the criticism of students' own cognitive limitations and strengths. Therefore, attention should also be paid to students' self-evaluation and mutual evaluation in the learning process to inspire the development of their critical thinking.

6. Conclusion

The cultivation of critical thinking is not only the era demand of the basic education curriculum reform, but also the key path for the implementation of the core literacy of thinking quality in the . From Dewey's reflective thinking to the systematic induction of critical thinking skills by contemporary scholars, this higher-order thinking ability has always been oriented to the core goals of "independent thinking, rational judgment and innovative solution", which is highly consistent with the direction of examining students' thinking ability in the College Entrance Examination evaluation system.

This paper analyzes the practical predicaments of thinking cultivation in senior high school English reading teaching, clarifies the threefold value of critical thinking cultivation in developing students' lifelong competencies, reconstructing classroom ecology and connecting with examination evaluation, and constructs a complete implementation process of "Prediction - Analysis - Questioning - Inference - Summary - Evaluation". The teaching practice of "A Boy's Best Friend" proves that when critical thinking training is deeply integrated with language learning, students can not only solidly improve their reading skills, but also form a logical and multi-perspective thinking quality in the dialectical thinking of the "emotional relationship between humans and machines".

Of course, the cultivation of critical thinking is not a one-off breakthrough, but a systematic project that requires teachers to continue to work hard in the setting of teaching objectives, the innovation of teaching methods and the optimization of evaluation. In the future, only by always taking the text as the foundation, thinking as the core, and continuously improving teaching strategies, can the English reading classroom truly become a fertile ground for the coordinated development of students' language ability and thinking quality, laying a solid foundation for their adaptation to lifelong learning and the future society.

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