

On the Application of Critical Thinking in Advanced English Curriculum

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Fund Project: Author Xu Yunwei is supported by the grant from the Teaching Reform Project of Institute of Technology, East China ,under No.XJJG2020-3.

Abstract: Mind mapping is a teaching method managed to use in Advanced English curriculum. Based on students' learning effect and constant reflection, it fully embodies the idea of teaching and learning together. Traditional English texts teaching explain the words, the structure and the general idea of the paragraphs at most. However, mind map focuses on the context of the whole text and the connections between each part or even each paragraph, so as to explore the author's writing intention and improve students' reading ability, and therefore combine the author's writing method to improve the students' writing ability.

Keywords: Critical Thinking; Mind Mapping; Advanced English Teaching

1. Introduction

Many literatures have mentioned the importance of critical thinking cultivation in English teaching, but there are few successful cases and statistical data to support the specific operation. An important reason is that critical thinking ability is a difficult concept to measure, and how to measure it largely depends on research methods. This study will use the Mind mapping method to explore the ways to cultivate the key skills of critical thinking for English majors in Advanced English course, the core course for English majors. Thus, in view of the lack of practical empirical research on critical thinking training for English majors in China, the author deeply understands the importance and necessity of critical thinking training for English majors after years of teaching English majors, and then explores the training methods.

2. Theoretical foundation

2.1 Critical Thinking

Critical Thinking refers to skills and attitudes, instead of a theory or discipline, it has no discipline boundaries. Any topic involving intelligence or imagination can be examined from a critical thinking perspective. Critical thinking is not only a thinking skill, but also a personality or temperament; It can not only reflect the level of thinking skills, but also highlight the modern humanistic spirit.

2.2 Mind Mapping

Mind Mapping, also known as mind brain map or mind map, was established by British scholar Tony B in the early 1970s. It's a whole new way of thinking, a way of materializing radioactive thinking. Mind map is an effective graphical thinking tool that can express divergent thinking and help learners visualize the knowledge structure constructed by specific topics. According to the natural thinking habits of human beings, it will be the radioactive thinking graphics, a record of human thinking process. But in order to use mind map effectively in English teaching, we should fully understand the characteristics of mind map. The types of composition commonly used for mind map consist of brainstorm, hierarchies, syntax analysis, branches, and content decomposition.

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doi:10.18686/ahe.v5i6.3750

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3. Teaching practice

For this study, the research objectives are aimed at Junior English majors, and double majored students whose second BA is English. In the teaching procedure, the teacher adjusted different ways of mind mapping according to students' learning effects.

3.1 Experimental stages

For better learning effect, the teacher experienced 3 stages in the process of mind mapping.

At the trail stage of mind mapping, in the first stage (one unit per stage), the teacher only asked students to draw a mind map for each paragraph, and used key words to draw the mind map on the basis of understanding the logical relationship between sentences. At the end of the unit, in the reflection section, it was found that students had a good command of each paragraph, but a poor understanding of connection between paragraphs, and they could only repeat the general framework of the article mechanically.

So, in the second stage, on the basis of paragraph mapping, the teacher arranged the class according to the framework of the article. At the end of each section, the students were required to draw a mind map between paragraphs in that section. Through a unit of practice, students had a good grasp of the cohesion between paragraphs in each part, while the understanding of framework of the whole text was only superficial, and students' learning effect could not be tested.

Therefore, in the third stage, the teacher added the full text mapping on the basis of paragraph mapping and frame mapping of each part. This time, the map simplified the details between paragraphs, paying more attention to the logical connections between paragraphs, and the logical relationship between parts (i.e. how the first part leads to the second part, how the second part leads to the third part, etc.). After the analysis of the text, the teacher steered the students to make a bold assumption about how the author of this article should unfold if he / she wanted to continue writing (because the articles in the textbook are all excerpts). And students learned how to use the mind mapping method in ordinary reading. The teaching effect was tested by the improvement of students' correct rate of reading comprehension exercises of Text 2 in each unit.

3.2 Results

The effect of mind map can be tested and proved from the comparative analysis of the learning effects in Advanced English between double majors whose second BA is English and English majors. The former did not use mind map frequently, but practiced once or twice. At the end of the semester, only 2-3 students in the class were able to draw mind maps. For English majors, mind mapping was used in the whole process, from paragraph mind mapping, structure mind mapping to full text structure mind mapping. At the end of the semester, few students had doubts when drawing the full text mind map (incorrect grasp of the logical relationship between the full text). In terms of examination results, the failure rate of the former reached 20 percent, while that of English major students was more than 90 percent. The influencing factor of English foundation can be put aside temporarily, because at the beginning of the junior year, their English level is not much different.

4. Conclusion

By drawing mind maps, students can not only improve their interest in learning, but more importantly, acquire a new way of understanding. Students' after-class comments show that in the process of mind mapping, their memory, understanding and imagination get improved. What's more, the mind maps cultivate students' spirit of critical thinking successfully, they change from passive learners into active learners at last.

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