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Professional Culture of the Specialist of the Future
DEVELOPING SOFT SKILLS AND CRITICAL THINKING

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Abstract

Different personal characteristics, such as flexibility and well developed communication skills, problem-solving and resourcefulness, empathy and responsibility are becoming more and more marketable nowadays. Young graduates have to be able to accept feedback, be confident and capable to show their efficiency and react properly because these assets foster professional growth. Nonetheless, it is hard to instill social skills in students because all individuals are different and there are no special disciplines aimed at competitiveness boosting. Social skills and various personal characteristics can be developed in the process of communication while solving problems. Fiction possesses a lot of examples of situations in which certain personal characteristics are discussed. These characteristics are usually accentuated in order to make readers understand their importance, thus providing bases for their deeper analysis as well as potential for personal development. In practice, modern students do not get full utilization of literature. They are not exposed to its potential contribution, don't think critically and that's why are not able to develop their personal characteristics. The case study presented in this paper portrays the issue by analyzing methods and approaches with the teacher employing guided analysis based upon critical thinking. It offers education recommendations with regard to the system of critical thinking development, which can help teachers and students use literature as a tool necessary for the development of their soft skills.

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1. Introduction

About 70 per cent of businesses today regard personal characteristics as sought-after assets which foster professional development. Employers expect prospective candidates to communicate well and be team-work oriented, flexible, dependable and resilient. Professionalism can be considered as the consistent use of specific knowledge and abilities as well as various soft skills. Soft skills indicate personal competences such as communication, diplomacy, planning, enthusiasm, empathy, etc. These skills are often referred as self-oriented or interpersonal and other oriented - interpersonal skills. They can be developed by the person himself or with other people while working together and communicating. This means that such characteristics are usually developed through group work while solving different problems where various individuals interact. Moral virtues are also related to the sphere of soft skills. Here belong temperance, justice, courage, honesty, loyalty, etc. They refer to sense of belonging to your family or other people with shared experiences, cultural norms, common goals. These virtues are social and humanitarian. In order to develop these skills it is necessary to help students analyze and understand their deep sense and develop generic, transferable skills for the future. One of the approaches to the development of soft skills and personal characteristics is literature reading and critical thinking (Krajewski, 1992).

Fiction plays an important role in providing students with valuable examples of virtue development, as readers are swept into different time periods, places, and adventures where the characters develop virtue by making decisions and choices. Critical thinking goes back to hermeneutics that aims at interpreting various conditions, providing the reader with understanding. It analyses texts and on the bases of this analysis the horizon of the reader can be broadened. According to Weinsheimer (1985), the text merges with the reader's own questions, creating the fusion of horizons. Throughout the years critical thinking has been receiving growing attention; however, there is no certified method for developing soft skills on the basis of critical thinking and literature reading. The next sections will discuss the process of developing critical thinking with regard to soft skills on the bases of literature reading.

2. Problem Statement

The humanities are dedicated to the study of the world, human relationships and various psychological and philosophical matters. People remain complex and unpredictable: they do not always get along; have a variety of motives, are not ready to change, do not always behave predictably. Fiction discusses these aspects and provides readers with various examples that explore and show various interpersonal problems. Here you can find examples of people who are confused dealing with colleagues, partners or customers, have different approaches and are looking for the solutions. Through literature reading, students can gain more experience and learn how to predict human behaviour in certain life situations. Analysing examples from different works they gain experience and learn how to cope and solve various problems. This paper presents an analysis of a passage in which altruism as an example of an invaluable moral value is discussed and analysed critically.

3. Research Questions

How can critical thinking through literature reading be viewed as a tool of social skills development?

4. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to describe the process of critical thinking and soft skills development in the course of literature reading. At the theoretical level, the concept of critical thinking, cooperative learning and education is explained. The necessity for the innovative educational system creation is discussed.

5. Research Methods

The study is based on integrative, comprehensive approaches to the study of critical thinking, interpretation and logic. Theoretical and methodological basis of this work draws on the works of B. Bloom, J.L. Steele, K.S. Meredith, Ch. Temple, J. Dewey, J. Weinsheimer and others which are dedicated to the study of critical thinking, soft skills and literature reading.

6. Findings

For the correct assessment of accuracy and truthfulness of a statement, one must be able to think critically. Critical thinking involves the process of situation or problem analysis. Critical thinker is able to separate facts from fiction, honesty from lies, accuracy from inaccuracy. The non-reflective mind on the contrary can neither recognize thinking as the process including concepts, assumptions, conclusions, points of view, nor be aware of corresponding standards for critical thinking: clarity, accuracy, relevance, logic, etc.

Modern students are rarely asked to do assignments aimed at information evaluation. Among the approaches to teaching critical thinking, based upon reading literature the taxonomy, introduced by B. Bloom, is given. This taxonomy combines six key elements: knowledge, understanding, application, analysis, synthesis and evaluation.

Foreign languages provide students with the opportunity to read various texts and discuss them. They can participate in debates, developing thinking skills, improving their communication and learning to interact in a team. Thus, such classes combine two types of learning goals: they develop social skills, because these skills are communication based, and critical thinking skills. Students work in pairs or groups to achieve maximum success. Such kind of collaboration contributes to the development of positive interdependence, the ability to take responsibility and actively participate in solving problems. Interaction and cooperation between the members of the group make students understand feelings of their peers, develop empathy, flexibility, responsibility and motivation (Almazova, Eremin, & Rubtsova, 2016; Almazova, Khalyapina, & Popova, 2017; Pogodin & Li, 2017).

The analysis was carried out basing upon the collaborative work on the excerpt from “The Hunger Games” by Suzanne Collins. The book is told on behalf of the 16-year-old Katniss Everdeen participating in an annual event in which boys and girls aged 12-18 compete. When Katniss realises that her 12-year-old sister was chosen to participate, she volunteers instead of her, understanding that the sister would die. This is an example of altruism. Being altruistic is one of the values, which has always been very important. Students read slowly, update the information they read to get maximum understanding, write questions to the text. Sometimes these questions are accompanied by their thoughts and answers to the question. According to the concept of Reading and Writing for Critical Thinking (RWCT), the first stage implies the usage of their existing knowledge in order to increase motivation for learning. The second phase relates the

introduced topic to the new content. At this stage, the teacher organizes discussions, works on the lexical stage of the text, as well as its stylistic analysis (Steele, Meredith, & Temple, 2006).

The teacher can ask questions about any factual information, its understanding, interpretation, application. At the application stage, the teacher can provide students with some problem in the form of a case study, which they are to discuss and solve using information from the text. After that, the teacher asks the students to analyze the actions of the characters deeper, the reasons for their behavior and other important details. At the stage of synthesis, the teacher lets students create their own situations, in which the discussed problem can arise. At the final stage, students should assess the importance of quality, which they have discussed. The stage, known as reflection, focuses on the application of the newly acquired information, its introduction into practice. At all stages students are involved in active participation that leads to the development of teamwork, communication skills, responsibility and reflexiveness.

In the taxonomy, knowledge implies the recalling of universal truths, methods and processes, patterns, structures or settings. This level can help students to revise the information and their experience in the field of the value under analysis. Understanding enables students to comprehend what is discussed, without necessarily associating it with other patterns. At this stage students communicate with each other discussing various virtues or personal characteristics. The stage of application can be defined as the implementation of abstract ideas in various situations. Students learn to use their knowledge in different situations. While analysing information from the text they split it into logical parts, explaining the relative hierarchy of ideas and clarifying the links between them. The stage of synthesis represents the unification of different parts, thereby creating a whole. Evaluation generates judgments about the value of ideas (Halpern, 2007).

The taxonomy is used as a basis for Evocation, Realization of Meaning and Reflection framework. Training consists of three stages in which students learn to think critically. At the stage of evocation, they are encouraged to use their knowledge and experience to predict and define notions for a particular topic. The implementation phase implies that text analysis, thematic presentations or other presentation form and new content are given. It is expected that students will experience new content and integrate it into their knowledge. This process can be organized in a form of a pair or group work, so that students have more opportunity for interaction. At the stage of reflection, students think about what they have learned in the context of their existing knowledge, rebuild it, create new links between old and new content and create a new quality (Plotnikova, 2008).

The teacher instructs students to talk about their own stories containing the problem of altruism, to list their personal achievements, lapses, reasons for lapses and successes, and steps towards further improvement. While reading the story, students discuss it and present the findings to the teacher. The teacher helps students analyse the situation and develop wider thinking beyond their findings through guided reflection. The analysis can focus on various subjects that utilize critical thinking, such as ethical professional conduct, professional responsibility. Then the teacher provides students with a case study in which the problem discussed in the text has to be solved (Popova, Almazova, Khalyapina, & Tret'jakova, 2017; Vdovina, 2017; Zemlinskaya & Fersman, 2017).

Dewey (1966) discusses the close connection of society, philosophy and education, highlighting that text interpretation guides the reader through self-interpretation and transformation process, through the

development of new experience. Thus, we can assume that through literature reading and proper analysis the personality of a student changes.

Reading literature is a multifunctional activity which implies that readers are able to remember, receive and reflect on their previous experience or memories in order to correctly interpret the meaning of the text (Ricoeur, 1973). In other words, readers need to develop various skills for working with information, such as the ability to distinguish facts from opinions; understand the literal or implied meanings and tone of the narrator; to search for details related to the issues under discussion; clarify causal relationships or links between events or actions; discern and detect facts and judgments; and, above all, apply what they have learned from this process, to other situations. All these abilities are related to critical thinking skills. That is why, reading literature can be considered to include the whole spectrum of mental attributes that are considered essential for critical thinking (Dewey, 1966).

The texts that are proposed for analysis should be devoted to the idea of those moral values or social skills that students should develop and that are marketable. They can discuss the ideas of honesty, sincerity, justice or altruism.

Below the examples of tasks given at various stages of critical thinking development are provided. Students are asked to do all the tasks working in small groups.

Application stage:

Fill in the dialogue chart while reading:

Dialogue chart

Character	Words

Use the ideas below to talk about altruism:

gives and shares what belongs to them with others without asking

identifies the one who needs their help, responds to them kindly and do their best to assist without expecting any reward in return for such assistance.

clearly understands that some people see him as foolish and/or people-pleasing but he always chooses to express and confirm his true character nonetheless.

Answer the questions:

Why should Prim Everdeen be grateful?

Is Katniss a real example of altruism?

Which features of character does she possess?

Make up and role play the dialogue between Prim and Katniss.

Synthesis stage:

Write a Sensory Emotion Poem.

Brainstorm the emotions Katniss experiences along with the incidents which inspire the emotional reaction. Choose one emotion for the poem. In the first few lines of the poem, associate the emotion with the five senses. The last line of the poem will include a metaphor of the emotion.

Use the poem to summarize Katniss's emotions from the beginning, middle, and end of the novel. This activity will encourage creative thought while motivating students to think critically about the novel.

Title (Emotion)

(Line 1) (Emotion) is (color)

(Line 2) What does the emotion taste like?

(Line 3) What does the emotion smell like?

(Line 4) What does the emotion feel like?

(Line 5) What does the emotion sound like?

(Line 6) What does the emotion look like?

(Line 7) (Emotion) is _____(include a metaphor)

Reflexion stage:

Discuss the following situation:

Penelope was driving to a friend's wedding in a beautiful gown with impeccable makeup and hair. She noticed a car jet off the road and flip upside down into a deep canal. Without a thought, she immediately stopped her car, kicked off her heels, and ran towards the accident. Knowing the driver was still in the car, she single-mindedly jumped into the deep canal and swam towards the bottom to attempt to rescue the driver. Penelope was not a great swimmer, and she was having difficulty breathing in such deep water, but her heart told her that she needed to save the driver.

Write an essay (200 words) about how the situation could have developed if Penelope was not altruistic at all.

7. Conclusion

As a conclusion, it should be noted that literature reading and critical thinking helps students to interpret the examples of various problems and create their own attitude to a certain moral issues. This can provide them with valuable experience which can be developed on the basis of problem solving tasks. After solving problems containing some moral issue students become more confident, develop communication and reflection in the process of discussion, and can react to the similar problems more effectively. They read slowly, questioning and interrogating the information to get maximum understanding from it. This helps them to become more reflective. They could write down a question they would ask if they were the examiner. Sometimes these questions are accompanied by their thoughts and answers to the question. This means students become more responsible and accurate, learn to analyse their own thoughts and ideas.

Evocation serves to activate existing knowledge, attitudes or impressions in order to raise interest for a given topic and motivation for learning. Then the students are challenged with expanding resources potent with new information. It can be noted that such tasks are essential for the development of deduction, reasoning, active listening, as well as flexibility, teamwork, self-confidence and responsibility. At this stage the teacher organizes discussions, works on the lexical stage of the text, as well as its stylistic analysis. The teacher can ask questions about some factual information, its understanding, interpretation, application. At the stage of application the teacher may provide the students with some problem in a form of a case study which they need to discuss and solve using the information from the initial text. This means that students are able to use the information that they have already processed. After that the teacher asks students to analyze the actions of the characters deeper, the reasons to their behavior and other important details. At the stage of synthesis the teacher asks students to create their own situations where the discussed problem could occur. At the final stage the students are to evaluate the importance of the quality they have discussed. The stage known as reflection focuses on the application of the newly acquired content into context, its implementation into practice and utilization for problem solving. The key principle of all phases is to lead the students through an active involvement during instruction by participating in cooperative teaching activities which lead to activation and development of social skills, communication competencies and a long-lasting knowledge retention.

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