

Research on Strategies for Cultivating Critical Thinking in Chinese Reading Teaching of Middle Schools

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Abstract:

This paper analyzes the current status of Chinese reading teaching in middle schools, pointing out such issues as the dominance of traditional teaching models, insufficient emphasis on cultivating critical thinking, and inadequate utilization of teaching resources. On this basis, the study expounds the significance of cultivating critical thinking for students' personal growth, the reform of Chinese teaching, and social development. Specific cultivation strategies are proposed, including creating contexts, designing questions, carrying out cooperative inquiry, encouraging questioning, and implementing multiple evaluations, which are illustrated with examples from teaching materials. The study shows that these strategies can effectively stimulate students' critical thinking and enhance their abilities of independent thinking and rational judgment.

Keywords:

Middle school Chinese
Reading teaching
Critical thinking
Teaching strategies

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1. Introduction

With the deepening of educational reform, the cultivation of critical thinking has become one of the important goals in Chinese reading teaching for middle schools. However, current teaching practices still face issues such as the dominance of traditional teaching models and insufficient thinking training, which restrict the development of students' independent thinking and innovative abilities. This paper aims to analyze the current situation and significance of cultivating critical thinking in middle school Chinese reading teaching, and propose practical

teaching strategies, hoping to provide references for improving students' thinking quality and Chinese literacy.

2. The importance of cultivating critical thinking in middle school Chinese reading teaching

2.1. Promoting students' personal growth and development

Cultivating critical thinking can effectively enhance students' independent thinking abilities. With the

development of society, increasing emphasis has been placed on the importance of an innovative spirit and practical ability. The New Curriculum Standards also explicitly state that “it is necessary to focus on cultivating students’ abilities to discover, explore, and solve problems.” Junior high school students are in a critical period of rapid growth, making the cultivation of their critical thinking particularly important during this stage. The teaching activities of the Chinese subject provide an excellent opportunity for students to exercise critical thinking. When encountering a text, instead of simply understanding its meaning as before, students should interpret it with their own subjective awareness and form their own ideas and opinions^[1]. For instance, after reading a text, teachers should guide students to grasp its moral implications, gain insights, and apply this understanding to the study of other subjects as well as future life and work. This helps them calmly analyze complex problems and make rational decisions when faced with challenges.

2.2. Promoting Chinese teaching reform and quality improvement

Introducing critical thinking into middle school Chinese reading teaching is one of the effective ways to change the current status of traditional Chinese subject education. Through conscious critical interpretation of textbook content, students will not only understand the ideological and cultural implications of texts from their literal meanings but also form and refine their unique insights. Cultivating students’ independent thinking ability and critical thinking helps improve their language expression ability and composition level. When evaluating various aspects of a text’s content and form, students need to express their ideas in written form, thereby exercising the accuracy and rigor of their language expression, and further promoting the comprehensive improvement of their Chinese comprehensive literacy.

2.3. Meeting the needs of social development for talents

The current era is an information-rich era, where everyone, including teachers, is faced with a vast amount of information every day. A person with critical thinking can distinguish which information is authentic and valuable, which is meaningless or untrue, and will

not be easily influenced by others’ opinions. However, junior high school students in China generally lack such literacy. Strengthening the cultivation of critical thinking in Chinese reading teaching is conducive to developing students’ good thinking patterns and cognitive habits. This enables them to maintain a calm attitude and make rational choices in future social life when faced with various complex information and diverse viewpoints, thus better adapting to the needs of social development.

3. Analysis of the Current Situation of Chinese Reading Teaching in Middle Schools

3.1. Dominance of traditional teaching models

At present, Chinese reading classes in some middle schools still remain in the stage of “cram-style teaching”, where teachers occupy most of the class time for lecturing, and students act as passive recipients of knowledge. Teaching content basically revolves around keywords, sentences, paragraphs in the text, and the main ideas of the article (i.e., the so-called “central theme”). Some teachers even focus their lesson preparation on how to find “standard answers” for the text and present these answers as teaching objectives for students to memorize or repeat. In this scenario, students have no opportunity to independently develop their own thinking, raise questions, or attempt to solve problems. They cannot cultivate innovative awareness, capabilities, or active participation skills, making it difficult to form critical thinking.

3.2. Insufficient attention to cultivating critical thinking

Some teachers lack a correct understanding of critical thinking and have deviations in their comprehension of it. When formulating teaching plans, they do not incorporate the cultivation of students’ critical thinking abilities. Moreover, most teachers focus primarily on improving students’ academic performance, prioritizing the instruction of test-taking strategies and methods for answering reading questions over cultivating students’ thinking abilities and patterns. Meanwhile, in daily teaching activities, teachers do not allow students to raise questions or make their own judgments and interpretations of the texts they read, which seriously

hinders the development of students' independent thinking and innovative spirit. For example, when teaching modern Chinese texts, teachers often guide students to analyze the text's expressive techniques and rhetorical devices according to fixed answering patterns. Students only need to apply the teacher's methods mechanically, without the need for independent thinking or judgment.

3.3. Inadequate utilization of teaching resources

First, there is a wealth of materials in textbooks that can be used for critical thinking training and education. However, in actual teaching practice, not all teachers can effectively utilize these materials to cultivate such abilities in students. Second, some teachers only understand the textbook content superficially, mechanically copying the textbook materials while ignoring the conflicts and debates between various viewpoints contained therein or questions that allow for discussion, thus missing opportunities to educate students in critical thinking. Finally, due to the limited classroom teaching time, some teachers are only confined to the in-class teaching content and are not good at introducing relevant extracurricular learning materials into the classroom, thereby limiting students' learning scope.

4. Strategies for cultivating critical thinking in the Chinese reading teaching of middle schools

4.1. Creating contexts to stimulate critical thinking

First, in the teaching process, creating authentic and infectious contexts can mobilize students' enthusiasm and initiative, putting them in an active state that is conducive to cultivating their critical thinking abilities. Second, teachers can adopt various methods (such as using multimedia technology) to create contexts based on the content of the selected texts.

Taking *The Emperor's New Clothes* from the seventh-grade (Volume 1) of the unified junior high school Chinese textbook as an example, students can watch a short animated video adapted from the story via multimedia. Two questions can be posed: "In real life, are there people as ignorant and ridiculous as the emperor and his ministers in the story? If you were there when

the child told the truth, what would you do?" By setting up such a context that connects the textbook content with real life, students are inspired to make their own judgments or evaluations about the content mentioned in the article. Additionally, this allows students to consider issues from multiple perspectives, thereby exercising their critical thinking abilities.

4.2. Designing questions to guide critical thinking

Teaching is a two-way interactive process between teachers and students, aiming to jointly construct knowledge, and questioning serves as the core teaching strategy to achieve this. An excellent classroom allows students sufficient time to discuss topics that concern them and encourages in-depth exploration around these topics. Therefore, in reading teaching, scientifically designing and effectively utilizing questions to organize classroom instruction is of paramount importance.

When studying *The Sight of Father's Back* from the eighth-grade (Volume 1) of the unified junior high school Chinese textbook, questions like the following can be posed: "Why does the sight of the father's back move 'me' deeply? Some argue that the description of the father climbing over the platform to buy oranges for his son in the last four paragraphs violates the social norms of that time. What is your opinion on this?" Through a step-by-step question design, students are guided to transition from surface-level understanding to critical thinking, deepening discussions around the core topic^[2]. These questions require students to not only grasp the emotional implications of the text but also conduct rational reflection and evaluation based on their own life experiences, thus breaking away from simplistic thinking patterns and cultivating critical thinking habits. By exploring these open-ended questions, students are prompted to reexamine classic texts, fostering their abilities in independent thinking and critical analysis. Only when questions truly serve as a bridge for dialogue between teachers and students can reading classes shift from "teacher-dominated" to "student-centered", ultimately achieving the teaching goal of cultivating students' higher-order thinking skills.

4.3. Conducting cooperative inquiry to deepen critical thinking

The learning approach of cooperative inquiry enables students to exchange ideas, broaden their thinking through the collision of thoughts, cultivate critical thinking patterns, and enhance their critical thinking levels. Therefore, teachers can select appropriate content from the unified textbooks to guide students in group cooperative inquiry learning^[3].

Taking Hometown from the ninth-grade (Volume 1) of the unified junior high school Chinese textbook as an example, teachers can organize students into groups to discuss and debate questions such as “Is Runtu’s transformation solely due to individual reasons? Are there any other social factors influencing him?” and “What is the realistic significance of the character Mrs. Yang?” Within the groups, members can question each other, supplement, and refine their own ideas based on their classmates’ viewpoints. Subsequently, the whole class can express opinions on a specific issue and reach a conclusion. On one hand, this ensures that every student participates in classroom learning activities; on the other hand, it stimulates students’ enthusiasm, encouraging them to think actively, bravely express different opinions, and exercise their language organization, oral expression, and logical reasoning abilities. Moreover, during the process of cooperative learning, students can learn from each other’s strengths and make progress together.

4.4. Encouraging questioning to foster a critical spirit

Questioning is an important manifestation of critical awareness. Therefore, in the process of reading teaching, attention should be paid to cultivating students’ spirit of doubt. Additionally, it is essential to create a democratic and equal teaching environment in the classroom, enabling students to develop the learning habits of asking questions bravely and skillfully. This not only requires teachers to transform traditional cramming teaching concepts but also to stimulate students’ critical thinking by establishing a democratic and equal classroom atmosphere.

For example, when studying Anecdotes of Mr. Ye Shengtao from the seventh-grade (Volume 2) of the unified junior high school Chinese textbook, a student

asked, “Why is Mr. Ye depicted so perfectly in the article? Are there really such flawless people in reality?” When faced with such questions, teachers should not dismiss or deny students’ ideas. Instead, they should affirm and praise the students, encourage them to find relevant materials to support their viewpoints, or invite other students to express their opinions, and then jointly discuss and reach a conclusion with the students, thus cultivating students’ independent thinking ability and innovative consciousness. Teachers should guide students to conduct in-depth exploration of these questions, enabling them to learn to analyze texts with rational thinking and not blindly accept the author’s viewpoints, thereby cultivating critical thinking. It should be noted that during the process of cultivating students’ questioning spirit, teachers need to protect students’ enthusiasm for knowledge while guiding them to master scientific questioning methods in a timely manner, so that questioning can truly become an effective tool for deepening thinking.

4.5. Multiple evaluations to promote the development of critical thinking

In traditional Chinese reading teaching, the assessment of students is mainly carried out through tests. This model primarily focuses on examining the extent of students’ knowledge acquisition while neglecting the evaluation and feedback of students’ thinking activities and thinking qualities. Therefore, to cultivate students’ good critical thinking habits, teachers need to construct a diversified and dynamic classroom teaching evaluation mechanism from multiple perspectives and all aspects. This involves incorporating attention to students’ thinking levels and development status into daily teaching activities and emphasizing the reflection of individual differences and uniqueness^[4]. When evaluating students’ reading learning, teachers can consider the following aspects.

Firstly, whether students have the ability to think independently and can put forward unique insights can be regarded as one of the evaluation criteria. Secondly, the ability to capture key information, integrate it, and form new viewpoints can serve as the second criterion. Thirdly, the extent to which students have a thorough understanding of the learned content and can express it clearly and fluently in language can be the third measure. Finally, evaluation can also be based on whether students

are good at listening to others' opinions and actively expressing their own views during the problem-solving process. This allows students to reflect on their own thinking processes during the evaluation, learn from others' strengths, and promote the development of critical thinking.

5. Conclusion

Cultivating critical thinking in middle school Chinese reading teaching is a crucial link to enhance students' Chinese literacy and thinking quality. Through strategies

such as creating contexts, designing questions, carrying out cooperative inquiry, encouraging questioning, and implementing multiple evaluations, combined with specific texts in the unified middle school textbooks, educators can effectively stimulate students' critical thinking and cultivate their abilities of independent thinking, rational judgment, and questioning innovation. In future middle school Chinese reading teaching, teachers should fully recognize the importance of critical thinking cultivation, continuously explore and innovate teaching methods, and lay a solid foundation for students' comprehensive development.

Disclosure statement

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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