ФІЛОСОФСЬКІ ЗАСАДИ МОВНОЇ ОСВІТИ ТА ЛІНГВОДИДАКТИКИ/ PHILOSOPHICAL BASES FOR LANGUAGE EDUCATION AND LINGUISTIC DIDACTICS

I.V. Horokhova, **PhD, Associate Professor,**

L.I. Tretyak, **Associate Professor**

English Philology Department

National Pedagogical Dragomanov University

CRITICAL THINKING SKILLS IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING

One of the *topical* directions of the modern education process in Europe is developing secondary and higher schools students' critical thinking.

The purpose of this article is to analyze the role of critical thinking in English language teaching, to consider philosophical tradition of developing of the critical thinking, to find out what kinds of critical thinking development techniques, provided special educational activities, are used at universities.

Modern society tendencies such as constantly expanding informational space, skyrocketing role of the communicative processes and increasing amount of information sharpen this challenge. All these facts are reflected in social sphere and particularly in education according to Brazilian educator Paolo Freire (Freyre, 2003), who stated that education is an institution which allows a person to develop his/her practical attitude to reality, to interfere to his/her context of reality and to integrate to it. Thus, under the general social progress conditions, education requires modern approaches as well. Because of shifting educational priorities from quantity of obtained information to the abilities of operating and using it in the real life, the vital importance of critical thinking is constantly increasing (Horokhov, Horokhova, 2015).

Critical thinking serves as an information filter. Analyzing information, a person checks, compares, analyzes and refers it constantly to personal experience, values, ideals and preferences. Personal opinion individually created, logically argumented is a result of intellectual activity. Stimulating critical thinking gives an opportunity to determine truth or falseness of a certain idea and to identify the individual attitude to it. A person, not controlled by outside forces, can individually control informational situation and adequately assess the reality. A critical thinker can be in informational whirlwind without any fear and encourage desire for self-determination due to his/her ability of making his/her own conclusions.

Thus, critical thinking is not only referred to informational society, but it is a mean of its development as well. It prepares people for successful agency in the informational society, preventing them meanwhile from the potential information stresses.

Critical thinking as a social process. First, it is improvement of generating person's knowledge. In this case, the purpose of the educational institutions is not only providing the young people with a certain set of knowledge but also developing the skills to search knowledge, creating skills to analyze different aspects of a problem or different opinions. Educational methods are said to be based on critical thinking, teach people to think independently instead of being a container of other people's knowledge. This conclusion is not a complete negation of the necessity of keeping information in mind. However, memorizing doesn't achieve the aim, which is the basis for modern education that is creating every individual development and self-realization conditions, building up a generation, which is capable for a life-long education, implementing the values of civil society. Only the individual cognitive activity, analysis and synthesis, reanalyzing of obtained knowledge approximate educational methods and educational purpose to each other to some extent.

Second, due to critical thinking the person becomes a subject of education, an active participant of discussing any educational work. It is achieved due to the ability of arguing and using critical approach which means "healthy" untrusting to any information in accordance with intention to check its truthfulness and to determine

own attitude to contradictory data. Encouraging the usage of critical thinking during the studying process needs the personal traits such as: the ability to overview human own positions if they do not withstand criticism; the ability to notice mistakes or artificial distortion in partners' argumentation and other sources of information; the ability to assess social phenomena, the deeds of social and political leaders, the individuals from the point of human moral position; the ability to recognize propaganda; the ability to demonstrate reasonable portion of doubts, skepticism, the desire to seek optimal decisions, actions in specific situations; courage, adherence to principles, having courage in confirming own positions, views; opening to other views, position, respect for their diversity are developed. These features not only provide successful process of studying but also become powerful tools for personal career making (Dewey, 2013).

So, critical thinking is considered to be social. The more democratic and independent the society can be the more developed criticism can be. Critical thinking is one of the means of problem – solving and a set of skills and abilities following from the philosophical consciousness. Features of critical thinking are based on ability to ask questions correctly and answer them at once. That's why American education focuses on teachers' questions and students answering during their lectures and seminars.

Identifying critical thinking considers its independence and at the same time emphasizes its social parameters. Critical thinking appeared in every member of society apart, the person is attracted to the process not only in finding the answers but in the process of formation the knowledge in general. Criticism is a tool for mastering, acquiring new knowledge and stimulating the identification of new priority theories that go beyond generally formed views, the implementation of alternative and rational ways of problems' decision (evidence, refutation and hypothesis). Critical thinking is based on the formation of moral and social responsibility, objectivity of judgment, struggling to find the truth. Critically thinker can adapt quickly to a certain conditions of life in a democratic society, because it is always necessary to take choice and make responsible decisions.

Thus, critical thinking can be taught. We can define the following features of critical thinking: developing true decisions strategies, based on obtaining, analyzing, processing the information; reflexive actions (analytical, checking, controlling, conceptualizing, applying, synthesizing, and/or evaluating information gathered from, or generated by, observation, experience, reflection, reasoning, or communication, as a guide to belief and action) which are in the process of thinking; meticulous analysis of the different views and opinions, expression of the individual position, evaluating of the own agency and the activities of others, making an objective decision.

Critical thinking as an integral part of English language learning. At university level, critical thinking skills are essential abilities in using intellectual tools by which one appropriately assesses thinking. In this case, by utilizing critical thinking skills, students can use the intellectual tools that critical thinking offers – concepts and principles that enable them to analyze, assess, and improve thinking. They will be able to work diligently to develop the intellectual virtues of intellectual integrity, intellectual humility, intellectual civility, intellectual empathy, intellectual sense of justice and confidence in reason. To put it briefly, critical thinking skills are self-improvement in thinking through intellectual tools that assess thinking (The Critical Thinking Community, 2009).

In order to activate students' critical thinking skills, English teachers need to present alternatives, different ways of interpreting texts and different conceptions of the world. The importance of thinking in today's education requires the main concept of critical thinking in which there is always more than one way to see things and that it is always up to the individual to judge just where the truth lies on any given issue (Mason and Washington, 1992). But in today's higher education, many lecturers complain that University students do not use their critical thinking skills sufficiently when they are doing both oral and written assignments. Teachers often find students unenthusiastic to exchange ideas critically and tend to accept experts' ideas without analyzing them properly.

Regarding the flexible nature of critical thinking, a teaching practice can be modified in different ways. This is because the implementation of critical thinking

skills and meaning in language teaching is not new and an absolute format has not been recommended so far (Masduqi, 2008). The underlying principle is that language learning is improved through increased motivation and naturally seen in meaningful contexts. When learners are interested in a topic and are given chances to negotiate meaning, they will be motivated to discuss things critically and at the same time, acquire language to communicate (Darn, 2006; Rfaner, 2006).

By applying the different productive teaching methods at a class, English teachers are expected to consider that the realization of critical thinking skills is feasible when teachers apply pair work and group work in which students think actively and negotiate meaning. The stages of pair-work and group work are also useful the students' communicative competence. In the productive stages, the students have more opportunities to get more language exposure and practice (Moon, 2005). It would engage the learners talking to one another to exchange information communicatively and critically. They talk in order to communicate, activate thinking process, and exchange arguments, not just to practice the language (Spratt, 2005).

*Conclusions***.** The realization of critical thinking skills and meaning in English Language Teaching is worth doing to improve students' English competence. Those two important elements can be incorporated in English lessons as long as teachers do collaborative activities providing students sufficient exposure to thinking process and meaning negotiation. The variety of classroom activities does not only cater students' communicative competence, but also create lively learning atmosphere.

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