The Problems of Teaching English Writing Skills Online

Institutional Description:

I used to work as an English / French language Lecturer at Beijing Normal University in Zhuhai, China from 2019 to 2020. Due to the eruption of the COVID-19 pandemic, all the courses of the university, whether core courses or elective courses, were to be taught virtually. Among these courses were four Essay-writing courses for English Major students at Department of English Studies of the School of Foreign Languages. I encountered numerous challenge related to making my courses effective and successful. Here are the principal challenges:

A) How to handle the high number of undergraduate students in one class, as this necessitated updating curricular planning for virtual classes?

B) How to make my feedback on students' writing assignments effective online, since I normally used to having face-to-face meetings with students?

C) How to find out about the weak students who were staggering with their writing skills to the extent that they might have failed to pass the course?

D) How to set assignments that were commensurate with the nature of the virtual environment?

E) How to set online exams that could have assessed the veritable academic level of the students? How to set the conditions of an online exams?

Currently, I am working as a Senior Lecturer at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, China since September 2020 until the present time. In this new experience, I have a challenge with virtually teaching postgraduate researchers in different fields of social sciences. In fact, teaching postgraduate researchers is definitely much easier than teaching undergraduate students, since the former have a string basis of academic knowledge and with an acceptable level of English language. Yet, unlike my previous experience in Beijing Normal University in Zhuhai, there are different challenges concerned with tackling the problematic issues of teaching writing skills online:

A) How to reach a meeting point between the researchers from Asian background and me from a western background where all the cultural discrepancies are welded?

B) How to express the scientific content properly in words on paper?

C) How to help researchers produce research papers where the written content is unbiased?

D) How to sharpen the researchers' analytical eye, so that they can analyze the written content of the references profoundly?

E) How to stimulate the researcher's mindset to get inspired with the ideas of the written content on their research papers?

Key Theorists:

- Jonathan H. Turner(2013) defines *cultural conflict* as a conflict caused by "differences in cultural values and beliefs that place people at odds with one another." He sees that this kind of conflict is due to the differentiation between the beliefs of the concerned parties.

- Michelle LeBaron (2013) view cultural differences as "underground rivers that run through our lives and relationships, giving us messages that shape our perceptions, attributions, judgments, and ideas of self and other." She concludes the nature of this cultural differentiation in the following elements:

A) "culture is multi-layered"; the superficial aspects of the cultural component does not reflect its concealed aspects

B) "culture is constantly in flux"; adaptation of particular cultural groups to novel cultural norms can occur with dynamism and unpredictability

C) "culture is elastic"; resistance of some against the novel cultural norms in the form of inactive participation

D) "culture is largely below the surface"; the difficulty of comprehending the various levels of the cultural aspects

- Posey, Guy; Burgess, Thomas; Eason, Marcus; Jones, Yawna (2010) chooses information and communication technology literacy as a vital means that students can adopt to communicate with teachers and submit information.

- Reese, Sasha (2015) highlights the importance of virtual learning environments since they lead to the development of other skills like creativity, communication, and knowledge application.

- Kiely, Kim (2014) states that cognitive skills or functions bear several aspects like perception, attention, memory, learning, decision-making, and language abilities." Then National Council on Measurement of Education (2017) elucidates that the capability of processing thoughts occurs through cognitive functioning. Therefore, it defines this

functioning as "the ability of an individual to perform the various mental activities most closely associated with learning and problem solving. Examples include verbal, spatial, psychomotor, and processing-speed ability."

- Richard J. Heuer Jr.(1999) reveals that analytical thinking is a skill like carpentry or driving a car. It can be taught, learned, and improved. But he still believes that cannot just be learnt in a classroom or being guided. It os acquired by practice.

- Ennis, Robert.H (2015) sees that critical thinking is the intellectual skills of conceptualizing, applying, analyzing, synthesizing, and/or evaluating information collected from or produced by observation, experience, reflection, reasoning, or communication as a guidance to conclude beliefs and take actions.

- Edward de Bono (2006) adopts lateral thinking method as a fashion of solving problems relying on inconspicuous creativity and unusualness mingled with reasoning. Ideas are not inspired through traditional logicality.

- Dweck, C.S. (2010) reckons that students can effectively foster a growth mindset, but the efficient cultural environment of the classroom has to be created, so that the process of thinking can be triggered.

Glossary

Analytical eye
Analytical thinking
Assessment
Cognitive functioning
Cognitive skills
Critical thinking
Cultural conflicts
Cultural discrepancy
Cultural environment
Cultural norms
Information and communication technology literacy
Intellectual skills
Lateral thinking
Mindset
Virtual classes
Virtual learning environment
Writing skills