

realization of an individually orientated approach in pedagogy.

Distance learning doesn't presuppose the refusal from real-life communication. Moreover, team work, that provides effective pedagogical facilitation, is a source of career development in any production industry, as the ability to complete the tasks jointly is a foundation of advanced development of enterprises. Individual and team effectiveness in the classes for studying foreign language provides the development of future competitive specialist.

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CULTIVATING CRITICAL THINKING THROUGH DISTANCE LEARNING

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21st century education is characterized by rapid change. We live and work in the age of advanced digital technologies, greater diversity and mobility. It is recognized nowadays that education needs to cover more than traditional subjects. Students need to learn the skills that are critical for life in the 21st century. They are called «global skills», and critical thinking is one of them. Developing critical thinking skills in learners is an integral part of the Western education system which is open for «plurality of views, and encouraging originality and analysis, rather than memorization and quotation» [1, p. 771].

But what exactly is critical thinking? A review of the literature shows that there is no agreed-upon definition. There exist a great number of definitions of the notion «critical thinking», which has become a «buzz word» in educational circles [2]. Siegel defines it as «the educational cognate of rationality», Norris and Ennis call it «reasonable and reflective thinking that is focused upon deciding what to believe and do». Paul writes that critical thinking is «learning how to ask and answer questions of analysis, synthesis, and evaluation». The ultimate objective for teaching critical thinking is to help students make correct judgements based on the careful weighing of available evidence [1, p.770]. Leading scholars on critical thinking Richard Paul, Linda Elder and Denise Halpern provide a helpful basis for developing a working definition of critical thinking. Incorporating elements from their work, we can define critical thinking as fair-minded thinking that is self-guided and self-disciplined, is purposeful and goal oriented, and performs at the highest level of quality [3].

When students think critically, they actively engage in these processes: communication, analysis, synthesis, problem-solving, evaluation, reflection. To create environments that engage students in these processes, instructors need to ask questions, encourage the expression of diverse opinions, and involve students in a variety of hands-on activities that force them to be active participants in their learning. Teachers who develop critical thinking skills in their students prepare them for the world outside the classroom.

Below, we present some teaching strategies and practical assignments that we have found to be effective in enhancing critical thinking in teaching foreign languages for university students.

Critical thinking can be used while doing some reading tasks. Reading is a thinking process. Elder and Paul point out that «to learn well, one must read well» [4]. The book «New English File. Upper-Intermediate» presents a great number of texts which can be used for reading and discussion in order to develop critical thinking. Examples of such texts are «Extreme interviews» where students find out about the latest trend from America in which interviewers throw bizarre questions at candidates to see how they react. When students are engaged in

talking about the text they have to answer those bizarre questions about themselves imagining they are at a job interview. These might be questions like «*On a scale from 1-10, how weird are you?*», «*If you were a car, what car would you be?*», «*What animal would you like to be reincarnated as?*» When answering, our students will have to think «outside the box».

While reading the text «*Confessions of a Cyberchondriac*» students learn to analyze the information from websites about illnesses and acquire a critical attitude to alternative remedies and miracle cures. They share their own experiences of looking for information on the Internet about the symptoms of illnesses (instead of going to the doctor). The tasks train students to analyze information and form a balanced judgement, which includes the ability to evaluate the source and accuracy of information found either online or offline. At our lessons students were engaged in different critical thinking processes, such as analysis of ideas, asking open-ended questions, discussion and reflection. Cottrell believes that critical thinking teaching benefits the development of critical thinking skills in terms of «improved attention and observation, more focused reading, improved ability to identify the key points in a text» [5, p. 1-2].

On the Internet site of «*The New York Times*» you can find the rubric «*Student opinion*» which can be used for critical thinking discussions. The whole world is concerned about COVID-19, so the learners are offered such questions for discussion as «*What weaknesses and strengths about our world are being exposed by this pandemic? How would you answer this question in terms of how your own family and community have been affected? How would you answer it more broadly, in thinking about your city, your nation or the world?*» Then students are to read a number of articles on the topic and to answer the questions:

- *What problems have affected you or someone you know personally? That is, what do you see among your own family, friends, classmates and neighbors that point to an issue our society needs to fix?*

- *What evidence of our strengths – whether through personal, group or institutional generosity, resilience or creative thinking – have you experienced?*

- *The pandemic has made many global, national and local societal problems worse. Which of these problems worry you most? What underlying issues, if any, did this crisis make you see more clearly?*

- *In crises, there are often opportunities. What do you hope will come out of this that might begin to fix or address the issues in our society that worry you most?* [6].

Some other questions are: «*What Have You Learned About Yourself During This Lockdown? What Do You Miss Most About Your Life Before the Pandemic?*» [7].

Students should be given enough time for mediation and thinking before responding to challenging questions. They should also ask their questions and participate in the discussion. It does not matter whether students are asked to tackle the suggested questions in or out of the class, they can be given these assignments for independent work at home; the important thing is that they will have an opportunity to think critically about the questions.

TED offers a lot of opportunities for interesting discussions and critical thinking development. TED is a nonprofit organization devoted to spreading ideas, usually in the form of short, powerful talks (18 minutes or less). TED began in 1984 as a conference where Technology, Entertainment and Design converged, and today covers almost all topics – from science to business to global issues – in more than 100 languages [8]. TED talks provide us with plenty of ideas that can change attitudes, lives and, ultimately, the world; therefore they can be used for working at critical thinking skills.

While studying the topic «*Ecology*» we can watch the TED talk «*Our campaign to ban plastic bags in Bali*». Some years ago, two young girls decided they were going to do something about the plastic problem on their island of Bali. So they started a campaign to ban plastic bags and shared their ideas on TED. Their inspirational talk can make our students think about the question «*What can you change in your community in terms of environmental protection? What campaign would you start in your city?*»

A very inspiring talk that is recommended for watching before your stressful situations is «*Your Body Language May Shape Who You Are*» [9]. After watching it students are asked some Socratic questions: *What information from the video do you find useful personally for you? Do you agree with the statement that our nonverbals govern how other people think and feel about us? How do you understand «fake it till you make it»? How can you better prepare for a stressful situation using the information from the video? How does the information on the video relate to your studies including distance learning? Give an example to show the meaning of the*

statement «Tiny tweaks can lead to big changes»? What generalizations can you make?

The main point of Socratic questioning is that it helps learners in creating justifiable meaning using high levels of thought in discussion, provide practice in critical thinking, and encourage them in pursuit of their curiosity about the context of the ideas in question. Socratic questioning stimulates students' thinking and assists them in creating their own way of thinking and judging [10, p. 27].

If a teacher is short of time and cannot watch long talks with students, it is possible to find very short talks (2-5 minutes) which can give ideas worth discussing. For example «Try something new for 30 days» [11]. Students learn how to make small sustainable changes that can add a new habit or subtract a habit and change their life.

With the help of the site *edpuzzle.com* we can prepare an interactive task for students with critical thinking open-ended questions, interrupting their watching the video and making them think and answer the questions before watching the next portion of the information [12]. Edpuzzle is a web-based interactive video and formative assessment tool that helps to create video lessons in some minutes. It lets users crop existing online videos and add content to target specific learning objectives

In 2013 Dmitry Voytko, an organizer of the TEDxOdessa conference made a site «Netpeak Journal» on which people share their life stories and ideas about the changes in their lives after listening to TED talks [13]. We can include our students in the discussion on the site.

There is also a radio site «TED radio hour» [14]. They have longer talks which are more complicated to listen to and which can be used for students' independent homework. They discuss topical issues like «Making amends» (*What makes a true apology? What does it mean to make amends for past mistakes? This hour, TED speakers explore how repairing the wrong of the past is the first step toward healing for the future.*)

Critical thinking is cultural thinking. While studying the topic «Immigration to the USA» we watched some videos on YouTube (Why Do People Migrate?! 10 Different Types of Migration, New Immigrants Share Their Stories) [15, 16, 17]. Students were asked critical thinking questions like «*Why would someone immigrate? What do you think is culture shock? What are your reasons for saying.....? Why would someone make that assumption?*» Answering the questions the students learned to develop confidence in reason, to compare cultural values, to think independently, to make predictions or interpretations, to distinguish relevant from irrelevant facts. The role of the teacher is to encourage and to reward learners, to keep discussions from becoming confusing.

We can develop critical thinking skills using the flipped model of teaching for lecture material. For more than two centuries, traditional college and university instruction has relied upon the use of the lecture as the model for the college classroom learning environment. The lecture in its traditional sense has its value as a means of instruction and should not be overlooked. However, the lecture has not been without criticism. It is criticized as being too long to hold a student's attention based on several authors' claims that a student's attention span usually declines after 10–15 minutes. Schueler wrote: «As a means of imparting information, especially if habitually used, the formal lecture is probably the most ineffective and wasteful of all methods» [18, p. 92].

Criticism of the lecture has given rise to other methods that university teachers have used for engaging students for the purpose of, and potential improvement of, student performance. One of them is the so-called «flipped classroom». The term is used to define the interchange of homework and classroom activities. It was first used at an international conference on learning and teaching by J. Wesley Baker [19]. Flipped learning is a pedagogical approach in which direct instruction moves from the group learning space to the individual learning space. The teacher guides students when they apply concepts and engage creatively in the subject matter. It means that learning usually done in the classroom becomes homework while the tasks usually done at home become classwork. Lectures are studied by the students on their own. Class time is spent using the material instead of simply comprehending the content of the lecture.

One of the benefits of the flipped classroom may be the promotion of critical thinking skills. Creating a learning environment that is active and collaborative as well as giving students the opportunity to practice important skills is vital for promoting critical thinking. The flipped classroom model emphasizes this kind of learning environment, which may facilitate the development of critical thinking in ways a lecture classroom does not.

This concept is even more relevant now with the introduction of smartphone technology as

students now have technology with the capacity to access the Internet at any moment. With this type of access, any student has the opportunity to direct their own learning. So a teacher can give a lecture to students in the form of a pre-recorded video or a text file. In this way students are placed at the center of the learning experience. They study the content of the lecture at the time which is convenient for them, actively engage in knowledge construction. Then during the class they perform practical tasks and engage in discussions. This method allows the learner to construct knowledge through interaction with content and teacher.

I completely agree with Saltanat Meiramova who writes that if we, teachers, help our students to become skilled in figuring things out – while reading, writing, speaking, and listening, while dealing with the problems of everyday life, while having to do with cultural differences – then they become more proficient in ways that make them independent, self-directed learners [10, p. 26]. Additionally, students with sharp critical thinking skills can become adept problem solvers. As they venture into adult life, their capacity for assessing situations and responding thoughtfully will mature with them.

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