Title	Language: An Essential Tool for Shaping Thoughts
Author	Daw Maw Maw Than
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Language: An Essential Tool for Shaping Thoughts

Maw Maw Than

Abstract

This paper attempts to present an experience of teaching literature to English specialization students by using different types of questions based on Bloom's Taxonomy(1965). The aim of this paper is to contribute the way of conducting the class in teaching a piece of literature, a short poem, to the first year English Specialization students. The objectives are to highlight the effectiveness of integrating the students' critical thinking skills and English language skills and the difficulties the students encounter in classroom activities. According to their performance in the classroom and in the exam, it was found that majority of the students have much improved their language competence and thinking skill together with notable broader vocabulary through the appreciation of a piece of literature.

1. Introduction

There was The Mandalay ELT Symposium in 2015 and some teachers shared effective strategies for teaching and learning English. This year conference aims to develop the capacity of higher education faculty to integrate critical thinking skills and English language skills into their department's academic curricula. So this paper is presented to share the experiences in teaching a poem to the first year English specialization students at Mandalay University, making them think critically, recall their own experiences in dealing with peoples in their social environments and recollect the knowledge they have got from their former studies, express their feelings or moods and attitudes to the situations they have come across, and also the characteristics of the things in their surroundings. To meet the theme of the conference "Integrating English Language and Critical Thinking Skills into Higher Education Classrooms in the Golden Land", the practice of training the students to make use of language in discussion on what they think about message the poet intends to convey is described in this paper.

1. Aim and objectives

In our country, from the primary level to highest level of basic education, the majority of the students are used to rote learning as they need to get high scores in respective subjects so that they can join the institutes- which are considered to be able to make their life comfortable. Therefore it is necessary to improve their thinking skills in higher education level and to make them use English language as it is an international language. To meet this requirement the

capacity of higher education faculty to integrate critical thinking skills and English language skills into their department's academic curricula should be upgraded.

The aim of this paper is to describe practical classroom applications related to integrating English language skills and critical thinking skills into the teaching and learning process.
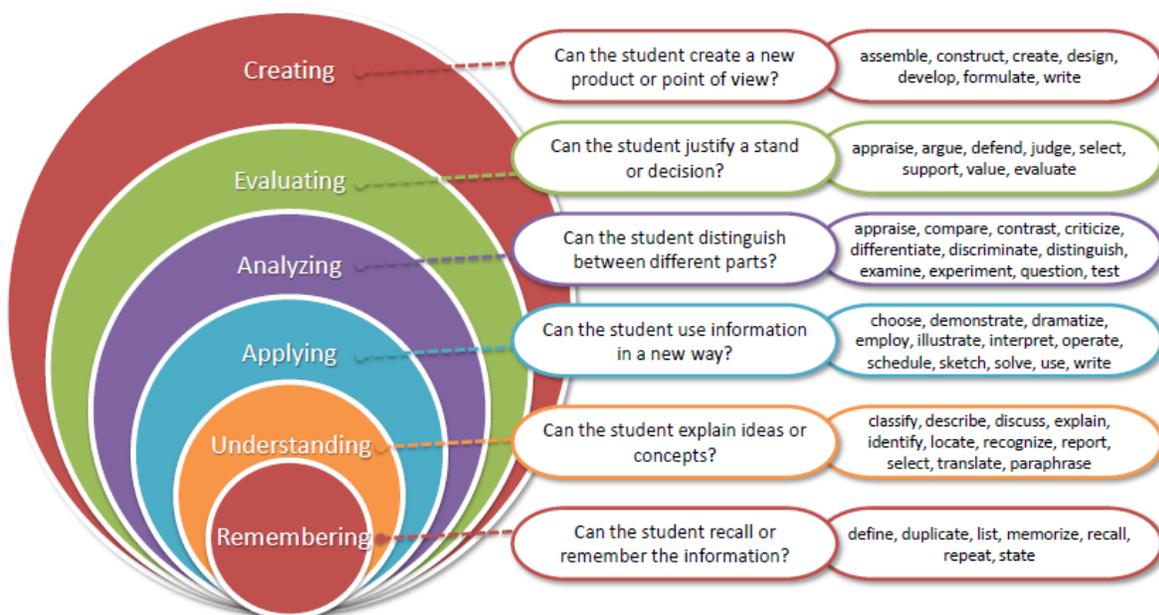
The objectives are to present some of the classroom activities performed by the students and the teacher's contribution in the activities, and to highlight the improvement in the students' language skills and their motivation in learning literature.

2. Literature Review

3.1 Theoretical Background

As the working theory, Bloom's Taxonomy is used to expand the students' higher order thinking skills. In 1956, Benjamin Bloom headed a group of education psychologists who developed a classification of levels of intellectual behavior important in learning. Bloom identified six levels within the cognitive domain, the first three levels are considered lower order and the final three levels are considered higher order. As shown in the figure, there are some questions associated with each level suitable to help the students catch the points in the text.

Bloom's Taxonomy (Revised)

Creating — Can the student create a new product or point of view? — assemble, construct, create, design, develop, formulate, write

Evaluating — Can the student justify a stand or decision? — appraise, argue, defend, judge, select, support, value, evaluate

Analyzing — Can the student distinguish between different parts? — appraise, compare, contrast, criticize, differentiate, discriminate, distinguish, examine, experiment, question, test

Applying — Can the student use information in a new way? — choose, demonstrate, dramatize, employ, illustrate, interpret, operate, schedule, sketch, solve, use, write

Understanding — Can the student explain ideas or concepts? — classify, describe, discuss, explain, identify, locate, recognize, report, select, translate, paraphrase

Remembering — Can the student recall or remember the information? — define, duplicate, list, memorize, recall, repeat, state

Level 1 is to make the students recall the previous information they have got. Therefore the questions like *"What is…? Who was it that…? Can you name……?, Describe…?What happened……?"*and so on are used to make them recognize what they have experienced.

In level 2, such questions as *Can you explain…? Can you write on your own words……? , Can you clarify…? Who do you think……? etc.* are used to make sure that the students clearly understand the facts or ideas in the text.

At level 3, it is to let the students apply the knowledge or facts they have collected at earlier stages. By making them construct, organize, demonstrate, and draw and many similar tasks by giving the instructions such as *Demonstrate how the author or the poet ……., Illustrate how the characters……., * or by using the questions like *Can you illustrate…? Do you know another…? What other facts do you……?.*

At level 4, the students can be trained to analyze the main idea of the text by exploring, connecting and relating the parts of information they have got through the text. The questions like *"What was the problem with…? Do you think… is a good or bad thing?, What was the turning point……?" a*nd so on are applicable at this stage.

Level 5 is to find out the students' evaluation on the text and level 6 is to make them generate new ideas or ways of viewing things from various angles.

3.2 Target Learners

The target students are altogether 67 first year students, majoring in English. All are at the age of mid-teens who have got English distinction in their matriculation exam. They have got former experience in learning poems in their mother tongue and in English from nursery schools to matriculation somehow or in some ways.

3.3 Teaching Material

The title of selected teaching material is ' Sixteen'. It is a very short poem by Carolyn Cahalan. It is a poem of nine lines in only one sentence composed of total fifteen verbs, one adjective used as a noun for the subject and one adverb. Though the selected poem is very short, it is a genuine portrait of the character of a sixteen- year- old person.

Sixteen

Sixteen
sees and laugh,
listens and sighs,
sleeps and eats,
aches and cries,
babbles, thinks,
loves and hates,
stretches, lives
and hopefully waits.

<div align="right">Carolyn Cahalan</div>

1. Sample Classroom Activities

In this session, the practical classroom teaching learning process to a poem is presented. For classroom activities, only the first four levels of Bloom's Taxonomy are used because the target students are only in first year and the ways they have learnt a poem in their basic education level might be quite different from the one in university.

Activity 1

First of all, to explore what message the poet intends to convey through the selected poem by recalling the previous information they have got concerning with the words used in the poem. The students are asked to make questions they want to shoot to their colleagues and the teacher does just monitoring and helps when it is necessary. The students make such following questions and so group discussions on the questions. Maximum four students in one group and some have three.

1. When is the word "sixteen" used?
2. Which verbs do you find in the poem?
3. When are these verbs used?
4. Is the poem about numbers of things or about a person? Why?
5. How old are you now?
6. Describe one of your habits when you were sixteen?
7. What do you usually do in your free time?

8. What kinds of story or music do you like best?

9. What is your favorite food?

10. Did you experience any disappointing incident?

11. If so, what did you do?

12. How do you feel if you were not allowed to do what you wanted to?

13. Who is your role model in those days?

14. How did you feel when you were scolded by your parents or teachers?

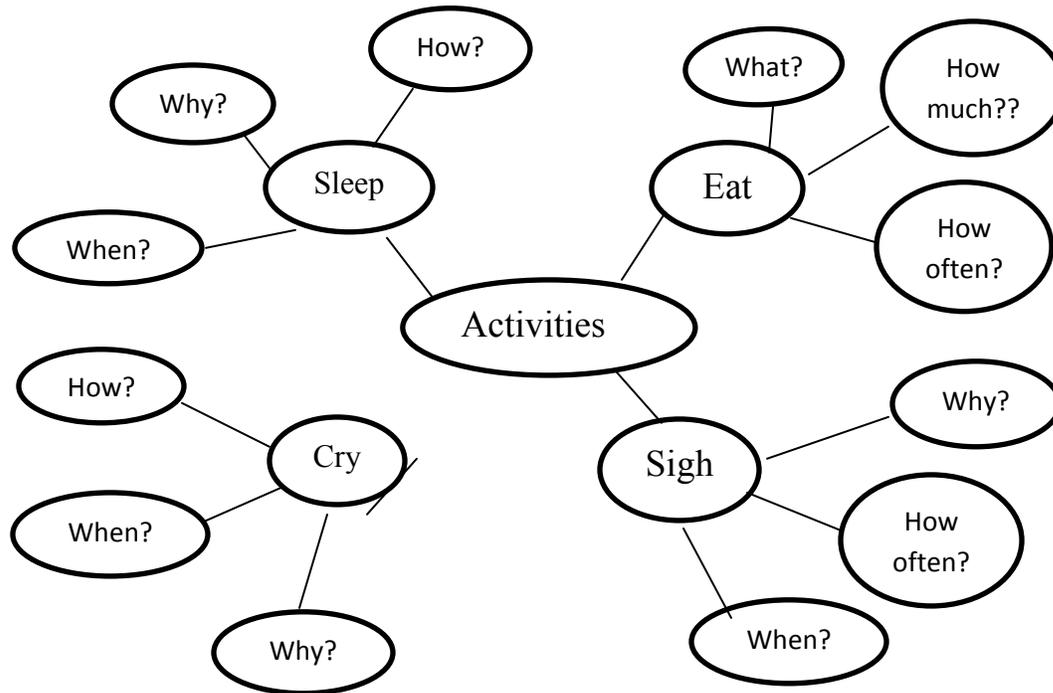15. What do you want to be in the future? Why?

Activity 2

After group discussions, the students, individually, have to ask the following   questions to ten other students so that the students clearly understand the facts or ideas in the text.

1 .Can you mention what a teenager like to see or listen?

2. Can you say when a teenager usually laugh or cry?

3. Explain a teen's sleeping and eating habits.

4. When do you usually make babblings?

5. Explain the attitude of a young person to "love" and "hate"

6. Interpret the word "stretch" used by the poet?

7. Which things can a person stretch out? Body or mind?

8. What do you think are the things that a teenager usually crazes for?

9. Give your predictions on what a young person is hopefully waiting for.

10. What are your habits when you were sixteen?

Activity 3

As level 3 of the Bloom's taxonomy is to let the students apply the knowledge or facts they have collected at earlier stages, in activity 3, the students are asked to write down what message the poet conveys through the poem and some more facts that want to add in a spider gram as in example.

Example

Activity 4

As the students are only at first year and the selected poem is their first lesson, they are trained to explore a few facts connecting and relating the parts of information they have got through the text at level 4. The questions "*What was the problem of eating a lot and sleeping a lot? Is it good or bad to love (or hate) a person easily?,Based on your own experiences, do you think that this poem can clearly portray the characters of a sixteen- year-old person?, What was the turning point……?" a*nd so on areapplied at this stage.

5. Finding and Discussion

Based on the students' response to the activities, it was found that the students feel less tension and stress to speak in English because they all are quite eager to share their previous experience recalling their own feeling or mood and how they reacted or responded to what they encountered.Moreover, their vocabulary banks are enlarged with new words as it is necessary to find out appropriate words to express themselves. At the same time the students' thinking skills are much improved as some questions are difficult to answer though some are easy. It is also a brainstorm for the students to think what the poet wants to say through this very short poem.

Some of the students' creatively interpreted characters of a teenager based on the words used in the poem are as follows:

Words in the poem   Information explored by the students

1. sees curious, wants to see whatever happens in front of them, likes to watch movie, stage shows, beautiful scenes,

2. laughs easy to laugh at any awkward action or clumsy figure or unmanageable event without consideration to the others' feeling, openly laugh loudly with a wide mouth,

3. listens like to listen music and songs, wants to know whatever the other people are talking about, listen to parents' or teachers' or their elders' order and instructions

3. sighs very often feeling unsatisfied, unhappy with present life, envies the others' life, wants to be like the others and sighs unless his or her desires are not fulfilled

4. sleeps sleeps a lot, sleep soundly as he does not need to worried about life, no responsibility for earning, strong and healthy

5. eats eats a large amount of food, likes to eat any kind of food as he or she has good appetite, teeth are still unspoiled, energy is easily burned as he or she is always active and alert

6. aches sensitive, emotionally very labile, wants to be loved or wants to get care from parents or the people around. If he thinks to be insulted or neglected, he feels great pain in mind

7. cries never hesitates to cry out whenever he feels happy and joy, or depressed and unsatisfied

8. babbles usually utters meaningless sounds as if he were singing a song when he feels happy or as if he were making complaints to the elders when he was blamed or punished

10. thinks very imaginative, always thinks about this and that, about friends, past events, places to go about, how to spend leisure time and future plans

11. loves and hates easy to love and easy to hate anyone, but the feelings never last long.

12. stretches always extend his imaginations, wants to be this at a time and that at other time, building a great career in his mind, his hopes and expectations are endless

13. lives and a teenager spends most of his life through happiness, sorrow, hope or depression,

14. hopefully waits a young immature teenager is waiting for the time of his dreams to come true with great hope

Therefore, though the selected poem is very short, the way the students disclose the meanings which the words carry by arguing, discussing, sharing their own experiences, and so on could make the classroom alive and active. By making the students discuss to explore what message the poet intends to convey by the use of particular short single verbs, by monitoring small group discussions and presentation, and by giving feed back to their ideas, the teacher could really integrate the students' English language skills and critical thinking skills into the teaching and learning process.

6.Conclusion

According to the finding of the paper, it can be noted that Bloom's Taxonomy is applicable in teaching literature because all the students, even the timid ones, tried to speak out what they know without feeling worried about grammatical mistakes and language barrier and eagerly corrected the mistakes in the language of each member in respective group. Summing up, this paper is hoped, to some extent, to be a mean to share ideas with English Language Teaching colleagues to explore new methodologies in teaching literature courses and to meet the theme of this year conference "Integrating English Language and Critical Thinking Skills into Higher Education Classrooms in the Golden Land".