

Cultivation of English Major's Critical Thinking Competence via the Rewriting Activity

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Abstract: Rewriting activity is based on students' comprehension of the reading text and it requires the students to change the original point of view to reconstruct the text. In this process, the student author should first of all comprehend the original text, locate the information related to the new perspective, evaluate the relevance and significance of the information and then determine the logical organization of the new text. This paper selected 25 pieces of students' rewriting compositions to study how students make use of the original text in terms of the quantity of quotation and modes of quotation. What's more, think-aloud is adopted to know the students use of critical thinking skills and the cultivation of critical disposition. The results show that in the rewriting activity, students have employed summary or paraphrase than direct quotation and even in some compositions, the original text does not appear and students have completely reconstructed the story in their own words. The think-aloud data indicate that students have adopted such critical thinking skills as selective attention, planning, brainstorming, self-monitoring and peer correction to select information and evaluate the information. As the activity was conducted in groups, students have got the opportunity to negotiate meaning and learned to reach consensus when differences arise. They have also exercised their creativity and imagination in the process of rewriting activity. Therefore, this activity has offered students an excellent opportunity to develop their competence of critical thinking and creative thinking. What's more, through relating the story from different perspectives, they learned to deal with daily life issues from more than one angle and thus improved their capability of empathy and sensitivity of other's emotions and feelings, which is beneficial to their interpersonal exchange in future.

Key words: critical thinking competence, whole-person development, rewriting, via the rewriting activity

1. Introduction

The rewriting activity is text-responsible writing task which requires students to firstly comprehend the source texts carefully and analyze the new perspective to determine the relevance of the source texts to the new perspective. The rewriting task coincides with the language acquisition mode proposed by Wang Chuming (2017) and the output-oriented approach proposed by Wen Qiufang, both of which integrates reading with writing and emphasized the context, language use, interaction, meaning-diving, synergy and creation. It is also in line with Anderson et al.'s (2009) theory of classification of cognitive skills. In the rewriting activity, students have exercised such cognitive skills as understanding, applying, analyzing, evaluating and creating. To understand the text, they need to interpret,

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classify, exemplify, summarize, infer, compare, and explain the text. To analyze the text, they have to differentiate and deconstruct the text. Then in the writing process, they have to evaluate the source text to determine the relevant elements. They also need to find coherence among the information in order to organize the new text. It is based on the input of positive evidence (Jiang & Yi, 2013) and organically integrates such enabling steps of consideration of context, interaction with source texts and creative imitation. It starts with comprehension and ends in creation. In the comprehension stage, students have to read the source texts in depth and appreciate the language use in terms of the characters' mentality, description of the characters' speech and action as well as the setting, and the revelation of the theme, which may provide the rewriting activity with the prefabricated language chunks and thus improve students' language proficiency through the interaction with the author and the text. Besides, students may be able to understand the author's attitude towards and purpose of writing through the diction so as to effectively absorb the source texts and make good use of them in the rewriting activity to promote the occurrence of language synergy. In the repeated reading process, students may undergo the characters' experience, completing the emotional synergy. Furthermore, through changing the perspective, students may learn to see issues from different angles, which may help enhance their sense of empathy.

2. Research Design

2.1 Research Questions

In the narrative writing, the story is usually told either from the first-person point of view or the third-person point of view. The narrator, who is usually the major character of the story who will directly or indirectly be involved in the major plots, through which the theme of the story will be revealed. In most cases, the point of view governs the procession of the events and influences the readers' interpretation of the story. The change of the viewpoint, i.e., the narration of the story from the perspective of a different character, leads to the different development of the plots and different resolution of the event. This paper takes the narrative writing entitled "A Class Act" as an example to study students' exercise of critical reading and creative writing. It aims to answer the following questions through analyzing students' compositions and think-aloud data:

- 1) How do the students make use of the source texts in the rewriting activity?
- 2) What critical thinking skills are employed by the students in the rewriting activity?
- 3) What are the effects of rewriting activity on students' whole-person development?

2.2 Research Instrument

2.2.1 Rewritten Text

This study requires students to rewrite a composition from a different perspective on the basis of the text entitled "A Class Act". The source text is 974 words long and is narrated in the first-person point of view. The setting of the story is Manchester during WWII and the narrator is a student from a girls' school. The major plots were the punishment the girl received from the deputy headmistress because the girl was unable to wear the prescribed school uniform to school due to the poor condition of her family. The climax of the story occurred when the girl wore a lace-trimmed green dress to school. As usual, she was punished by the school headmistress and sneered by her peers. It is the literature teacher who praised her instead of punishing her that produced the change in her and revealed the theme of the story, i.e., One kind word in a time of need will last a lifetime. The rewriting activity requires the students to choose a different point of view to relate the story in the form of group work. The perspective they choose should be other characters who are related to the girl, namely the parents, the literature teacher, the deputy

headmistress and the peers.

2.2.2 Think Aloud

In the course of writing, students are required to record their thinking process with the help of mobile phones. After the students, the author transcribed the recording and identified the critical thinking skills used when students consider the details of content to be covered in their writing work and when they negotiated the structure and the content of the writing work.

2.3 Data Analysis

The rewritten texts were encoded according to Barks & Warrs' Triadic Model of discourse loan. The continuous use of five words or more or the mere repetition of a clause from the source text is considered direct quotation, otherwise it is paraphrase or summary.

Source text: Growing up in bomb-blitzed Manchester during the Second World War meant times were tough, money was short, anxiety was rife and the pawnshop was a familiar destination for many families, including mine.

Paraphrase: During the Second World War, Manchester suffered from air raids. Life was hard and money was scarce. Anxiety hung over the whole country and the supplies were also short.

Summary: In WWII, people suffered from the war and were extremely short of funds and materials.

The analytical framework was adopted from Keck's classification of paraphrase into near copy, minimal revision, moderate revision and substantial revision (2006, p. 262) as paraphrase is considered part of the "Triadic Model" of paraphrase, summary and quotation. The linguistic criteria of the classification are shown in Table 1:

Table 1 The Taxonomy of Paraphrase Types

Types	Linguistic criteria	Examples
Near Copy	50% or more words contained within unique links	Comparable worth is an idea that different jobs can be rated equal and paid equally.
Minimal Revision	20–49% words contained within unique links	Comparable worth is the idea that different jobs can be rated equal by a set of standards and be paid equally.
Moderate Revision	1–19% words contained within unique links	Comparable worth is the idea that various may be ranked equally and therefore, should be paid equally.
Substantial Revision	No unique links	This article discusses the concept of, a concept set on balancing out wages for all workers of the same job level.

Note: Original Excerpt: "Comparable worth", the notion that different jobs can be rated equal and paid equally.

Source: Keck, 2006, p. 268.

3. Results Analysis

This study has collected 25 compositions composed by students in groups of six and the original text is about 947 words long and the rewritten compositions range from 156 to 478 words long. The total number of words are 5870 and the average length of the collected compositions is 234.8 words.

Table 2 Statistics of Paraphrase in the Collected Corpus

Types of paraphrase	Numbers of compositions	percentage	Words quoted
Near copy	1	4	225
Minimal revision	7	28	419
Moderate revision	13	52	356
substantial revision	4	16	104
total	25	100	1104

3.1 The Quantity and Mode of Quotation

In terms of quantity of citation, only one composition quoted more than 200 words from the original story, accounting for 55% of the total, which can be considered near copy. The compositions adopting substantial revision occupy 16%. There are 13 compositions making moderate revision, accounting for 44%. The rest of compositions make minimal revision. In terms of the perspectives, the narration from Miss McVee's point of view occupies the highest percentage, 26%, followed by that of the deputy headmistress 18.4% while that from the perspective of the parents and peers is the lowest, 5.8% and 6% (see Table 3).

Table 3 Perspectives of Narration and Ratio of Quotation

Perspectives of narration	No. of compositions	Length of compositions	No. of words quoted	percentage
Deputy headmistress	8	1956/8	364	18.4%
Miss McVee (English literature teacher)	12	2525/12	656	26%
parents	3	1026/3	60	5.8%
peers	2	363/2	24	6%

This is easy to understand because the deputy headmistress and Miss McVee are the two important characters who are directly involved in the story while the parents and peers are either not present or just observers (see Table 4).

Table 4 Perspectives of Narration and Characters Present

Perspectives/ Plots	Daily assembly	Literature class
Deputy headmistress	present	absent
Miss McVee (English literature teacher)	absent	present
parents	absent	absent
peers	Present (participant)	Present (observer)

As Miss McVee is the most important character in the story (she is the only character who has been given a name), her words and action play an important role in revealing the theme of the story. Moreover, her compliment to the author (My dear, I declare you are the brightest and loveliest sight in this entire dreary school. I am only sorry that I shall have the pleasure of looking at you for just one lesson and not the entire day.) is in the form of the direct speech, which is also the only direct speech in the story. Although in some compositions, the compliment is paraphrased or summarized, most compositions adopt direct quotation and this quotation becomes the most frequently quoted content in the students' compositions which adopt the perspective of Miss McVee. Moreover, the amount of quotation is related to the presence or absence of characters. According to the sites of plots, when the author was punished by the deputy headmistress, her parents and Miss McVee are not present while in the literature class, her parents and deputy headmistress are absent. Her classmates, however, are present in both plots, but they are either bystanders or just play a minor role in them. Therefore, it is easy to understand why students choose the perspectives of the deputy headmistress or Miss McVee to rewrite the story. However, whatever the perspective they select, they mainly adopt paraphrase or even create some plots when they relate the story.

3.2 Creative Writing Based on Critical Reading

In the rewriting activity, students have to read the original text in depth so as to select a different perspective. After determining the new perspective, they need to compare and contrast the original perspective and new perspective, select the information related to the new perspective and eliminate irrelevant information. On this basis,

they started to relate the story by inventing some plots. In this part, we will study one composition which adopted the perspective of mother in detail to show students' critical reading and creative writing. The whole composition included about 500 words and six paragraphs. As is known from Table 4, the author's parents were not present when she was made to stand on the stage as a shining example ...because the author mentioned that her mother "had no hint of the torment" she had faced as "I knew it was very important not to let my well-meaning mother know about this ritual humiliation". In other words, the mother was absent from the school-related events. However, students have created the composition by interpreting the important words used to describe the mother and her behaviors.

source text: For her part, our mum was thrifty and meticulously clean, and her five children were always sent to school well fed, very clean, and attired spotlessly, despite the hard conditions.

...although my clothes were ironed to a knife-edge, and shoes polished to a gleam,...

Rewritten text: I wake naturally before the sun has fully risen, and over the years it has become a habit to get up early. Set up breakfast and dishes for the husband and children, and put yesterday's ironed clothes by everyone's bed. As we ate breakfast, I stared at the doorway where the children's shoes were, each painted white, and looked around the room, wondering what else could be pawned, put into a new pair of shoes, or perhaps put together a school uniform that the children didn't have.

Source text: Every day I would battle back tears as I stood in front of my peers, embarrassed and most often, alone... However, in my 12-year-old mind, I had no choice but to see the punishment through. I knew it was very important not to let my well-meaning mother know about this ritual humiliation...

Rewritten text: My second child had breakfast early and dressed in school uniform early. Although she lacked a blue blazer and hood, she didn't seem to care. She is always independent and careful. When I am working, she is always the first to help me. Every morning she gave me a sweet smile, waved to go to school and came back in the evening with a big smile. She told me that she was doing well in school, but I saw her red eyes and the reluctance behind her smile every time she came back. I saw her staring at her non-standard school uniform silently in a daze, my heart also felt guilty and sad, but also understand that I can not really do anything, not to live up to her sensible and filial piety, and carefully maintained up the dignity.

Source text: Then one day our family won a newspaper competition for a free photographic portrait sitting... mom told me that I would have to wear my nest lace trimmed bright green dress to school.... She had no hint of the torment I faced.

Rewritten text: I think it's time I did something, today is the day for our family to take a photo. I took out the green lace trimmed skirt that I had prepared early. I knew that she was humiliated and hurt by the irregular uniform at school, but I insisted on letting her wear this more conspicuous dress to go to school. I felt that I was really a bad mother when I saw that she was about to say something but was a little embossed.

Just as the author had expressed her inner thoughts of "wishing and wondering", the students also expressed the mother's inner thoughts as is shown in the following paragraph:

However, something can only be experienced by oneself. I hope my children be brave, optimistic, and kind, and have a smile from the heart every day, instead of being careful and hiding their thoughts like now. How I wish there could be an enlightened teacher in the school who could truly see the inner heart of children through their outer clothes. I put on the green dress for her at the same time, but also secretly determined that, if today, after school, she is still with red eyes, I will take her to escape from the impersonal school, no matter how difficult life is, I will let the child grow up in a loving school.

In the last paragraph, students have imagined the mother's recognition of the changes of the author's mood by means of her footstep and smiling face without introducing the reasons of the change, which is logical as the mother

had no hint of what had happened in the literature class, either.

As the minutes ticked by, today I was in no mood to do any housework, only anxious to see my children back. I heard footsteps outside the door, which sounded light. I hurried to the door, saw my lovely child waved to me from a distance, also saw her face for a long time sincere and bright smile. I know she's grown up, she's made a big step forward in her life, and nothing is gonna beat her, at least for a long time to come.

It is interesting to notice that although the deputy headmistress and Miss McVee appeared in different plots, students tried to make them meet in their writing. They explained the deputy headmistress' change as a result of the meeting, which displayed students' creative thinking. The first two examples were from the deputy headmistress' perspective and the rest are from that of Miss McVee, the English literature teacher.

E.g. 1. After assembly her first class was English literature. She consoled herself and went on reading. The class began. Miss McVee ordered her to come and sit in the front row, directly before her. Would she punish her? I thought. But I was disappointed. Miss McVee cocked her head to one side and looked at her up and down carefully. ...

I saw the girl give the widest smiled I had ever seen. Was I wrong? Miss McVee taught the girl and me a lesson of compassion. She made me realize that one kind word in a time of need can last a lifetime....

E.g. 2. I came across her literature teacher Miss McVee as I went back to my office. We talked about this student along the way. And I appeared to change my view of this student, knowing her poor family conditions. I even blamed myself for what I did before, not receiving any explanation from her when she wanted to say something.

E.g. 3. Several times I have seen her stand on the stage. Our deputy headmistress pointed at her and said something ugly. I can understand why the deputy headmistress asked them to wear standard school uniform, but this girl's family was too poor to afford this pay. As a teacher who was fortunately enough to get this job, I can't help her.

E.g. 4. I noticed that one girl was often punished for not wearing her school uniform. She became the laughing stock of the whole school. One day the girl wore a bright green dress with lace trim to the school. I saw her trudged up to the platform without waiting for the order from the headmistress. She looked at the procession of young girls with obedient and eager eyes, tears rolling in her eyes. I know she wanted to be part of the group and I sympathized with her. I think I must encourage this strong and lovely girl.

In addition, they have imagined some non-existential plots such as the dialogue between the headmistress and the literature teacher, the mother's judgment of the daughter's suffering at the school from her swollen eyes and father's coming to the school to defend his daughter.

3.3 Whole-Person Development

Besides the exercise of creativity and imagination, the rewriting activity can help enhance students' development of empathy and promote their sensitivity over worldly affairs. Through relating the story from different perspectives, they learned to deal with daily life issues from more than one angle and knew they need to jump out of conventions to become tolerant and open-minded. As a result, their capability of empathy and sensitivity of other's emotions and feelings would be improved, which is beneficial to their interpersonal exchange in future. They may realize the evil and selfish nature of human being and try their best to overcome such negative attributes, which is conducive to the cultivation of their value systems.

In the source text, the deputy headmistress was depicted as a merciless figure who thought of it as "her mission to teach me a lessso". When students rewrote the story from the headmistress' point of view, they tried to justify her

behavior in the form of inner dialogue.

E.g. 1. I, the deputy headmistress of this school, still need to perform my duty and defend the discipline of the school as nothing can be accomplished without norms of standards. Even in times of war, we must abide by the school rules and regulations. If everyone fails to comply with the basic requirement of wearing school uniforms, then what about the laws of the country.

E.g. 2. Maybe this girl has some trouble to get uniform, but if I am lenient with her to dress plain dress, the other students will follow her action by then. At that time, students dress casually and school rules are broken.

E.g. 3 I couldn't be more outraged until she put on a very bright green dress and then strutted up to the stage. I believed that no one can bear such an undisciplined students.

In a composition written from Miss McVee's point of view, after the summary of the main plots, students have listed some psychological activity occurred within Miss McVee to explain her behavior:

As an ordinary teacher in this school, I actually know the regulations of the school and the girl who is really "famous" at school. Every day I go to work, I would see that girl wearing different clothes from others. That interested me.

One day, I saw this girl wearing a lace-trimmed bright green dress to school. She didn't bother to wait for the command but trudged up to the stage of her own accord. I believed that moment was truly an embarrassing time. Many girls and boys laughed at her as if she was a joke of everyone. When I looked at her, she was so awkward that she didn't raise her head. She was battling back her tears.

An idea occurred to me, and I must pay more attention to this girl and taught a lesson for every my student.

After that, I thought it was a duty for me to inspire and enlighten her hardship of school life.

Well, in fact, I thought school should pay more attention to students' mental health, not just stressed out the rules which was really strict and not very meaningful.

In the denouement, they quoted the theme statement "One kind word in a time of need can last a lifetime." What's more, they cited a Chinese popular saying concerning praise and punishment to show the importance of compliment, i.e., One kind word can warm the coldest winter and one bitter word makes June the coldest day. In the end of the composition, they drew a conclusion that encouragement is more beneficial than punishment.

4. Discussion

Through analyzing students' think-aloud data, it is found that students have employed such critical thinking skills as selective attention, interpretation, analysis, inference in tackling the original text. Before the rewriting activity, they have used brainstorming, planning and outlining. Firstly, they need to plan the plots of the rewritten story according to the selected perspective to ensure the consistence of the source text and rewritten texts in terms of logic and structure. To do so, they have to read the text in depth and examine the theme, logical relationship, syntactic structure. They have to determine the relevance of information according to the new perspective and change or even create some plots so as to achieve the grammatical consistency and logical coherence. Thus students have sought the opportunity to conduct in-depth learning and consolidated their understanding of the source text. They have become active creators of texts rather than receivers of information. They have not only mastered the linguistic knowledge, but also learned to use information flexibly. In students' compositions, we have found that the students have jumped out of the source text to create some plots, which is a manifestation of their creative thinking.

After they finished the first draft, they self-monitored and peer-revised the writing and some students even

adopted translating in order to clarify the information and check their interpretation. As the activity was conducted in groups, students have got the opportunity to negotiate meaning and learned to reach consensus when differences arise. Therefore, this activity has offered students an excellent opportunity to develop their competence of critical thinking and creative thinking.

Through rewriting the story from different point of view, students not only improved their language competence, but also learned to exchange roles and became more compassionate and considerate. They have realized that there are more than one angle to consider everyday worldly issues and sticking to one specific point of view may lead to ego-centralism, which is detrimental to one's overall development.

5. Conclusion

The rewriting activity integrates reading and writing organically. It enables students to better understand the text and create a new text on the basis of deconstructing the reading text. In the process, students analyze, infer, evaluate, select and apply the source text, thus improving their critical thinking competence. According to the need of the plots from the new perspective, they creatively make use of the source text and even invent some plots. In addition, the consideration of different perspectives is conducive to the development of empathy, which may make the students become less ego-centered and more compassionate and thus facilitate the whole-person development. Finally, in the course of rewriting activity, they pool information., learn to listen to different opinions, understand the importance of interdependence, which is beneficial to their life in the future when they step into society.

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