

khatuna Chanishvili

Khatuna Chanishvili

Caucasian University, Tbilisi (Georgia)

Covid19 Pandemics, Distance Teaching and development of Critical Thinking through Moodle Platform

ABSTRACT

Time, when mankind awoke at a time of covid19 pandemics expresses two dramatically different attitudes. People and their interests were divided into two parts; some of them were those, who could not stand isolation, with aggravation of their depressive background and the others – were able to adjust the reality to their interests and capabilities, they became modern and read the universe in a new way. They have discovered the new vision, they went deeper into implications and managed to adequately perceive the reality, they were able to adapt naturally. The education systems made attempts to launch the distance teaching and this turned out to be more or less creative, cognition oriented process. Georgian education system has dealt with this challenge by practical introduction of various programs and platforms. We would like to focus on the features and capacities of education platform Moodle as it can be a tool for development of critical thinking in distance teaching within the scopes of one specific course. This course is “Principles of Contemporary Thinking” and teaching of Georgian language to the foreign students.

Keywords: *pandemics, critical thinking, student*

Introduction

Reality of the coronal world is the best givennes for development of critical thinking in the distance teaching in the university space. The students have ability and the lecturers – the opportunity to transform the mankind crisis caused by pandemics, in the turn of the millennia and centuries into the wide-scale thinking space. And Moodle platform is a very good instrument for this, due to the individual detailed voice or textual instructions and feedback by stages, providing activation of critical thinking. In this work we have applied the method of analysis.

First Stage of Critical Thinking Development on Distance

In our opinion, for development of critical thinking in the first grade students there would be very useful to work on thesis formatted and structured as specified in recently published textbook included into the lists of mandatory literature in the syllabi of many Georgian universities and Caucasian University among them. The student must select one topic, study it independently and send to the course leader for final evaluation in the end of semester. When working on the thesis, the student must be able to scientifically work the issue/problem subject to study (Kavtaradze,

Kasrashvili, Saghinadze, Pataridze, Sabauri, 2018: p. 15). As academic writing is the university course and is taught mostly in the first semester, knowledge of the thesis structure allows its application in the other courses as well, e.g. in the „Principles of Contemporary Thinking“ and scientific processing of the issue under consideration implies activation of critical thinking and use of Moodle platform would contribute to this, facilitating the process of achievement of this goal, in distance teaching and make it result-oriented. This will be ensured by completing of the stages of work on the thesis. First of all, the process of selection of the issue should be clarified, implying definition of own ideas and interests applying method of brainstorming or generation of ideas. Applying of the Moodle features is the most flexible way for understanding of the first stage for achievement of this goal, as on the basis of detailed instructions the student can clearly understand how significant is to select the issue within his/her sphere interests, moreover, communication with each of the students through creative dialogue would yield good results. In such case, in our opinion, number of theses made mechanically, superficially, for evaluation only, would be minimized, as regarding age psychological type of the students, it is

clear how significant are for them the sincere, competent individual academic relationships. Absolute majority of the students will understand significance of this process and the process of cognition will become very pleasant, useful; together with correct selection of the title, supposedly, the stage of self-cognition, new discoveries will commence as the instructions are focused on formulation of the title as precisely as possible and in the researches the first bright spot will appear and be present there up to submission of the thesis, as further will be thinking about main statements and arguments that would give to the students the secret experience transforming research text into the useful thing: “work on the topic teaches how to formulate own views and put the facts into order, i.e., substantially adds ability of making something useful for the others” (Umberto Eco, 2014: p. 23).

In the syllabus of the “Principles of Contemporary Thinking” course, the list of mandatory literature includes the textbook “Introduction to Contemporary Thinking”, where the foreword states: “This book is the introduction to the history of western style thinking. This is the collection of the most influential texts by the greatest thinkers that have ever created in the depths of western civilization” (Introduction to the Contemporary Thinking, 2017: p. 5) and

naturally, this includes activation of the critical thinking ability, as a result of working of the main parts of the texts by different classics the student will face several main philosophical questions. This implies self-cognition, rational and irrational perception of the world, understanding of the moral, liberty, responsibility and purpose of the state. If the works are created within the scopes of this course, orienting of these ideas will turn out to be a very creative process, as for the first grad students would need to answer many questions before definition of the specific issue, i.e. selection of the topic. And Moodle platform ensures dealing with these issues, based on several specific instructions, the student can prepare the work title with proposed questions and theses, followed by the individual feedback that can even include voice communication for this course, where the lecturer expresses his/her own views and assumptions, where the pitch of a voice and attitude to the student are unambiguously positive and are oriented towards activation of the creative thinking act. At this stage, learned theoretical material is waiting for practical continuation, thus, selection of the title, through detailed feedback based on Moodle platform turns out to be a distance space for very creative, individual oriented, thinking and intellectual dialogue.

As for teaching of Georgian language to the foreign students, in this process as well, Moodle can become the most reliable and protected arena, where at the first stage of language teaching some mistakes, formulation of own views, creation of the small text title would be a creative process, rather than strained environment where for the students of different psychological types the discomfort of expectation of different reactions is fully excluded and this implies activation of creative, critical thinking elements and one could say that this is the environment close to ideal for communication with the lecturer.

The above process, in the conditions of self-isolation, at a time of distance teaching, guarantees particularly comfortable environment. The first stage of creation of the research paper, the home assignment, is selection of the title for activation of critical thinking and motivation.

Formulation of the Main Part in the New, Distance World

Naturally, particular attention should be paid to the paper introduction as proper formulation of the introduction is the image and model of the full text. Through Moodle, in the conditions of distance, virtual relationships, the introduction can be perceived metaphorically as the

introduction to new, coronal world, where the mankind awoke now. Focusing on this context of introduction by the lecturer is quite possible by means of individual instructions and feedback on Moodle platform. Within the scopes of the “Principles of Contemporary Thinking” the virtual dialogue between the lecturer and student would be of interest, about validity and relevance of collected literature, coincidence of own intellectual preferences and the main idea of the source author, significance of the topic. The dialogue can also describe the issue of to what extent the topic is the part of the actual thought of polyphonic culture, emerging in thoughts about the new world model prospects. And significance of the ideas of such type is offered by the turn of millennia and centuries. How can be the new vision emerge in the ideas of the authors of moral theories and homework of the first grade students of one of Georgian universities of 21st century. Retrospection of such type, in time, epochal emphases and modern existential feelings is the real means for activation of critical thinking as this time is unique, for understanding, filtering of the accumulated ideas and emotion, primarily, for formation of own natural human image. Regarding the reflections on these issues, with audio impressions and instructions, Moodle can form as the training ground for

really critical thinking, where, within the distance academic discussion between two generations, the pulse of the new time can be determined.

As for teaching of Georgian language to foreign students, here no literature will be collected but several critical questions can be offered, as well as activation of their attempts in the coronal distance world, to ensure understanding and naming of the inflow of new knowledge and information called Georgian language. These questions can deal with such simple issues as sharing of impressions about sounding of Georgian language, visual perception of the alphabet and connections of such main words with their native language as love, human, god, native land, education etc. Advice can be given to leave the first impressions about Georgian language for some time and after learning the language, translate them into Georgian. Activity of such type, could be interpreted as the function of some kind of chest, which would get the foreign students familiarized with the alphabet of critical thinking elements in Georgian. This activity would be some kind of introduction with respect of communication with the new culture and language.

Introduction, as it implies formulation of the questions for research, for proper understanding of this activity, we regard that Moodle capacities are very flexible as

due to the instructions the students can understand how significant is to put the questions, that any significant universal progressive phenomenon commences with the questions: “sometimes the scientific work can be represented through putting questions. In such case the title must necessarily mention about this, possibly, before the title the phrase – “for study of the issue” could be added (Gochitashvili, Shabashvili, Sharashenidze, 2013: p. 172). In our opinion, this is stating of the issue that allows formulation of the original questions for the research and in this the lecturer can help the student, with respect of providing examples of the questions offered by great scientists and philosophers, explaining that the question and doubt are identical thinking acts and discovery of such condition in one’s own mind is the one to be welcomed. Didactics of such type, in our opinion, would be very effective for individual judgment and feedback in the distance coronal world, as we regard that such type of thinking is more effective in our existential time, because the human mind and especially the ones of young people are naturally activated towards cognition and putting questions. And the lecturer’s duty, in our view, is awakening-activation of this natural, frequently sleeping quality of the student and individual distance communication would

contribute to this through instructions and feedback.

What should the student say, in the new way, significantly, or how? The main part of the home assignment is the core of the contents, for understanding of which the student makes attempts. Working of the collected sources, implying the stage of critical thinking analysis is the process where the legitimate research questions are put. At the interpretation stage the own vision must be formulated. Creative mind will always find the small path in the thinking space that would lead to the large way and feed with plenty of oxygen. But for us it is significant to awaken in each student the sparkle that was given to him/her with birth. The main thing, in this process is that the lecturer was able to activate, through distance teaching and Moodle individual communication, the creative, free critical thinking skills in each student, by considering the arguments obtained as a result of working of the sources, widening of the horizon and in the context of the selected topic, seeing of the wide, epochal picture. In our opinion, here it is significant to activate the sense of relationships between the world and human and the course of “Principles of Contemporary Thinking” allows this, as presenting of general picture through considering of one specific issue and seeing of the historical

variability of human thinking model – this is understanding. For formulation of the main ideas activation of thinking about the new epoch signs is possible, as well as seeking of the answer to the question of why in the coronal world the pace of so called consumer society life has paused and why adequate seeing of own self and the world became so significant. Why did the turn of the millennia and centuries have allocated time for this and brandished the yellow-card to warn the humans. In our opinion, seeking of the answer to this question is the ideal instrument for activation of critical thinking and we regard such dialogue thinking process through Moodle as a natural means, as such thoughts are in the mind of each individual today and if the student has the opportunity to formulate and present these thoughts in the academic space, in our view, this would be the means of ensuring internal comfort for him/her and he/she would never reject it. Such process of cognition would contribute to facing of the main challenge of coronal world and this, in our opinion, implies that the individual, primarily, should determine the contents of pandemics, give name to it in positive or negative sense, as giving name to the phenomenon makes it less dangerous. It is accepted and adequate perception of reality is not difficult any more. And the adequate,

i.e. unbiased perception of reality, in other words, the idea, is the beginning of free, substantiated judgment. If one clarifies the main sense of the time, in our view, the arguments corresponding to the specific questions and statements that, in the main part, the student will formulate through specific activities, as the lecturer regards necessary and assign it to the student with individual detailed instruction. Possibly, this can be contextualization of the issue, putting five main questions: Who? What? Where? When? How? With the collected material, or questionnaire given in one of the manuals for understanding of analysis, interpretation and synthesis stage “For what purpose are you reading? What questions arise in relation to the work ...? What elements should be considered in details? As a result, which elements could be ignored? How would you interpret the significance of the elements, at the individual level, i.e. with respect of individual elements, as well as in relation to the entire work? What are your assumptions in relation to the work? ... How do you synthesize them? What are the relationships between the elements? What are the relationships between this specific work and other works? What are your conclusions about the work? (LiaKacharava, KhatumaMartskvishvili, LiliKhechuashvili, 2007, 76) Work on the

main part, as the central axis of the text, is the longest and most important stage as the first feedback is followed by the second one, further with the third one and so on, until both, the student and lecturer obtains the desired result. And for this result the distance teaching, with its programs and platforms, transforms what, at the first glance is the dull, imitated education process, into the vivid thinking field and paradoxically, for activation of critical thinking, i.e. vivid thinking process, the coronal world, distance teaching and critical thinking process can become the scheme of the new learning scheme that provides positive results without any exclusions. If we follow this significant logic, we can even sketch the future contours as well, to ensure more reasonability, thorough understanding of the meaning of arguments, their defending and finally, adequate perception of the text and reality and make the process of teaching and learning, if not general life style, more reasoned, oriented towards great knowledge and seeing of wider picture, as presentation of any issue narrowly, lacking context and epochal syntax, in our opinion, contributes only to formation of subjective knowledge conditioned by emotions that is tailored to formation of private comfort of hedonist society and this really does not provide

internal comfort, as the depressive and hopeless attitudes come not from the fear to virus but from sense of lifelessness resulting from absence of critical thinking as this is impossible without wide, existential vision. Thus, in our opinion, a single specific issue reflects the entire world and contemporary time just like the entire world reflects a single specific issue.

As for the courses of Georgian language for the foreign students, we regard that focusing on the feedback about the main part of textual works is the most significant phenomenon. This feedback, as such, is a detailed and individual one and in our opinion, it should serve to activation of critical thinking, because, as, mentioned above, isolation of the coronal world, mystical process of distance teaching and comfortable and reliable space of Moodle for sharing of the daring academic ideas, could be presented as special historical phenomenon, as this reality, in few years, may turn into the one that have no such existential contents any more for the student. Now, for the world, it will be not something new but some past stage that loses the intensity of emotions with time. Therefore, with the foreign students, simple textual but meaningful stresses, in our opinion, would be capturing of the reality established by the universe, capturing of the moment, its transformation into the unique experience, i.e. loading of reality with the

contents and not horror in the face of pandemics.

Students Texts and Our Conclusion

In our opinion, composition of the home assignment is very similar to the structure of the universe, with the introduction, body text and conclusion. As the most part of the mankind have different ideas about the conclusive part of the universe, and we advise, when creating the individual voice or written instructions and feedback, for development of critical thinking, not to summarize what was already considered but rather discuss the proposed prospects of the issue, formulation of the own versions of problem solutions and putting rhetoric questions as such types of conclusions seem to be the logical end of critical thinking model, as in each version of the conclusion developed by the student would contain afterword oriented towards logical judgment. And basis for this is provided by the introduction and body text that were written according to the detailed, refined instructions and feedback prepared with orientation towards the sincere positive emotions, with due regard of age psychological type of the first grade students and tailored to individual needs, as discussed above. Epochal contextual approach to the issue, supposedly, will repeat in the conclusion

and, possibly, we shall see existential visions and emotions of part of the new generation, their attitude towards the universe, themselves, the issue under consideration and Georgian language that the foreign students must learn. Reality of the coronal world is the best givenness for development of critical thinking in the distance teaching in the university space. The students have ability and the lecturers – the opportunity to transform the mankind crisis caused by pandemics, in the turn of the millennia and centuries into the wide-scale thinking space. And Moodle platform is a very good instrument for this, due to the individual detailed voice or textual instructions and feedback by stages, providing activation of critical thinking, in the “Principles of Contemporary Thinking”, as well as in teaching Georgian language to the foreign students. For us, the world under pandemic danger, some kind of mystics of distance teaching and capacities of Moodle platform is the actual givenness oriented towards the positive future that could be used for formation of the large-scale thinking model and present the narrow, professional non-contextual visions in wide picture as existential individuals in the crisis of millennium and century. But we should ennoble this crisis, implying widening of the internal vision for the consumer society and its orientation

towards human, fundamental principles and this is possible only as a result of critical thinking development.

Conclusion // Discussion

In the crisis epoch, activation of critical thinking in the conditions of distance teaching would contribute to development of vital skills, adequate perception of reality, which, in turn, would

make the individual more creative, through internal efforts and training, making even coronal reality a useful, unique experience, harmonically involve the individual into the improvised communication with the world and eliminate or make ironical the depressive thoughts, forming logical, well-reasoned free-thinking persons that, in turn, would contribute to improvement of the world.

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