


A Method to Develop Critical Thinking: Playing the Devil's Advocate

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Abstract

The ability to think critically is at the foundation of an equitable and just society. One aspect of critical thinking (CT) is the ability to create and develop structurally sound arguments. Curricular requirements often restrict addressing this issue. Furthermore, students arguing their own opinions often assume agreement and therefore do not see a need to fully explain. As such, I examined how CT can be developed through the use of a timed-writing activity wherein the students argue against their own positions. I employed an action research approach to compare CT development in the intervention class with another class that did not receive the intervention. Analysis of the data suggested that this method was effective, and that encouragement of dissociation has a positive effect on CT development in students.

クリティカルシンキング (CT) は、包括的な社会の基盤だ。CT の 1 つの側面は、構造的に正しい議論を作成し開発する能力だ。カリキュラム要件により、この問題への対処が制限されることがよくある。さらに、自分の意見を主張する学生はしばしば合意を仮定しているので、説明する必要はないと思う。このように、研究者は学生が自分の立場に反論する時限ライティング活動の使用を通してどのように CT が開発されることができるかを調べた。研究者はこの介入を使用し、介入なしの他のクラスと比較して彼のクラスの CT 発生を比較した。データの分析は、この方法が効果的であること、そして解離の促進が学生の CT の発達に良い影響を与えることを示唆した。

There is an increasingly perceived need for the teaching of critical thinking (CT) in the classroom. The need for CT is fundamentally an ethical issue, and educators are obliged to develop students' critical faculty as part of their duty as educators and citizens (Freire, 1973). This call for empowerment and CT development is not uncommon in the guidelines for course development in many universities in Japan and around the world. In fact, the Japanese Ministry of Education (MEXT) in its "Grand Design for Higher Education toward 2040" has called for the creation of young people who have analytic skills and can bridge classroom learning with real-world issues (2018). Japan's move towards fostering CT as an educational goal is tied with an increased understanding of globalization and the interdependence between Japan and other nations.

The ability to state one's ideas in a meaningful and convincing manner is of growing importance in a society where digitally facilitated micro-social-interactions are the norm. Stylistically, however, there is also a need to focus on the style of argumentation. In fact, argumentation is a central aspect of CT and a necessary 21st Century skill (Asterhan & Schwarz, 2016). It must also be stated that the ability to formulate complete multi-premise arguments is only a portion of the broader picture; the true benefit of learning argumentation is in the ability to critically analyze the arguments of others.

Of particular concern in the development of writing for university students is that several aspects of argumentative writing are non-linguistic. In particular, the inability to form complete multi-premise argument structures leads to ineffective student writing (Allagui, 2019). Papers that have single-premise arguments are building the structure of the argument laterally rather than vertically. Papers at this level can only develop a surface-level explanation of phenomena and lack synthesis or evaluation of ideas. Moving beyond the restatement of ideas is essential to develop a cohesive and expressive paper.

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meet the needs of modern society, students will need to develop two major aspects of critical thinking: Students will need to have complete multi-premise arguments, but also be able to develop interpersonal communication skills designed to promote meaningful and productive discourse. This research focused on an activity that developed sCT, however, students will also need some support to develop aspects of self-reflection and in tandem, strong interpersonal interactional skills to promote utilization of CT in collaborative situations.

This study suggests that the devil's advocate writing activity or a permutation thereof, ought to be considered in the development of EFL writing coursework. Students, especially lower-level students such as the participants in this study, are often saddled with repetitive and uninteresting topics. These topics often result in poor writing with a limited demonstration of sound claim structure. The intervention undertaken in this research showed that students could meaningfully support their ideas in a limited period (15 minutes) while developing sCT through writing. Therefore, I recommend that writing topics should not shy away from the controversial but embrace it.

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