A pragmatic and critical approach to critical thinking in EAP

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Aims

• to present how CT is taught on our Foundation EAP course
• to show how both pragmatic and critical EAP have been adopted
• to encourage EAP tutors to consider how CT can be used to empower students
Outline

• Background
• Aspects (steps) of CT focused on
• Limitations
• Questions
• Handouts and references available
Background

EAP in the 1990s: pragmatic versus critical EAP

• **Pragmatic**: functional, needs analysis
• **Critical**: questioning challenging, more political
  – Benesch (1993, 2001) - *rights analysis*
  – Pennycook (1997)
  – Canagarajah (1999)

• Marrying of both approaches
Background: context

• Foundation programme:
  – Arts & SS (Business)
  – 18-20
  – international students

• Modules
  – language: WCS & OCS
  – content: Business Methods or Media & Text
  – Critical Thinking
Critical Thinking

• CT: newly restructured previously Analytical Thought (15 credit module)
• Development of the course and materials

• Critical reading to critical thinking: 6 aspects
6 aspects or steps

- Purpose
- Questions
- Facts & Opinions
- Authority
- Evidence
- Reflection/Conclusion
Purposeful; awareness of purpose

Paul (1994): ‘drive’
Purpose:

- Setting personal aims
- Relating to definitions of CT
Purpose

- **Pragmatic level**: to develop *intrinsic* purposes and aims
- **Critical level**: opportunity to explore their own learning and identify what’s useful to them

*Do I really want to proceed to HE?*
(Effective) Questions

What?

Where?

How?

Why?

When?

What if?
(Effective) Questions

“If you do not know what you want to know, you’ll not be in a position to know how to find it out.” (O’Leary, 2004)

Will we be tested? What does this mean? (Abdulaziz)

Can we change the (WCS) assessment? I think we should be allowed to choose our own topics (Hasan); why are we doing this?
(Effective) Questions

The Walt Disney Strategy; 3 rooms (*dream*, *realist*, *critical*) and posing a range of questions (*what*, *why*, *how*)

**Task**: create a new product or service and undergo the WDS process
(Effective) Questions

• **Pragmatic level:** thinking actively, being engaged

• **Critical level:** evolving their thinking; develop a questioning attitude towards learning
Facts and Opinions:
Truth, truth and beliefs

Truth/Knowledge
Facts
Theories
Opinions
Facts and Opinions: discussion

• Professor Dame Jocelyn Bell Burnell on *Truth and Understanding*

‘no absolute truths’
Facts and Opinions

• **Pragmatic** level: use facts and opinions more judiciously

• **Critical** level: possibilities; change; knowledge can be contested
Evidence

claim + evidence = evaluation
Evidence

- analogy
- statistics
- testimony
Evidence

- **TASK:** *How important is breakfast?*

- **Pragmatic level:** understand statistics
- **Critical level:** their right to challenge claims that are not substantiated regardless of the authority
Authority:

*purpose and ideology*

- Parents
- Tutors
- Author
Authority

• TASK: to re-examine the assessment of WCS

• Pragmatic level: understand the existence of authority in academia

• Critical level: can question, challenge and introduce alternatives; more ownership of their learning
Reflective Conclusion

- Reflection & Conclusion
- Evidence
- Facts & Opinions
- Purpose
- Beliefs
Reflective Conclusion

• SEM 1: discussions
  – Can men and women be friends?
  – Is it important to proceed to HE to be financially successful?

• SEM 2 - to have debate in week 10 about ‘goal of education’

Mohamed: the goal of (university) education is to get high grades and pass the course
Reflective Conclusion

• **Pragmatic:**
  – presenting valid conclusions

• **Critical:**
  – to make informed decisions
  – reach personal and meaningful conclusions
Limitations

• EAP can be prescriptive
• work in progress: a lot more to explore
• success rate amongst students
• 1 class in a particular context
Key References

Questions

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