

Teaching Critical Thinking in the Framework of the Argumentation Theory at Text-based Lessons for Learners of English

The general theory of communication is based on the presumption that any text fixed in writing can be perceived as a peculiar case of realization of the author's communicative intentions in a definite communicative situation. The author of the text in this situation is regarded as the communicant, the addresser, and the reader can be presented as the recipient, the addressee of the message. The communicative interrelationship that arises in this case can be treated as a certain type of argumentation process in which the author's basic pragmatic intention is to convince the addressee that the author's or the protagonists' views and opinions should be supported and their attitudes to the focus problems should be shared. In this aspect the development of the students' argumentation skills (the ability to engage in reasoned discussion and the capacity to promote effective argumentation through a structured guidance) becomes a dominant target in the process of teaching. [1: 219]. The important goal of education is also to develop in students a critical attitude towards the received information and the acquired knowledge and to form critical thinking skills so as students can be convincing and successful in the civilized argumentative discourse. To be sufficiently good at argumentation means not only to possess the ability to give one's reasoned arguments and to avoid the unsupported arguments that can lead to a breakdown in communication during reasoned discussions, but also the ability to evaluate the given arguments, to understand and perceive other people's ideas, to distinguish explicit and implicit arguments, to identify the conflict of views and to see an ambiguity in oral or written texts so as not to be led astray by someone's ideas or reports in private or public argumentative contexts, or not to be influenced by someone's emotions and public sentiment. Critical reasoning skills can be assumed to be based on the abilities to evaluate the quality of the content of the given arguments and to form a critical attitude to given oral or written information, on the abilities to produce one's own views on the problem under discussion and to develop freedom and independence from the influence of false arguments that can arise in the process of communication. The development of critical thinking skills to promote effective argumentation in discourse may include the following main strategies: students' critical analysis of the position of the opponent, the identification of students' own position in argumentative discourse and the formation of students' point of view on the discussed problem, the discernment of unsupported arguments in argumentation, critical evaluation of explicit and implicit arguments, the discrimination of true and false arguments, improvement of students' ability to identify the conflict of views.[2: 120-121]. To improve students' critical thinking skills at the text-based lessons the following tasks can be formulated during discussion based on literary texts [3; 4; 5; 6]:

a) evaluation of the importance of the events, of the amount and volume of the information:

Could you say you feel satisfied with the information given by G. Betteredge in this part of his narration? Is this information sufficient or insufficient? What part of the information given here you find most essential for the understanding of the development of the events and which is subordinate for the understanding of the setting and the people? Could you support your views with proper arguments?

b) evaluation of the influence of the personage, the narrator of the story, making reasoning about the narrator's being an unbiased person, estimation of the level of confidence in the narrator's words:

Did the story told by Mr. Waverly sound true to you? Could you pick up the words from his narration when he described his emotional state and decide whether they were really the feelings

of a father whose child had been kidnapped? Does Betteredge sound persuasive when he speaks about the family of Lady Verinder? Is he more influenced by his personal feelings or by his social respect for the mistress of the house or something else? Could you prove your point? In what key does Jane Eyre describe the events and the atmosphere at Gateshead? What, to your mind, is a description of facts and what is Jane's personal opinion? Why do you think Jane made false reasoning about Mrs. Fairfax as a person and about her social status? Why was she misled? Is there enough evidence in the narration to support Jane's high opinion of Mr. Rochester? Could she be under a self-delusion or a self-deception about him? Why?/ Why not?

c) analysis of the structure and of the scheme of argumentation, the recognition of the implicit and explicit arguments, evaluation of the given arguments:

What pragmatic types of argumentation can be found in Jane Eyre's narration: moral instruction and judgments, logical reasoning, explanation of facts, description of events, common sense reasoning, conceptual statements, reference to experience, emotional impressions or something else? Could you find any places in Betteredge's story where he is especially subjective in his reasoning? In what way can it be explained? Could you speak on the manner in which Mr. Godfrey made his proposal to Miss Rachel? What persuasive techniques (promises, flattery, glittering generalities) are shown in his speech? What figurative language does he use to increase his influence over Rachel? Does he sound convincing and sincere? Can he be trusted? Could you prove your point with the lines from the text? Do you think Miss Clack's reasoning is based on facts and logical-rational approach, or is she influenced by her emotions, her biased perception of the world? Which is your choice in the evaluation of her arguments? Could you prove your point?

d) evaluation of the personages' views in the case of conflict of opinions:

Whose view on Miss Rachel's role in the loss of the diamond seems more convincing to you: Sergeant Cuff's, which is based on true facts and logical reasoning, or G. Betteredge's, which is based on his feelings and intuition? Could you prove your point? What arguments did Jane, the heroine, put forward in defence of Bertha Mason? Do you agree with her arguments? Are there any other cases of conflict of opinions in this part of narration? In what way can they be accounted for? What arguments are there for and against each of positions? Prove your point. Do you think St. John and Jane mean the same thing when they both speak about "justice"?

e) analysis of the position of the main characters, their behavior and actions:

What was Henry Adams' opinion about the English people? Can we agree with his understanding of the English character? Do you think that Mr. Packington is right in thinking that his wife was jealous, narrow-minded and suspicious? Can we agree with Hercule Poirot's remark about the young generation knocking on the door without noticing that the door is open? What do you think he means by that?

f) analysis of the position and the views of the author of the work and his/her appeal to the reader:

What is the target of M. Twain's satire in the story? Could you find the lines in the text which show the writer's satire and comment on them? Could you find the lines of emotional strain in the text to show a melodramatic note and its emotional influence on the reader's feelings? In what way can Charlotte Brontë's views and her attitude towards Jane, as a young girl, and as an adult, be felt in the text? What can you say about the author's presentation of herself and her feelings and views in the text? Could you prove your point? Could you find the lines in the narration in which the reader is addressed directly? Whose voice is heard here: Jane's, the heroine, Jane's, the narrator, or Charlotte Brontë's, the author's? Comment on the idea of the reader which is seen in the narration. What emotional and psychological atmosphere does this direct appeal to the reader create? Could you prove your point?

g) formation of students' own points of view and their opinions:

What arguments can you think of either for or against Jane's behavior? Was Jane a really brave woman? What opinion have you formed of St. John? How much are you influenced in your reasoning about him by Jane's description and by her judgment, by his actions and behavior or

by his words? Could you find the lines in the text that help you form your own opinion about him? What arguments, logical or emotional, are mostly seen in Mr. Rochester's story? In what way are you influenced by it and why? Choose one of these opinions. What are your arguments for or against them?

In conclusion it may be said that the quality of students' argumentation in discussions and the level of students' critical reasoning at text-based lessons of English can be improved if the possibility of the literary text, viewed in the framework of argumentation theory, is regarded as helpful and rewarding for the development of critical thinking skills.

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