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Teaching Critical Thinking at Text-based Lessons for Advanced Learners of English

By a widely accepted thought argumentation is a basic requirement for active participation in a modern democratic society. The ability to communicate, to engage in a range of public or private disputes and discussions, to participate in online communication, in different types of blogosphere activities presupposes the development of good practical argumentative skills and the formation of critical thinking skills so as to be effective in the civilized argumentative discourse. To be sufficiently good at argumentation generally 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 can be assumed to be based on the abilities to measure 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 discussed problem and to develop freedom and independence from the influence of false arguments that can arise in the process of communication. Most frequently used false arguments that can arise in argumentation are: *argumentum ad verecundiam* (reference to one's own significance or to the authority) [1:126], *argumentum ad populum* (a direct or indirect influence on the emotional sphere of the hearer) [1:124], *argumentum ad hominem* (a direct personal attack at the opponent with the aim of defamation of character) [1:102], *argumentum ad baculum* (a threatening attack at the opponent so as to prevent his/her opinion to be expressed) [1:100-101]. 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. To improve students' critical thinking skills at the text-based lessons the following tasks can be formulated during discussion based on the book "Jane Eyre" by Ch. Bronte [3]: evaluation of the importance of the events, of the amount and volume of the information (*What do you think is central to Jane Eyre's story of her early years at Mrs. Reed's house? Is there enough information for the reader to have an opinion about the people Jane Eyre met at Thornfield?*); evaluation of the influence of the narrator, estimation of the level of confidence in the narrator's words (*Does Jane Eyre sound persuasive to your mind while telling the reader about Lowood school? What makes her narration convincing? In what cases is Jane Eyre more influenced by her emotions, by her age, by her common sense, by her life experience, by her logical thinking? Prove your point.*); analysis of the structure and 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: logical reasoning, description of events, emotional impressions or something else? Find cases of inconsistency and controversy in Mr. Rochester's argumentation and comment on them. Motivate your answer*); analysis of the position of the main characters (*Say how typical Mr. Rochester's story about his "unhappy" love in Paris looks to you. What arguments, logical or emotional, are mostly seen in Mr. Rochester's story? Are there any 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*); formation of students' own points of view and their opinions (*What opinion have you formed of St. John? How much are you influenced in your judgement about him by Jane's description and by her reasoning, by his actions and behavior or by his words? Find the lines in the text that help you form your own opinion about him*).

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.

References

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Abstract

The literary text, viewed in terms of argumentation theory, can be used for the development of critical thinking skills at text-based lessons. Some main strategies to improve students' critical thinking skills in discourse can be: critical evaluation of explicit and implicit arguments; the discernment of unsupported and true or false arguments.

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