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Szakdolgozat

Koller Nóra

Tanári mesterszak (3 félév, levelező)

2024.

EÖTVÖS LORÁND TUDOMÁNYEGYETEM

Bölcsészettudományi Kar

Szakdolgozat

A kritikai gondolkodás tanítása ellentmondásos témák révén

Teaching Critical Thinking Through Controversial Topics

Témavezető:

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EÖTVÖS LORÁND TUDOMÁNYEGYETEM
PEDAGÓGIAI ÉS PSZICHOLÓGIAI KAR
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A tanulmány címe: **„A kritikai gondolkodás tanítása ellentmondásos témák révén”/ “Teaching Critical Thinking through Controversial Issues”**

A témavezető neve: dr. Lázár Ildikó.....

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Lázár Ildikó s.k.

.....

a témavezető aláírása

Abstract

This thesis explores the ways critical thinking may be fostered in two English for Academic Purposes (EAP) classes primarily advertised for incoming Languages & Cultures students at the Faculty of Arts and Letters at a Portuguese university. Relying on contemporary approaches to critical thinking as an aspect of critical pedagogy, the premise of the essay is that communicative production in the EFL classroom is collaborative, with knowledge seen as co-created and emergent, rather than inhering in textbooks or teacherly transmission. Instead, educational conduct must be seen as problematizing practice, anchored in the scaffolding of novel interpretive opportunities for learners in heterogeneous groups while promoting student agency. To this end, taboo or controversial topics, typically underrepresented in textbooks but productively facilitating students' navigation of complex social contexts in the target language, have to be represented in classroom discussion. Based on action research carried out over 6 weeks, this study served to correct a locally identified problem with criticality. Materials were specifically tailored to the discussion of complex social justice issues. The teacher-researcher's observations were juxtaposed by interviews with students and data from assignments, class observation, and surveys distributed at the beginning and end of the criticality module.

Keywords: criticality, English for Academic Purposes, controversial topics, action research, materials production

Contents

1 Introduction

This thesis explores the ways critical thinking may be fostered in two English for Academic Purposes (EAP) classes at a Portuguese university. With the pedagogical objective of promoting a questioning, analytical attitude forged while improving participants' language skills, the research aimed to answer the following questions: How does engaging with controversial topics affect students' use of the target language? How are materials best utilized to advance a complex approach to social justice issues in the EAP classroom?

Relying on contemporary approaches to critical thinking as an aspect of critical pedagogy, the premise of the essay is that, following Thornbury (2013), knowledge produced in the EFL classroom must be seen as community-based, shared, communicatively created and emergent: that is, awareness of language does not inhere either in textbooks or grammar instruction. Instead, the critical thinking skills of students must be privileged and encouraged. This shall enhance participants' agency over their own education (Fedorova & Kaur, 2024). To this end, it is essential that taboo topics, be they subsumed under the PARSNIP acronym or other appropriacy controls (Meddings, 2006; Atkinson, 2022) be represented in classroom discussion. Critical thinking is frequently de-emphasized in textbooks, as well as teacher training (Santos, 2013; Hughes & Dummett, 2016; Li, 2019). Even when explicitly referred to in materials, its possibilities are pre-empted because of the decontextualized, apolitical nature of these texts, marketed to a wide, yet homogeneous global target audience. Therefore, criticality (Banegas & de Castro, 2016) is at best gestured towards, rather than nurtured. This problem was identified in the locally ascribed coursebook (de Chazal & McCarter, 2012). Given the continued absence of critical thinking skills from the EFL class, the acquisition of metacognitive strategies to be utilized for social change requires a rethinking of teacherly practice and materials production.

With this as its central problematics, this study aimed to serve as a local corrective, relying on the methodology of action research. Study findings are based on classroom practice on the C1 level. The research subjects were university students, predominantly enrolled in the programme Languages & Cultures, attending the compulsory curricular subject English 1.

The essay is divided into three parts. Chapter 2 elucidates the meaning of criticality to then provide an overview of approaches to critical thinking in EFL, intertwined with theories about critical pedagogy, and critical EAP (or CEAP); the contra-productive influence of appropriacy controls on materials production; and practical implications for educational praxis. Chapter 3 describes the particular context of the study: the setting, the locally identified problem, and the participants. The methodological framework of action research is used to explain data collection and analysis. Research design is complemented by a weekly breakdown of the criticality teaching module. Thematic findings are discussed in Chapter 4, framed by the results of the pre- and post-surveys, and informed by the interpretation of multi-step interactions related to materials specifically produced or utilized to thematize the relationship between music and different forms of textuality, fake controversies surrounding undergraduate degrees, and gender-based discrimination. An invisible social variable, disability will be identified as a limit of criticality in the local context.

2 Critical Thinking in ELT

This chapter gives an overview of different, yet complementary approaches to critical thinking in the EFL classroom. First, conflicting meanings of criticality will be elucidated; productive tensions with critical pedagogy will then be elaborated on, complemented by a dialogical approach to CEAP in the next section. These transformative, social justice-focussed teaching models aim at bridging the gap between theory and practice; as such, they cannot be anchored in globally produced textbooks, whose appropriacy controls act against a complex questioning attitude; as does educators' privileging of description over analysis, as discussed in the next subchapter. Finally, the practical implementation of criticality will be explored.

2.1 Critical Thinking: Elucidating the Term

The meaning of critical thinking, its role in the teaching of English as a foreign language, and its practical implementation require clarification. The confusion over the term stems from the seemingly different uses of the qualifier 'critical' in critical theory or critical perspectives, critical thinking, critical pedagogy, and, as we shall see, critical EAP. Using

the umbrella term criticality, Banegas and de Castro argue against a pejorative understanding of a questioning attitude: "being critical does not mean being negative about other people's or one's own assumptions; it means being able to identify assumptions and evaluate evidence and issues logically" (2016, p. 455). Similarly for Apple, "being critical means something more than simply fault-finding. It involves understanding the historically contingent circumstances and contradictory power-relationships that create the conditions in which we live" (Apple, 1993, cited in Santos, 2013, pp. 88-9). Criticality is further related to socially embedded analysis and evaluation: "to be critical is to call up for scrutiny, whether through embodied action or discourse practice, the rules of exchange within a social field" (Luke, 2004, cited in Santos, 2013, p. 88).

Criticality may be instilled by "developing learners' language awareness through the analysis of ambiguity, vagueness, connotation and reification in discourse" (Banegas & de Castro, 2016, p. 455). However, in an overview of good practices for the teaching of critical thinking in EAP, Li (2019) notes that, problematically, this skill continues to be underdeveloped in EFL classrooms simply because it has remained absent from teacher training programs. Activities fostering an informed approach to social issues which would enable students to synthesize different perspectives creatively were explicitly called for in the critical turn of the 1990s and early 2000s. However, at the time, "teachers did not have sufficient knowledge about critical thinking skills or how to assess them. Twenty years on, this issue still exists, despite the widespread belief about the significance of critical thinking skills in academic work" (Li, 2019, p. 14). Ascribing the semantic and practical confusion over the exact meaning of criticality to the diversity of emergent research, Beaumont has a more optimistic view. He states that "critical thinking is not a single entity but an umbrella term that comprises many complex processes" (2010, p. 429) allowing for progressively increasing abstraction, and helping students to become active thinkers, as well as active speakers, of English.

2.2 Critical Thinking in/and Critical Pedagogy

Critical thinking is a major tenet of critical pedagogy. In Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970), critical thinking is "a necessary first step towards understanding the social matrix we inhabit and becoming aware of inequalities within it" (Banegas & de

Castro, 2016, p. 456). Banegas and de Castro underline, however, that critical pedagogy also differs from critical thinking in its orientation towards transformative action; critical pedagogy in this regard is seen to "go beyond" critical thinking (p. 456). It is questionable, however, whether critical thinking and action-oriented pedagogy should be seen dichotomously, as the authors propose, or rather, as mutually dependent. As discussed by Thornbury (2013), critical pedagogy as an inventive and heterogeneous approach positions itself in opposition to the transmission or delivery model of education, which focuses on the teacher, rather than the student, as the central figure in the learning process. Accordingly, educators 'deliver' – that is, uncritically reproduce – knowledge anchored in globally produced and marketed textbooks, which in turn allow for the instruction of discrete units of the language. By contrast, "[c]ritical pedagogy seeks to understand and critique the historical and socio-political context of schooling and to develop pedagogical practices that aim not only to change the nature of schooling, but also the wider society" (Pennycook, 1990, cited in Thornbury, 2013, p. 110). Language on this model does not inhere in textbooks: instead, it emerges in collaborative interactions, co-constructed by learners and the teacher, and is self-directed by the students' own linguistic needs. That critical pedagogy fosters critical thinking is implicit in Thornbury's argument against coursebooks and in favour of a pedagogical practice which prioritizes social and local awareness. The idea of awareness-raising advocated for here slightly differs from the concept used in Thornbury's more practice-oriented earlier work on EFL pedagogy. Awareness-raising in this previous incarnation referred to making learners aware of authentic texts in the teaching of speaking (Thornbury, 2005) – an objective which nevertheless remains relevant for critical thinking.

In his introduction to a special issue of the *TESOL* journal on critical pedagogies, Pennycook argues against a superficial understanding of democracy or student autonomy in teaching: "A critical approach to TESOL is more than arranging the chairs in a circle and discussing social issues," he cautions (1999, p. 338). The author is equally dismissive of a discursively impoverished concept of critical thinking that fails to challenge structural inequalities such as gender, race/ethnicity, religion or education. He claims that "so-called critical thinking... [is] an apolitical orientation towards a general questioning scepticism" (p. 334). This is not to say that Pennycook rejects critical thinking per se: he agrees with Benesch, writing in the same issue, that a participatory, "dialogic critical thinking—expanding students' understanding beyond what they may have already

considered to promote tolerance and social justice—can and should be taught" (Benesch, 1999, p. 573). In Pennycook's theory, this is akin to an understanding of teaching as a problematizing practice (p. 341). Based on familiarity with critical theory, it should enable the posing of "hard questions about many of our cherished beliefs: about sexual and cultural identities, about the possible effects of our pedagogies, about what we take classroom discourse to be, and about the roles of native and nonnative speakers" (p. 344). Focusing on the "possibilities for promoting change through education" (p. 346), the author calls for transformative and engaging pedagogies. Teaching is transformative when, instead of "help[ing] students enter an unchallenged mainstream" (p. 338), it relies on an informed scepticism, promotes openness and is itself open to change, brought about by self-criticism and self-reflection. Importantly, therefore, this type of educational practice is aware of its limitations. Following postcolonialist feminist theorist Spivak, Pennycook refers to this as "the limits of knowing" (Spivak, 1993, cited in Pennycook, 1999, p. 345). A pedagogy of engagement is offered as "an approach to TESOL that sees such issues as gender, race, class, sexuality, and postcolonialism as so fundamental to identity and language that they need to form the basis of curricular organization and pedagogy" (p. 340).

2.3 Critical Thinking and CEAP

Benesch's work applies critical pedagogy to the teaching of EAP. Writing in the aforementioned special issue of *TESOL*, edited by Pennycook, Benesch provides a practical example of teaching critical thinking in an EAP classroom at a US college. With her reading class, she discussed the then-recent murder of Matthew Shepard, a university student and gay man who had died as a result of a homophobic attack in Laramie, Wyoming. Benesch's role in the classroom discussion was that of a conversation facilitator and intervener. The author does not offer an overview of the language used in these teacherly roles, or the linguistic scaffolding of critical thinking. Privileging instead the sharing of student opinions about the hate crime, she nevertheless notes that, within the frames of a collaborative speaking task, "teaching critical thinking is neither an unguided free-for-all nor a didactic lecture but a balance between extended student contributions and gentle challenges by the teacher" (Benesch, 1999, p. 578). That is, Benesch's objective was to encourage students to question their assumptions about

homosexuality, tolerance, and social justice. That her interventions were successful was evidenced in the changing views expressed in her group. Rather than being entrenched in oppositional communicative positions, students arrived at a more complex understanding of their own conflicting attitudes vis-á-vis the murder. The genre of critical thinking in this example is significant, for Benesch is a proponent of self-reflexive exchange, or dialogic critical thinking. This is defined as "a form of dialogical discourse in which the taken-for-granted assumptions and presuppositions that lie behind argumentation are uncovered, examined, and debated" (Gieve, 1998, cited in Benesch, 1999, p. 576). This meets Thornbury's expectation that, in a critical pedagogical setting, "language mediat[es] language" (Swain. 2000, cited in Thornbury, 2013, p. 214), that is: "collaborative dialogue facilitates the appropriation of linguistic knowledge" (p. 214).

In Benesch's 2001 book, *Critical English for Academic Purposes: Theory, Politics and Practice*, critical thinking is axiomatic to the extent that it is subsumed under the umbrella terms critical pedagogy and critical EAP. Only one chapter addresses criticality directly, discussing anorexia in an ESL class for psychology students. The term itself is most summarily defined in the chapter by Ramanathan and Kaplan's threefold approach, which emphasizes "(1) developing students' sense of informal logic toward strengthening their reasoning strategies; (2) developing and refining problem-solving skills; (3) developing the ability to look for hidden assumptions and fallacies in arguments" (Ramanathan and Kaplan, 1996, cited in Benesch, 2001, p. 65). These objectives undermine the charge that education in critical thinking is "a form of social indoctrination that imposes the teacher's social agenda" (p. 63), implemented through topic choice. According to this critique, educator-chosen problem texts reintroduce a centralizing, authoritarian attitude into the lessons, and go against process approaches which underline the student selection of issues to be researched in class.

However, Benesch argues that, firstly, imposition is inevitable. Secondly, on the above view, students appear as passive recipients, rather than active participants engaged in reciprocal exchanges, actualized as dialogical teacher-learner relationships characterized by student agency and resistance. Benesch notes that participants responded to the topic of anorexia in her writing class in a variety of ways, including "opposition; testimonials; questions; interest; boredom; disgust; compassion; identification; and surprise" (p. 69). Understanding dialogue as a dynamic practice in contradistinction to the static transfer of

facts, Benesch states that classroom discussion may benefit from resistance, although these ideas must be productively utilized by the teacher. For instance, male students' views of anorexia as a girly, and as such, irrelevant topic bolstered further exploration of perspectives in the class. Thirdly, she problematizes both the notion of the student-as-apprentice or novice and the teacher-as-butler; and claims that learning relies on collaboration between active agents to combat the feigned neutrality often employed in classrooms (Benesch, 2012; Fenton-Smith, 2014). Writes Benesch: "critical EAP does not encourage students to find their unique 'voice' by mining their private experience for writing topics, as in expressionistic rhetoric" (Benesch, 2001, p. 68). Instead, importantly, it aims at "offering choices they might not have imagined before participating in a dialogic classroom" (p. 68). Importantly, the specific choice of anorexia as a topic for reflection challenged both appropriacy controls and the scholarly canon, and "created openings for expression resisted in the academic world" (p. 72).

Problematically, a binary between native and non-native speakers of English has been posited in the criticism of CEAP, and of the teaching of critical thinking. Fedorova and Kaur engage with Benesch's oeuvre to argue that critical EAP is a "democratic approach to teaching which entails stimulating students' active questioning" (Fedorova & Kaur, 2024, p. 57) of their learning contexts and the socio-political status quo; as such, it "promotes students' agency in shaping their own education" (p. 57), enabling them to reflect on the social role of the university. To this end, the authors give a trenchant critique of pre-sessional courses which aim at preparing incoming foreign students for academics in institutions where the language of education is English. These typically 6-week-long courses take place before the academic year commences and are skills-focussed; they also advertise EAP as a lifestyle rather than a critical approach. However, despite their initial success at the language course, international students are often found struggling in their later studies. Fedorova and Kaur attribute this to the preparatory courses' sanitized focus on "language", or discrete units of English taught in isolation from social matters. For the authors, this is a needs, rather than a rights-based approach, whereby students' putative language needs are pre-conceived and often mask those of the institution. That this is a longstanding problem is also indicated in Benesch's article, where a US-based opponent of the teaching of critical thinking attributes better thinking skills to native speakers. Proponents of this "deterministic stance towards language and culture" (Benesch, 1999, p. 575) view critical thinking as arising from socialization, while its teaching presents

either as an impossibility or an ideological imposition. In sharp distinction to native speakers, “nonnative-speaking students are portrayed, at once, as deterred by their cultural backgrounds from thinking critically and susceptible to its influence in US university classes” (p. 574). In a more recent study of summarizing as a vehicle of criticality, Vorobel and Kim (2011) attempt to reframe the issue by focusing on the impact of cultural difference on thinking patterns, exemplified in the transfer of L1 writing strategies to the L2; however, this approach still leaves the native-non-native binary intact.

Notably, Fedorova and Kaur also collect teachers’ views on the implementation of critical thinking, providing their research subjects with relevant readings for the pre-interview stage. In effect, then, they contribute to the training of these educators. However, while pointing to a gap between theory and practice, underlining that their interviewees are unfamiliar with academic work about critical EAP, the authors miss an important opportunity to actively engage with their subjects’ changing role as they become teacher-students during the exchange, and to reflect on their own position as potential trainers. A more flexible research design would be more in line with critical thinking as described above. Such an approach would better benefit teachers who, as several authors (Santos, 2013; Hughes & Dummett, 2016; Li, 2019) note, are often unaware of, have received no training in, or are at a loss as to how to implement critical thinking in their everyday practice. As it is, the relationship between the researchers and the researched in this paper remains locked in a somewhat rigid and didactic binary, leaving the meta-discursive level of their article untheorized.

2.4 Critical Thinking and Coursebooks

A complex approach to teaching and learning requires equally complex, topical teaching materials which are preferably locally developed. The resistance to coursebooks is understandable, given that the absence of so-called taboo topics from these texts hinders critical thinking. Controversial issues are collectively referred to as PARSNIP. As Meddings laments, "while the mafia relies on the omertà - a vow of silence and non-collaboration, ELT publishing swears by the Parsnip. An acronym, of course, standing for: no politics, alcohol, religion, sex, narcotics, isms or pork" (Meddings, 2006). Atkinson (2022, p. 2) adds “pain, oppression, death, sexually transmitted disease and

conflict" to the list, which she then further extends to teen dating and the inclusion of a text about an air hijack after 9/11 (pp. 8-10). Cassar et al. discuss further controversial, topical and "thorny" issues, such as migration, "violence, discrimination, human rights, the rule of law, crimes against humanity, sex and corruption" (Cassar et al., 2021, p. 658). As a rule, these are underrepresented in textbooks but may enter classroom discussion due to teacherly interest, leading, however, to teacher vulnerability in overly regulated institutional settings (Divéki, 2018; Gulya & Fehérvári, 2023).

In her overview of recent approaches to textbooks, Atkinson (2022) takes note of conflicting perspectives. On the one hand, adherence to the above textual prohibitions, or non-negotiable content controls, is seen to have resulted in bland, topically similar textbooks marketed worldwide. On the other, the inclusion of cross-curricular content and the prioritisation of learners' complex interests, by, for instance, teaching the imperative through following instructions for creating origami figures, is argued to allow for productively circumnavigating the negative effect of these acceptability constraints. On this latter view, "PARSNIP guidelines do not automatically lead to the production of anodyne textbook content, just as the inclusion of provocative material does not necessarily make for an interesting book" (p. 4). Students may also wish to enter the classroom by leaving the world behind. As an Ecuadorian teacher of English commented: "My students… come to class… to socialize with their friends and have fun. Their own lives are quite often a struggle and the English class is a time to enter a different imaginary world" (Richards, 2014, cited in Atkinson, p. 15). The divide or delicate balance between an escapist and socially aware classroom, as well as the role of nationality in this example, however, remain unaddressed. While Atkinson successfully argues for creativity in the face of textual constraints, she fails to consider teaching to different levels of English, where knowledge about these controversial topics is essential in using the language to navigate the world, related as they are to global citizenship and intercultural competence (Divéki, 2018; Lázár, 2020). She also avoids the question of representation, which, according to Gray (2013), has remained a pressing matter, even though strong advances have been made in "the ways in which women, people of color, the disabled and the elderly are represented in UK-produced materials" (p. 42). Quoting Thornbury, he notes, however, that the same does not hold for the LGBT community: "Where are the coursebook gays and lesbians? […] They are still firmly in the coursebook closet. Coursebook people are never gay" (Thornbury, 1999, cited in Gray, 2013, p. 42).

In her book chapter, entitled "'This activity is far from being a pause for reflection': An Exploration of ELT Authors', Editors', Teachers' and Learners' Approaches to Critical Thinking" (2013), Denise Santos documents her own experiences about the writing and implementation of a textbook aimed at Brazilian teenagers. The Brazilian curriculum places emphasis on awareness about the cultural hegemony of English, elsewhere defined as linguistic imperialism (Phillipson, 2016). Therefore, it is imperative that "the historical conditions and ideological implications surrounding the teaching and learning of [a] language have to be part of the very content to be taught in English lessons" (Santos, p. 89). Furthermore, EFL is "expected to be less about uncritical skills development, and more about how to think critically about the world and our place in it" (p. 89). Santos shares Thornbury's view, cited above, that language, or for that matter, critical thinking does not emerge from textbooks, and tasks originally not aimed at developing critical thinking may provide opportunities for the "reflection, analysis, questioning, and even contemplation of social change" (p. 92). At the same time, the volume co-authored by Santos included a section specifically aimed at developing critical thinking at the end of each unit. Influenced by Pennycook's problematizing practices, these subchapters introduced problem situations, such as the use of English titles in a video game aimed at the Portuguese-speaking Brazilian market, or the use of Brazilian stereotypes in a Disneyland ride. However, Santos found that, when put into practice, these exercises were used to teach description instead of analysis. Teacherly interventions invariably led students away from articulating conflicting arguments about the problematic, essentialist nature of these representations which identified Brazil with coffee, idleness, palm trees, and the samba. That is, classroom discussion veered away from challenging "an exoticized version of Latin America as a homogeneous Other place devoid of differences" (p. 106). This was also the case when learners expressed awareness of these issues. Such teacherly attitude irreversibly undermines any critical intent: opting for "description rather than a more sustained critique of the conditions one is describing" (Pennycook, 2001, p. 51, cited in Santos, 2013, p. 106), the transformative possibilities of constructive dialogue are elided.

2.5 Student Detectives in the Criticality Classroom

In an article specifically focussed on the scaffolding of critical thinking, Beaumont (2010) elaborates on the Numrich sequence. Developed by educator Carol Numrich at Columbia University, this list of tasks is best described as the seven consecutive steps of observing; identifying assumptions; understanding and organizing; interpreting; inquiring further; analysing and evaluating; and finally, making decisions. These metacognitive strategies (446) are fostered as students gradually move beyond literal levels of a text. The first two steps, observation and the identification of assumptions, are carried out in the pre-text phase. The former refers to looking, listening, noticing and naming; its purpose is to aid in eliciting students' already existing knowledge about a topic. The reactions provoked by the topic are evaluated during the latter. During understanding and organizing, the focus is on literal levels of the text, such as low-frequency words. These content-related tasks serve to provide a solid foundation and may include putting information in order; classifying; or comparing and contrasting. The next step, interpretation, serves as the threshold between literal and abstract thinking: "with its central subskill of inference, [it] is at the heart of critical thinking" (p. 442)

Beaumont compares learners engaging in interpretation to detectives, and the lesson to a crime scene: "we are asking students to be Sherlock Holmes or investigators… [They] must use what they have in front of them, the evidence, to come up with a response, theory, or judgment" (p. 441). The extended allegory is useful to convey how students must search for clues by inferring, that is: by identifying meaning from context. Interpretation therefore requires them "to go between the lines of what they read, see, hear, and think. They should not be led automatically by their first impression, their personal experience, or their gut instinct" (p. 442). This provides the basis for the next three steps in the sequence: the practice of inquiring further necessitates research, and may be combined with the teaching of referential phrases or the reported speech. Having collected different sources or points of view, students then engage in analysis and evaluation; in the final step, they are called upon to apply "critical thinking skills in a non-classroom setting" (p. 445). Investigating the social issues of poverty and housing could therefore lead a student-detective to make informed decisions by examining tenants' rights in her community; or, as in Benesch's CEAP classroom, to engage in student activism or other forms of direct political action, such as the writing of letters of

protest to the state legislature opposing education cuts (Fenton-Smith 2014). Beaumont's contribution usefully explicates the different layers of critical thinking. As he himself notes, however, in a heterogeneous classroom setting, it would be unrealistic to expect the stages to unfold linearly.

Like Beaumont, Ur (2018) identifies criticality with higher-order thinking skills (HOTS) that require some mental effort. As such, inference is prioritized over remembering, or consolidating what students already know. Ur further refers to critical thinking as "crap-detecting", deep processing, divergent thinking, and thinking outside the box, utilizing the sub-skills of precision, logic and criticism to detect tautology and underlying assumptions in, and coherence of, a given text. While Ur notes that lower-order activities, such as matching, are not necessarily easy, Hughes and Dummett (2016) go further by underlining that criticality is best viewed as a mindset which integrates lower- and higher-level skills; as such, it necessitates a holistic approach. Well-known hierarchical models of metacognitive strategies, such as Bloom's classic 1956 taxonomy and its 2001 revision by Krathwohl and Anderson, therefore must be complicated. In the former, the lower-level skills of knowledge, comprehension, and application are superseded by the HOTS of analysis, synthesis and evaluation. In the later model, importantly, creating replaces evaluation, suggesting productive engagement as the most complex skill (Dummett and Hughes, 2018, p. 8). Nevertheless, Dummett and Hughes' emphasize correlation over hierarchy. Their own framework is based on the three Rs: "thinking reflectively (being curious), rationally (thinking analytically), and reasonably (coming to sensible conclusions)" (p. 4. Original italics). The complex skill of self-reflexiveness would therefore characterize Numrich's sequence already from the second step. Similarly to Ur's understanding of critical thinking, rationality is linked to the detection of logic, and the production of logical arguments, while being reasonable reinforces the social justice imperative of proceeding without bias, and having an open mind (p. 4).

3 Research Design and Methodology

The research took place in two English 1 groups at a Portuguese university. The students predominantly majored in English; some had English as their minor. The subject was the first of six EAP courses taken consecutively during the Bachelor of Arts degree. The groups met twice weekly for appr. 100-minute-long-sessions. 28 students were enrolled

in both the 2 pm and 4 pm classes, however, in the observed period, only 16-20 regularly attended the lessons in the first group, and 4 in the second. The rest had the option of obtaining a grade in January's resit period. Students were required 70% attendance. As a result, attrition could appear relatively late; conversely, new students entered the class during the semester.

The researcher has been a non-native English-speaking teacher (or NNEST) at the university since 2019, with limited Portuguese. The language of instruction is entirely in the target language. The CEFR level was C1, making it ideal for the fostering of critical thinking skills, which are typically, albeit erroneously, "associated with higher proficiency levels of English (B1+ level and above)" (Hughes & Dummett, 2016, p. 12). Due to the highly specialized language of textbooks aimed at English for specific purposes, de Chazal and McCarter's *Oxford EAP: A Course in English for Academic Purposes* (2013), the volume used in the English 1 classes, is of a lower, upper-intermediate or B2 level. It is expected that chapters 1-3 are covered in the first semester. This is carried out primarily with an eye on pedagogical aims, rather than coursebook content. As such, the semester should finish with students having mastered the skills of paraphrasing and summary writing; note-taking during lectures; mastering research skills and scanning and skimming texts; understanding visual information, such as charts; and preparing extended, dynamic presentations. Grammar points include the tenses, relative clauses, noun phrases, discussing facts and opinions, and paraphrasing. These are elaborated on with the help of *Oxford Grammar for EAP* (Paterson & Wedge, 2013), typically assigned as self-study. Both textbooks are curricular impositions.

3.1 Research Questions

This study is based on the premise that critical thinking may and has to be taught in order to facilitate learners' felicitous navigation of complex communicative contexts in the target language. That is, the view put forward here emphasizes the socially emergent nature of language, constructed in interactions. Against this background, the following research questions emerged: How does engaging with controversial topics affect students' use of the target language? How are materials best utilized to foster a complex approach to social justice issues in the EAP classroom? While the researcher initially set out to explore the place of critical thinking in EFL, participants' responses led to further

questions: how do students relatively well-versed in criticality mobilize controversial topics on the C1 level? Furthermore, are there limits to critical engagement?

3.2 Research Approach

This qualitative study is based on observational action research undertaken over 6 weeks, divided into two iterative (Burns, 2009) cycles spanning 4 and 2 weeks, respectively. The current essay provides a detailed textual analysis of the main themes (Creswell & Creswell, 2023; Burns, 2009), which emerged dialogically (Benesch, 1999; Benesch, 2001) in student-teacher interactions, or at the intersection of the researcher's declared objective to provide a conducive environment for the improvement of participants' critical thinking skills on the one hand, and students' communicative production on the other. As opposed to a positivistic approach to critical action research in CEAP (Pearson, 2017), main themes were identified both on the basis of recurring topics or subtopics in different lessons, and their overall relevance for the critical thinking module. Data collection and the subsequent description and thematic analysis were based on class observation, field notes in the form of recordings or post-concurrent verbalizations (Atkinson, 2022), student work, and semi-structured interviews with participants. Recordings were transcribed with Otter.ai and checked for accuracy. Participants' informed consent was asked at the beginning of the teaching module, while interviewees filled in an additional form. Pseudonyms were used throughout. The name of Languages & Cultures BA course is similarly non-specific: it is an amalgam of several existing programmes.

3.3 Reference to Earlier Research

As Cohen et al. note, action research is particularly well-suited to studying individual educational contexts by the teachers themselves, given its focus on "practitioners' practices, their understandings of their practices, and the conditions in which they practice" (Kemmis 2009, cited in Cohen et al., 2018, p. 440). Not only is action research intervention-oriented, but it aligns with, and is informed by, criticality in its aim to be transformative and bring about change from the ground up. Indeed, Pearson (2017) defines criticality as action and argues that it may be produced in an educational setting

that privileges students' self-reflection over quantifiable output. It allows for agentic methods, challenging the status quo in EAP courses where "only that which is measurable is valuable" (Pearson, 2017, p. 162). In its implementation, action research is practical and participatory; it is interaction-based and is highly informed by participants' input, either in the form of feedback or feed forward (Cohen et al., 2018). Research design relies on the dialogical nature of this flexible inquiry: cycles of planning, acting, observing and reflecting feed into each other, resulting in a series of spirals, and allowing for situated re-planning or reconceptualization.

It has to be noted that this democratic, transformative approach to educational institutions might be particularly revealing precisely because of the hierarchical nature of schools, seen as "formal and bureaucratic, whilst action research is collegial, informal, open, collaborative, and crosses formal boundaries" (Cohen et al., 2018, pp. 454-455). Emphasizing the collaborative construction of meaning, van der Broeck (2023) advocates for an understanding of pedagogical practice as a thirdspace in EAP. Teacherly self-reflection may involve an enhanced awareness of power-relations in the classroom, materializing in the control over learning (Fenton-Smith, 2014; Burns, 2009). In her review of 45 articles, Ali (2020) notes that action research in EFL has primarily focused on writing, with only half as many texts devoted to listening and reading, leaving speaking, vocabulary and grammar undertheorized. Action research in EAP is similarly writing-focussed, offset by the teaching of reflective dialogue and presentation skills (Kizilcik & Daloglu, 2018; Fahmi, 2011). In hierarchical educational contexts, such as the researcher's own, which traditionally favour the teacher-centered delivery method, a holistic, interactive approach to skills is therefore required.

Action research corresponds to Pennycook's idea of praxis. Pre-empting the binary opposition between teaching practice and its academic meta-discourse, brought about "because of the difficulty of some critical theory and because of a tendency at times to dismiss theory as disconnected to practice", Pennycook claims that "[n]either pedagogical practice nor personal experience could be assumed to be unmediated by theoretical standpoints" (Pennycook 1999, p. 341). Praxis is therefore defined as "the mutually constitutive roles of theory grounded in practice and practice grounded in theory. It is a way of thinking about critical work that does not dichotomise theory and practice but rather sees them as always dependent on each other" (p. 342). This was found to be a

particularly useful approach for the researcher's teaching of EAP, combining academics and EFL teaching. Educational praxis was further informed by the communicative method of language teaching. A learner-centred pedagogy, it aims productively to counteract Santos' observation, that "the critical thinking generated" in analyses "is mainly concentrated in the thinking done by researchers themselves" (Santos 2013, p. 91).

3.4 Description of the method of data collection

Data was collected via a pre- and a post-survey at the beginning and end of the 6-week-long research period. Questions of the two questionnaires can be found in Appendix A and Appendix B. Both surveys were distributed as Google Forms, and sought to clarify students' levels of criticality before and after the thematic teaching module. Students were informed about their rights, including the right to opt out from answering the surveys, with the help of an adapted, detailed consent form (Institutional Review Board, University of Tennessee, Knoxville, 2021) [Appendix C], shared in the groups' respective Google Docs before the pre-survey, and referred to again preceding the distribution of the post-survey. Student interactions and two group presentations served as a significant data source. In-class discussions were taken note of in a variety of formats. Post-concurrent verbalizations were created between lessons, or during the days following teaching. These smartphone recordings were the source of "rich, extensive data and [detailed] thoughts and actions that might otherwise be forgotten or overlooked in retrospective project accounts" (Atkinson, 2022, p. 5). An example may be found in Appendix F. Note-taking or keeping a research diary were found not to be feasible due to the short breaks between the consecutive English 1 lessons, and the active involvement of the researcher in the classroom. Recordings made by the teacher collected memorable student interventions, and the educator's subjective perception of class procedures. These were complemented by photos taken of the board after each lesson. Assignments served as a further source of data of students' linguistic production. During the research period, these consisted of the following: a creative writing task; a letter to a newspaper's agony aunt; song analysis (submitted as a 1-minute-long mp3 file); an academic review of a peer's recording on Google Forms. Additionally, two semi-structured interviews (Appendix E) were made with students on Zoom, providing idiosyncratic, yet significant individual contributions

to the notion of critical thinking. Interviewees provided written consent (Appendix D) before the video call took place.

While action research has the declared aim of improving institutional relations, interviews with other educators were not possible due to clashing schedules. Consent was refused in two cases, and was revoked in one. Lack of engagement was also due to increased precarity in the 2024/2025 academic year. Colleagues nevertheless expressed interest in hearing about the results in the future. NNESTs typically only meet in the exam periods of January and June; sharing a research report could be possible then.

3.5 Criticality as a Problem in the Assigned Textbook

One of the pedagogical objectives of de Chazal and McCarter's book is the development of critical thinking, helping learners to "study effectively in English" (de Chazal & McCarter, 2013, p. 6). The "Introduction" further defines critical thinking tasks as "encouraging you to think about the content of the module, and about your own performance in writing and speaking tasks" (p. 6) However, rather than an overall attitude, critical thinking is swiftly identified with singular tasks, typically one in each subchapter. The exercises explicitly related to critical thinking include mixing and matching different styles of intelligence to their definitions (for reading); reacting to a decontextualized statement about government spending deprioritizing education (for a short writing task); a checklist for an essay plan with simple Yes/No questions; or a prediction task for a video lecture about legal systems. Critical thinking as a label is highly visible throughout, given that the authors use meta-language, entitling each task with the skill it ostensibly promotes, rather than advertising the topic to be discussed.

While several activities in the book do encourage criticality in the form of an unbiased, multi-layered, self-reflective approach, exercises such as the examples cited above do little to foster a complex questioning attitude. Nowhere does the book explicitly offer training in critical thinking, or address what this skill entails. This suggests that these tasks were included or labelled as such to meet publishing or marketing demands, or even visibly to engage with critical pedagogy. This add-on quality undermines the very aims of these tasks, and suggests that critical thinking could be learnt or taught discretely, in isolation from other skills. While students in the previous years had been able to carry out these tasks, if begrudgingly, they were deeply puzzled about the meaning and significance

of criticality: “We don’t really know what critical thinking means or what we should be doing,” a former learner announced during group work in the Fall of 2023. The volume’s frequently mystifying instructions add to the confusion.

Another problem with the coursebook is the dated nature of its “authentic” academic texts, advertised as the main vehicles of criticality (p. 6). Authenticity in academia is a research criterion, rather than a language concern. Gesturing towards the authenticity requirement in EFL, the authors reproduce sections of PARSNIP-safe, extremely drily written scholarly texts aimed at an overly general academic audience. These are unpopular with students, and are best altogether replaced or exploited in tandem with materials specifically tailored to learners’ interests and communicative needs.

3.6 Instruments

In addition to sources of data enlisted in 3.4, a pre- and a post-survey were utilized as the instruments framing the research. These were administered at the beginning and end of the critical thinking teaching module.

3.6.1 The Pre-Survey

The pre-survey was distributed at the beginning of the semester on Google Forms. Besides collecting data on social variables, such as age, course of study and nationality, it asked students to reflect on any prior knowledge about critical thinking by defining the term in their own words (questions 1 and 2); finishing two sentences describing when they had last resorted to the use of this skill, and the ensuing changes, if any (question 3); and to give examples of any situations where thinking critically could be to their advantage (question 4). The phrase ‘critical thinking’ was repeated several times without a paraphrase in order to avoid influencing answers by providing available meanings. Most questions were open-ended to allow for a variety of reactions. Answer time was approximately 20 minutes. Among those present, ten students did not fill in the survey; out of these, two opted out because they were below the age of 18.

There were 20 respondents. From the 11 studying Languages & Cultures, 5 further specified their course as English (2 students), English with French (2) or German (1). Out of the two European Studies majors, one also had English as their minor. Other

represented courses included Journalism (3), Law (2), Art Studies (1), Psychology with an Anthropology minor (1), and Tourism (1). The research subjects came from various stages of the BA cycle: the majority were first year students (11), 2 were in the second and 6 in the third year, while 1 was completing the 4th year of an extended BA. Although there were no MA or PhD students in this cohort, 1 participant was studying for a second degree: a Public Administration graduate, she had started Law. Reflecting this academic heterogeneity, respondents' age ranged from 18 to 27 years. Learners formed an international group, with the great majority (12) identifying as Portuguese; others came from Brazil (3), Italy (2), East Timor (2), and Turkey (1). Exchange students – that is, students not completing their entire cycle of study at the university – included the 2 Italians, an East Timoran and a French subject. The data had to be cleaned: reactions showing the use of internet interference were eliminated at each point.

3.6.2 The post-survey

Due to changes in the class during the semester, personal information was again collected in the final questionnaire, distributed at the end of the critical thinking module. Data indicated that the group had become more international, with a further Erasmus student from Italy (age 21), and new participants from Cyprus (24), Bissau-Guinea (19), and East Timor (20); while others had stopped attending lessons. The new incomers were students of Journalism (BA, 3rd year), Sports Sciences (BA, 4th year), and Languages & Cultures (2 students, BA, 1st year), respectively. There were 22 respondents.

The post-survey was based on the findings in the interim, and as such, had more numerous, but more direct questions. The first thematic part of the questionnaire addressed different facets of criticality, such as thinking outside of the box, and having an unbiassed, complex approach to controversial issues, related to in-class discussions (Questions 1-3). In the next four subsections, students were asked to evaluate their own critical skills, with a focus on changes in thinking, first in general terms (Q. 4); then related to the teaching materials, which participants had to further specify (in Qs. 5 and 6); and finally, in terms of work forms (Q. 7). A further line of inquiry (Q. 10) aimed to shed light on a potential future task where learners' critical skills might be applied. The last section focussed on participants' suggestions: ideas for further topics and notable

absences from the module were collected (Qs. 8 and 9), together with specific and general feedback to the teacher (Qs. 11 and 12).

3.7 Procedures and Materials Used

Materials production was organized around the two larger thematic sections of music, textuality and critical thinking; and the correlation between degrees and career prospects. Additional topics included childhood poverty and sexual harassment. Taking seriously Gray's concept of materials in action (Gray, 2013), emphasis was put on the creation, adaptation, and scaffolding of challenging, yet motivating worksheets (Scrivener, 2005; Harmer, 2007). Alongside procedures and objectives of the individual lessons, these are presented below. Individual tasks are further discussed in the next chapter.

3.7.1 Week 1: Introduction to Criticality

Lesson 1 started with an obligatory placement test, with an added creative writing task: learners had to finish a story taken from an autobiography about a child growing up in severe neglect (O'Sullivan, 2023). The familiarization of learners with the research context was followed by the distribution of the pre-survey.

Lesson 2 served as an introductory class to criticality, enabled by the placement of associated images and quotes on the walls of the classroom. A mix-and-match exercise, adapted from Debra Hills' book *Critical Thinking in 1 Hour* (2011), was also utilized, alongside a similarly adapted letter sent to *The Guardian*'s agony aunt, which students answered with their own written suggestions. The lesson was offered as an open, Harry Styles-themed workshop on the European Day of Languages, drawing participants' attention to the heterogeneity of research in the humanities, including researching pop cultural phenomena.

3.7.2 Week 2: Childish Gambino's *This is America* (2018). Extended Song Analysis

In Lessons 3 and 4, students were introduced to academic analysis via the extended, multi-step analysis of US-American rapper Childish Gambino's *This is America* (2018). Various sources were used to engage learners. The primary text ascribed for these lessons was the article "Childish Gambino: *This is America* Uses Music and Dance to Expose

Society's Dark Underbelly" (Cookney & Fairclough, 2018), complemented by Winten's (2018) close reading of the lyrics. The former text had been published on *The Conversation*; a platform combining daily news with contemporary research, it aims to bridge the gap between theory and practice, exemplifying Pennycook's (1999) concept of praxis. Accordingly, textual analysis in the article was complemented with embedded hyperlinks and multi-media, such as a tweet about the slave archetype Jim Crow; and videos potentially familiar to the students, creating further productive interpretive links with Beyoncé's song *Formation* (2016), and the movie *Get Out* (Peele, 2017).

The main source article therefore already represented a multi-layered, high-level analysis with its synthesis of different perspectives, and provided a rich interpretive context. Criticality was fostered via video and lyrics analysis in Lesson 3; a close reading of the source text, juxtaposed by an analysis of the monograph *The New Jim Crow. Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness* (Alexander, 2010; Macat, 2016) in Lesson 4; the submission of interpretive audio recordings by Lesson 7; and their peer correction and feedback in Lesson 10.

3.7.3 Week 3: Tense Review. Reflection on Creative Writing

In Lesson 5, the revision of the tenses was carried out on the basis of the grammar book's Unit 1 (Paterson & Wedge, 2013, pp. 6-15). An additional article, adapted for grammatical purposes from *Buzzfeed*, described the dismissal of a tenured professor from UC Santa Cruz for sexual misconduct (Subbaraman, 2019). The text provided vocabulary related to the #metoo movement; however, due to its role as a grammar task, the topic of harassment was not sufficiently explored and the text was repurposed for Lesson 11.

Criticality in reading and writing was at the center of Lesson 6. Students received their short compositions from the placement test, together with feedback, and were provided information about the source book. The multi-step engagement with O'Sullivan's autobiography was complemented by error correction.

3.7.4 Week 4: The Prospects of Liberal Arts Degrees. Noun Phrases

To provide context for a thought-provoking multimedia section from the coursebook on graduate employability (de Chazal & McCarter, 2012, pp. 20-21), a provocative article

was selected from *The Chronicle of Higher Education*: "When It Comes to Future Earnings, Liberal-Arts Graduates Might Get the Last Laugh" (Leckrone, 2020). In Lesson 7, a jumbled text was used for understanding textual structure and coherence; vocabulary was utilized in initial group discussions about the marketability of degrees. The article was read in its entirety and further discussed in Lesson 8, followed by introductory exercises related to noun phrases using Unit 3 of the grammar book (Paterson & Wedge, 2013, pp. 28-35).

3.7.5 Week 5 Graduate Employability. Noun Phrases

For Lessons 9 and 10, the aforementioned section of the coursebook was utilized. While focusing on the experience of engineering students in the labour market, this subchapter provided an unexpectedly humanities-based list of desired skills by employers, and introduced the notion of participatory research. Tasks comprised of a sequence of videos, representing different parts of an academic lecture given by an employability counsellor. Providing an external perspective to the humanities cohort of English 1, this part of the book helped extend the ideas of interdisciplinarity introduced by Leckrone's article in the previous week. The video lecture could also be used as a model for students' eventual presentations. The teaching of noun phrases, an additional objective of this section, was complemented by tasks from the grammar book (Paterson & Wedge, 2013, pp. 36-37).

3.7.6 Week 6: Peer Analysis. Researching and Commenting Locally Relevant Sources

Peer analysis of students' previously submitted song analyses was the focus of Lesson 11. This was first carried out in small groups, followed by open class feedback. Review vocabulary, to be utilized in end-of-term assignments, was pre-taught. In addition, learners were asked to take note of language use, and thematic concerns, such as mentioning anything symbolic; using academic research; and evidence of critical thinking. The final round of peer review was carried out as an individual writing task.

A well-documented sexual harassment case in Portuguese academia with an international scope was discussed in Lesson 12, with Subbaraman's (2019) article from Lesson 5 used for context and vocabulary. With a view to the final step of the Numrich sequence about

localizing criticality (Beaumont, 2010), students had researched sources of local, academic relevance, such as those advising about reporting sexual harassment on campus, for group presentations on the topic. The module concluded with the discussion of criticality in preparation for December's oral exam.

3.7.7 Week 7: The Post-Survey

The final questionnaire was distributed in Lesson 13.

3.8 The Quality of Research

Triangulation was used to ensure coherence, reliability and validity (Creswell & Creswell, 2023). Data was collected through multiple sources, such as surveys, student work, semi-structured interviews, classroom observation, and post-concurrent verbalizations. While action research is defined by its particular local context and does not have an objective of reproducibility (Burns, 2009 and 2020), procedures and tasks are transferable to other educational settings, and findings could inform multi-cultural comparative analyses in the future.

4 Results & Discussion

Following Burns (2009), results are discussed thematically, rather than chronologically. Certain aspects of individual lessons were emphasized best to demonstrate students' progress. Results are framed by the pre- and the post-survey: discussing participants' working concepts of criticality, the first instrument provides the background for the overall analysis of the teaching module, while responses to the second extend the researcher's findings in the interim. The subchapters following the analysis of the pre-survey will first focus on the metalanguage of critical thinking and criticality as a creative skill. Criticality as an unfolding sequence will be discussed in relation to song analysis; and to the multi-faceted, multidirectional correlation between university degrees and career prospects. The emerging themes of gender and dissent and invisible disability are

the focus of the next two subchapters. Following the results of the post-survey, limitations of the research are offered as the concluding section.

When quoting students, the original linguistic features of the contributions were preserved. That is, as evidence of learners' linguistic competence in the target language, the extracts were not edited for accuracy, with the exception of assignments submitted for evaluation, where asterisks (*) indicate errors.

4.1 Framing the Research 1: The Pre-Survey

Responses given to the pre-survey are provided in the order of the four questions (see Appendix A). Students' initial, working concepts of criticality are cited in detail to demonstrate the different levels of engagement with the topic in the two groups.

Results show that the vast majority of students (16) had already been familiar with critical thinking, having heard about it in educational settings (13) or at home (3), with 1 respondent referring to both, and 1 giving a non-specific positive answer. Regarding the former, university was mentioned four times, high school once, while unspecified "classes", which could equally refer to secondary or tertiary education, were brought up seven times. Previously or currently taken academic subjects included Philosophy (2), Communication (2), and Public Administration (1). Some students emphasized the indispensability of criticality for specific fields of study: "As I study Communication, critical thinking is very important to understand our studies"; "…in my first course, Administration and in current course, Law… [i]t's all about critical thinking. We can't just applicate the law without interpreting it, giving it a meaning and adapting it to the situation". Academic knowledge about critical thinking had also emerged from, or was complemented with, videos on *YouTube* and other unspecified social media (2 students). One student failed to give an answer.

Definitions of criticality were collected in the second topical section of the survey. Relying on their already existing knowledge, respondents provided sophisticated definitions which themselves called for cognitive sophistication. Several different aspects of criticality were mobilized in the answers; significant overlaps and rich descriptions meant that emerging themes were identified rather than ways of delineation. Respondents foregrounded the need for analysis and a multi-layered

perspective. Four students understood criticality to be a structured, yet open-ended and solution-oriented way of thinking. As one student put it, “this opinion must be flexibal and allow to accept new points of views or variables, to remake the processo… again… It's a cicle.” The general importance of “using rationality and logic” was underlined in five cases, and in one, was contrasted with relying on emotions. A high number of research subjects (8) understood the skill in individualistic terms, as “thinking on our own, not entirely influenced by other's opinions”; as another student put it, “it's a way of a person to think with their own head, which means, to have their own perspective about a certain topic”. Relying on outside sources – “books or media” - was mentioned twice; listening to others once. Critical thinking was further seen as not restricted to any given setting, employed with the aim of arriving at a better (2) or an unbiased analysis (1). However, two students understood criticality to be about fault-finding, or “always not accepting what others do”. These reactions reflect a widespread, but mistaken interpretation (Banegas & de Castro, 2016; Katz, 2018).

When having to reflect on how they had applied this skill, however, four students opted out of answering. From those who reacted, six believed having a critical attitude led to change, while for four, the critically assessed situation had remained the same. As for the former subgroup: education-related problems were preeminent, such as choosing which subjects to take (2), enrollment at university (1), or debating going on an Erasmus exchange (1). Students recalled “thinking carefully… in order to achieve my future objectives”, and noted that, apart from the decision to start an undergraduate course, the results made for a slight change. Similarly, only a moderate difference was seen by 1 respondent, “who did a research in different channels” to have a more informed view “when I got important news about what was happening in my country.” A complete overhaul of “a plan” was reported in very few words by 1 student. Critical thinking had no effect on situations reported by the second subgroup: political views were not transformed either because “I didn’t have the hability to think in my own terms”, or because “my opinion on the matter was already formed previously and the addition of new information just helped my opinion and thoughts about it remain the same.”

Question 4 asked about the everyday application of critical thinking. To a large segment (8 students), this approach was useful in all aspects of life. As a senior Philosophy student put it: “it could be useful on politics, philosopy, literature and even religion, and so

much more." Altogether, 4 respondents mentioned politics, with a special emphasis on elections. One respondent provided a correlation between political and "certain society issues (abortion, euthanasia, poverty, gender equality, etc.)" Naturally, several (4) students mentioned education. A law major underlined the importance of critical thinking for both teaching and studying: "I am of the opinion that it is better to teach by stimulationg the process of thinking than to just throw the informations to decorate, this last is stupid, I did it during all my youngest student's year, I remembered quite nothing." Other applicable areas mentioned were entrepreneurship, events planning, and, without further elaboration, emotional life. Two textbook-style answers were eliminated because of their incongruity with the respondents' overall writing style.

What stands out in the results of the pre-survey is the discrepancy between students' informed, nuanced, academic understanding of critical thinking, and the relative lack of information about its practical application. Definitions were plentiful and highly informative, contradicting expectations about a lack of knowledge about this skill. That learners were more eloquent when defining an abstract concept than when describing its effects on their everyday life confirmed the teacher-researcher's working assumption about an existing gap between theory and practice. Furthermore, criticality was sometimes identified in a utilitarian manner, as a means to an end, rather than an overall attitude. Interestingly, the exact nature of the resulting transformation was ambiguously presented in the most philosophical answer to the third question, where the critical contemplation of free will was mentioned as essentially inconclusive: "Everything remained the same because I came to the conclusion that, depending on the individual and their experience, one is free to do whatever they wish with their life." However, this stoic answer seems to miss the point: the reflection on, and weighing of possibilities, and the arrival at a deductive answer is precisely the practice of critical thinking.

4.2 The Metalanguage of Critical Thinking

For an initial discussion of critical thinking as the general framework for classes, the exercise "Getting to know yourself – critically" was adapted from Debra Hills' ambitiously entitled *Critical Thinking in 1 Hour* (2011) [Appendix G]. The book, published in the *Student Essentials* series, has the objective of sharing the practical tenets

of criticality with an undergraduate audience. In the original task, student readers are asked to react to the following statement: "Using Facebook extensively can diminish a person's intellectual ability" (p. 9). Hill suggests that students then compare their answers to seven reactions listed below this claim about social media use, and identify the one closest to their own position. Next, she interprets each answer from a critical perspective. This activity took place in an open workshop, organized for the European Day of Languages, entitled *Harry Styles, Critical Theorist? An LGBTQ Approach to Academic English*. Keeping with the workshop's theme, and inspired by Hughes and Dummett (2016), who modified this task for a B2-C1 level class, the topic was changed: the English 1 group was shown a statement that read "Pop songs don't help anyone learn more about society." Students were then asked to react to this claim in groups of four. Reporting back in open class feedback, they first seemed unanimously in favor of the statement on the board. This changed considerably when they had to identify their initial position with one of Hill's seven possible answers. Confirming Beaumont's theory (2010), when provided, subtleties were understood and quickly incorporated, making way for critical thinking: while 4 students continued to judge the statement as "definitely true" and 2 dismissed it outright as "ridiculous", 2 refused engagement by choosing "I don't know" and 5 hesitantly allowed for a 50% chance of truth/falsity. Finally, 6 decided that evaluation should be carried out on the basis of further research.

The group therefore moved from a seemingly unanimous rejection of the idea that pop songs may have social relevance to a more heterogeneous pool of answers when shown different possibilities. This indicates that the availability of nuanced model interpretations provides opportunities for students to critically examine and evaluate their own positions, even complicate them with the idea of further research. Notably, the notion that more information was needed to solidify one's understanding of the issue had not been previously mentioned and, as such, was the real import of this task. An additional activity familiarizing students with academic search engines cemented the notion that extended study of a topic was not only necessary but could be carried out by the participants themselves.

The language of the task was also critically considered. Students had to match the seven reactions to scholarly comments: Hills' own interpretations, which ranged from supportive, yet cautious ("Perhaps you worry your answer is 'wrong' or that your opinion

isn't important. However, opting out of a debate suggests a lack of engagement and is likely to lead to average marks", p. 10) through harsh ("Shrugging your shoulders indicates no thinking at all", p. 10) to celebratory ("Yes! We have a burgeoning critical thinker in our midst", p. 10). The exact meaning of the phrase 'sitting on the fence' was complicated by the 4 pm group, who correctly related it to answers 5 and 6, but also identified it with answer 7 ("I agree/disagree for a number of reasons but I'd need more information before I gave a definitive answer", p. 10). In Hills' framework, this was the only statement promoting criticality; not only did it pose the requirement for research to be carried out about the topic in question, but it also met the criterion, shared as part of comment c), that "[c]ritical thinking needs an open mind." Perhaps due to its ambiguous wording, students conflated the flexibility of informed thinking with the disinterest represented in answer 5 ("I don't know") and the relativizing attitude of 6 ("I'd say it's 50% true and 50% false.") Reflecting on semantic nuances proved productive in this group, leading to a discussion of the history of political music in Portugal; and the cultural relevance of Turkish singer Hande Yener's lyrics for Tulut, a Cypriot Erasmus student who belonged to the Turkish-speaking minority in his home country: "Hande Yener likes liberty", he noted.

4.3 Criticality and Creativity

To pre-test students' critical thinking, a writing task (Appendix H) was repurposed. It had originally formed part of the placement test, administered at the very beginning of the course. Including composition this year was called for after several incidents in the past two academic years with submissions created with varying degrees of Artificial Intelligence (A.I.) assistance. Therefore, the composition task had a dual objective. Firstly, it had the administrative function of obtaining a writing sample from each student with which to compare later submissions. At the same time, importantly, it also served to provide an early instance of student voice.

A creative writing task was seen to serve this purpose well, given that incoming first year students are unfamiliar with academic genres, which often require research completed in advance. Creativity is an important facet of critical thinking; however, a false dichotomy is often posited between fiction and scholarship, in other words: creative and academic writing (Katz 2022, Chapter 4). Test-takers were shown an extract from a recently

published autobiography by Katriona O'Sullivan, entitled *Poor: Grit, Courage and the Life-Changing Value of Self-Belief* (2023). The book describes an unprivileged childhood in great detail. Growing up in the Dublin of the 1980s as a daughter of parents who battled drug and alcohol addictions, O'Sullivan found solace in the company of books, and at school. However, in the chosen section, the 8-year-old protagonist is unexpectedly called in for a meeting with Miss Hall, a teacher she is unfamiliar with. It is implicit in the extract that the child has faced obstacles: she idolizes her form teacher, Mrs. Arkinson, a savior-like figure. The scene depicted, of a child getting into trouble at school, is universal. It is only the location that is curious: why should the meeting take place in the bathroom? Students were asked to finish the story in 8-10 lines.

While all of the short texts reflected on the dread of the protagonist encountering authority, only a few learners commented on the official meeting taking place in the unofficial location of the stalls, the governing paradox of the selected episode. In the essays addressing this contrast, Katriona was summoned to the school toilets because she was accused of breaking the mirror there; she was shown graffiti smearing her: "when I came into the bathroom, I saw the wall full of *bad words insulting my person and my temperament"; the teacher frightfully asked her to kill a spider crouching in the corner: "Eventually, Miss Hall started talking, stuttering a little, and clearly embarrassed…"; Miss Hall turned into a monster: "the teacher became a huge fly, with red eyes and green wings. […] *Anything happened next, I don't remember." The room was also seen to have been selected as a convenient substitute because "*the principal was flooded." While these writers took note of the location, the language used was at times not of the required level (*bad words instead of 'curse words'), the incorrect phrase had been chosen (*anything happened instead of 'whatever happened'), or parts of the sentence were missing (it was the principal's office, not the principal herself, which had been flooded).

Despite leaving the problems of the location unsolved, learners did not necessarily avoid thematizing it. Several texts displayed social awareness, associating the privacy of the bathroom with the confidentiality of the meeting. One posited that the topic of conversation was going to be Katriona's "home life", while four opted for bullying: the protagonist was accused of violence against other students in three instances, and was a trusted eyewitness in one. Writers contrasted the dread of being summoned by authority with light-hearted topics, such as an invitation to organize a birthday party for Mrs.

Arkinson, or academic praise: Katriona was informed that she "had been the only student in school who has been selected to *presentated my drawing in an international event about equality for all children." The last solution displays the use of a false friend, utilizing conjunction from the student's native Portuguese and applying it to English.

Katz emphasizes the positive correlation between criticality and creativity: "Imagination plus criticality makes for creative scholarly work" (Katz, 2018, Chapter 4). While the student essays were in each case imaginative, they were not necessarily critical: that is, with a few exceptions, the act of writing was not based on the close reading of the text. Socially sensitive essays engaged with the extract's atmosphere, rather than the facts at hand. Interestingly, noticing the incongruity of the location bore no clear correlation with writing skills, such as the use of discourse markers ("eventually", "as soon as", "noticeably", "on the contrary"); continuity, expressed in the mirroring of O'Sullivan's style of emphatic repetition ("I hated Miss Hall, and I know she hated me… I think we all have those teachers, the ones who dislike us"); grammar ("Nothing came to mind about what she could possibly want to speak to me about"); and vocabulary. Those not responding to the location were more often found to have used colloquialisms ("obviously", "freaking out", "my world stopped", "the whole silence thing"). However, it cannot be concluded that higher levels of accuracy and a more varied vocabulary were used in all cases by the writers noticing the discrepancy. This suggests that criticality has to do with effective reading strategies, and that high-level language use itself – devoid of critical skills – may be learners' sole objective in carrying out tasks in the EFL classroom.

In the book (O'Sullivan 2023, Chapter 3), we learn that Katriona, called "Pissy Pants" by her classmates, was once again saved by the institution. Growing up in extreme poverty, she wet the bed while having no access to basic necessities, such as a towel, toilet paper, or a toothbrush. Her two teachers conspired to provide her with clean underwear and an understanding of basic hygiene; using inclusive, egalitarian language, Miss Hall taught her how to wash herself properly. Hence the location.

In a later class, students were returned their own texts, and were first shown the cover of O'Sullivan's book, then a short quote explaining the derisive epithet "Pissy Pants" to elicit ideas about the paradox of the previously provided extract. Learners were then given a longer section of the text, which they could check for further details. The clues presented offered more context for the writing task, and the problem situation was correctly

identified by one participant in each group once the short quote appeared on the board. Upon reading the longer section, learners showed understanding and empathy, but also disappointment over Katriona's dire circumstances and ongoing educational troubles, which contradicted their own, happier narrative outcomes. The groups continued to joyously engage with the topic, with more than half of the 2 pm class expressing preference for creative writing projects over academic ones. This underlines Katz's point about not maintaining a scholarly-writerly binary in EAP, which could be realized in an integration of more varied writing genres in the future.

4.4 Critical Thinking as an Unfolding Sequence: Song Analyses

Childish Gambino's *This is America* (2016) is a musically, lyrically and visually complex work of art. Responding to current events, it allowed for the productive eliciting of students' background knowledge about racism, police brutality, and the Black Lives Matter movement. Song analysis included pre- and post-task activities. Before class, students had had to read the article, and complete a mix-and-match exercise to help with advanced academic vocabulary (Appendix I). Using chunks of language, rather than individual words, the latter also served as an early introduction to paraphrasing, a key skill to acquire in English 1. However, mixing and matching requires lower-order thinking skills (Ur, 2018), and students could have grouped these original phrases according to different criteria instead; alternatives will therefore be considered in the future. In its current form, the exercise helped learners better understand the primary article's high-level, often technical terms. Post-task activities included paratextual, language- and content-related questions, complemented by a listening task in the second lesson (Appendix J).

Given the sophisticated analysis of Cookney and Fairclough's article (2019), and the subtlety of *This is America* itself, in-class discussion first focused on the meaning of the word 'symbolic'. The dictionary entry of the word was shared on a Power Point slide (Cambridge Dictionary, n. d.), and further examples were elicited. Students quickly found a musical instance of representation: that of the orchestra resembling the progression of a marching band in Taylor Swift's *Look What You Made Me Do* (Swift, 2017). In that song, according to participants well-versed in associated lore, the military allegory signified the singer's powerful comeback after a long hiatus caused by controversies,

including public attacks against her, in the past. Having identified a working example, the groups then listened for symbolism in *This is America* itself. Their ideas, shared in pair work monitored by the teacher, were modified and rendered more complex during the second listening, which itself provided more varied stimuli in the form of the song's video. While this double lesson had complex pedagogical aims, what stood out was students' willingness to engage with the music: several of them were listening, then watching *This is America* with visible interest, quite a few with a smile on their face. Immersion in the activity indicated the success of catering to musical and visual intelligences, and relying on non-textual material for the fostering of critical thinking. In the next step, aural and visual information was complemented by scholarly textuality: learners consulted extracts from Winten's (2018) lyrics analysis, displayed on the walls of the classroom. In a further step, visual representations of Cookney and Fairclough's musical and filmic examples extended the analysis, bringing together the various sources used. Among others, a still from *Formation* (2016) was shown, with the singer Beyoncé sitting on top of a patrol car half-submerged in the flood, expressing, as the students put it, her "dominance" over the police. The historical background of the image – the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans – was successfully elicited.

A lengthy discussion of the song's symbolism took place, with learners eagerly organizing, analyzing and evaluating aural, visual and textual cues. This involved creating relationships between different elements of the song, and the scholarly interpretation of the lyrics. The correlations were visualized on the board (Appendix K), with reactions proportionate to group sizes. Relying on their pre-existing knowledge, students identified the language of Childish Gambino's lyrics with African-American Vernacular English, and related the repeated invocation of "dawg" to colonial oppression, when, just like in the song, African Americans were treated like dangerous animals; forced to live in inferior conditions, they were often kept behind bars. Slavery had resurfaced in the present, the students argued, only in a different form: the lines "you just a black man in this world/just a barcode" (Childish Gambino, 2018) provided an interpretive link to commercialization. On the other hand, the repetition of the phrase "get your money" was seen as suggestive of financial/material oppression. Language was also considered as only one of the song's many sound systems, including the African-inspired intro, the gospel choir, gunshot sounds, and, interestingly, silence. The visual language of clothing was also examined, with the Klu Klux Klan associated with the dehumanizing and

anonymizing white head sack worn by one of the musicians. Learners empathetically related the ragged, dirty clothes shown in the video to poverty, symptoms of a continuing slavery and "eternal suffering." Both groups were curious to learn about the etymology of the word 'gospel', sonically and visually represented by a choir in the song, and explained in an extract from Winten's analysis. Unfounded interpretations could be classified as mere observations: for instance, smoking in the video signified marijuana culture for some, but upon further eliciting, this was found not to have any relevance for the overall meaning of the lyrics and the video.

Participants were asked to use their smartphones to create their own 1-minute-long analyses about their favorite song by a later date, integrating some of the vocabulary from Cookson and Fairclough's article, looking for an instance of symbolism in the lyrics or video of their chosen piece of music, and researching and referring to a relevant academic article by title. These recordings brought to the fore further controversial topics, such as women's rights, politics, and mental health issues, among others. Peer review took place in groupwork as well as individually, while the teacher's feedback was sent in mp3 format. In-class peer review, an effective method in EAP (Li, 2019), proved to be highly enjoyable. The use of the sandwich method by layering negative feedback between positive remarks, ensured that learners received praise even when their analyses were deemed to be lacking: "good enunciation" and "a good use of voice" were mentioned, alongside more pointed criticism of structure, comprehensibility, and originality. Particular song analyses are mentioned in section 4.6 of this study. The questions from the individually written peer reviews, along with corrected sample answers, may be found in Appendix L.

4.5 Liberal Arts Degrees and Graduate Employability

The topic of graduate employability, or the relationship between jobs and degrees, was discussed during two weeks, from different perspectives. First, it was explored on the basis of an article from *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, which provided a statistics-based counterargument to the prevalent notion that humanities degrees were not valuable. In fact, the text stated the opposite, already suggested by its title: "When It Comes to Future Earnings, Liberal-Arts Graduates Might Get the Last Laugh" (Leckrone, 2020), and surprising first paragraph, which emphasized the long-term financial advantages of a

humanities degree over those from trade and business schools. The text had been chosen for its several claims fostering critical thinking. It provided evidence and a persuasive argument for higher education in the humanities, which students might have needed to rely on in at-home discussions when selecting their Languages & Cultures degree, or discussing their prospects. The article also emphasized that, contrary to popular belief, what mattered was not the subject studied at university, but the pleasure taken in it, and the fact of graduation. Quoting an education expert, Leckrone stated: "Students who are comfortable at their college in a major they like are more likely to graduate and succeed in the long term", before adding: "The single most important thing about the college that you go to is that you wind up graduating" (Leckrone 2020, paras. 25-26).

The text was used to complement, and prepare the ground for, the coursebook's listening task on "Graduate Employability" (de Chazal & McCarter, 2012, pp. 20-21): with a fictional university lecture its setting, it reported on a survey conducted among engineering graduates and their potential employers, and finished with a shortlist of skills necessary for success in the job market. Following a humanities-centered article, this video lecture allowed for an external perspective on the correlation between degrees and future careers. While its ostensible aim was to teach students about noun phrases, this section of the book also offered talking points in the English 1 classroom by enabling comparisons between liberal arts and STEM fields. As such, it furthered a discussion about interdisciplinarity, already heralded in Leckrone's text as the future of education; and, implicitly, the concretization of criticality in the form of thinking outside of the box.

This sequence of four classes was particularly significant because students mobilized and extended the above ideas in surprising ways. A quick succession of several text-related tasks was prepared to familiarize learners with the argumentative language and structure of the article from the *Chronicle of Higher Education* (Appendix M). In response to textual analysis, an unplanned debate was initiated in the first group by Catarina, an eloquent but hitherto quiet participant, who made strong claims about careers not being anchored in particular degrees, but in the skills one acquires during their studies. She spoke at length, problematizing in her impassioned defense of the humanities the unidirectional and constraining correlation posited by society, many of her peers in the class, and, indeed, also by the teacher as a trick question to foster communication. For this first-year student, a degree in languages was a springboard, rather than a destination.

This prompted another speaker, Miguel, to vehemently challenge the previous position by emphasizing the continuing social and cultural value of positions traditionally associated with liberal arts degrees, such as that of a librarian. Eventually, a common ground was reached with the discussants noting that their stances complemented, rather than contradicted, each other.

Both English 1 groups agreed that a university education enabled social mobility, an important point made in the article. However, they offered opposing views on whether changing one's class status through education was a possibility in the national context. Some emphasized continuing Portuguese economic migration to wealthier Western countries, such as Switzerland; others saw the country as a place where one could live, if not the American, but at least the Portuguese dream. This latter perspective was especially emphatic in the 4 pm group, where three of the five students in attendance came from abroad, with two from former colonies: Brazil and Guinea-Bissau. Answers therefore were informed by historically and geopolitically determined aspirations, as well as national pride.

Response was varied to the second topic, or whether academia provided sufficient preparation for the job market. Communicative outcomes also showed the influence of group dynamics, understood here as peer pressure. In the 2 pm group, students initially almost unanimously stated that they were being taught no transferable or marketable skills at university. This viewpoint was then complicated by Samira, one of the quieter learners, who posited that a language degree could lead to varied job opportunities in teaching, translation, or in sales at international companies. Others then joined in in defending linguistic ability, as well as knowledge about linguistics, as skills transferable to the labor market. Interdisciplinary abstraction, however, was limited: there was no engagement with the teacher's example about the usefulness of an applied linguistics background for a career in A.I., understood as a large language model.

Stronger and more individually diverse reactions were given in the 4 pm lesson, showing the influence of social variables such as age, academic experience, and the small group's multi-disciplinarity. The idea that reciprocity, or the ability to listen to and engage with others, was a critical skill tied these different views together. Marília, a mature student who had returned to academia in her 40s, especially strongly supported the view that a university degree contributed to communicative success at the workplace: "We learn

when to be silent – when to say our arguments" in dialogues, she noted. While the notion of criticality as strategic thinking was implicit in this instance, in a shortlist of useful skills for future careers produced in the class, critical thinking was explicitly mentioned twice. Cecilia, who had just started her Arts Studies BA, noted that art critics had to be open-minded, flexible, and evaluative; while Tulut, a Sports Sciences senior, provided a detailed account of his coaching expertise, with creativity, equality, critical thinking, and "solving equations" emerging as the most desirable characteristics.

In an online interview with the latter student, it turned out that his was not a hierarchical ranking of skills; Tulut further identified criticality with reflective thinking, and – similarly to Marília quoted above – reciprocity. Relying on his coaching experience while in high school, he recalled giving football players abstract tactical problems to work out in pairs. Being aware of multiple, equally useful solutions brought up dialogically, athletes could start "thinking critically, and they [could] try to understand one another", he noted. Importantly, he also proposed a strong link between criticality, engagement with others, and reading. Having helped found a tween girls' football club in a remote Cypriot village, Tulut had bought his trainees books by J. K. Rowling and Jules Verne:

> One of the things that I do in my village was trying to make them read books… especially to my girl team. […] Romans and stories, things, classical ones. […] I just brought them and say, "You can take them and read. And this is just free. And please, after reading, share with your friends this book so there will be accumulation."

Tulut saw reading as a social, rather than an individual activity, symbolized, among others, by the "romans" – a false friend either for the word 'romance' or 'novel'. Reading was also a gendered practice: when asked why he had only encouraged the girl team to read, he said he had been doubtful about the boys ever touching the books. The notion of reciprocity in the above extract is extended in the metaphor of "accumulation", and is further attenuated by the speaker's keen understanding of gender equality, and his sophisticated sense of pedagogy: as Tulut emphasized, his aim was not only to improve players' technical ability, but to provide intellectual stimulation in a social context characterized by poverty and low social mobility. Having joined the English 1 class in

the third week, Tulut showed awareness of, and growing interest in, thinking critically. His use of English, while grammatically often inaccurate, nevertheless showed great communicative competence and a determination to convey a strong message in the name of social justice.

The thematic sequence was important because the texts and their communicative scaffolding created motivation for usually non-participating students to raise their voice, and take control of the floor. The juxtaposition of the humanities with fewer marketable skills and career prospects turned out to be a fake controversy, with scientific research contradicting popular opinion (Cassar et al., 2021, 658). Nevertheless, social consensus over this issue is endemic enough that the topic could be productively addressed. Some genres of speaking were not anticipated, and as such, were not planned for; however, they were facilitated by further elicitation when they arose, as well as by praise; and were accommodated in the flow of the lessons. Responses to the materials provided strong evidence of students' progress, and their growing willingness not only to speak up, but to enter into a discussion with each other. The lessons also challenged the role and extent of teacherly control over language learning. Ultimately, Thornbury's point was proven about speaking as a process, with language facilitating language, and linguistic knowledge emerging in interaction (2013).

4.6 Gender and Dissent in the Classroom

The issue of gender-based discrimination was the explicit focus of materials twice during the six-week-timeframe: firstly, it was detected in a reader's letter to a newspaper; secondly, the issue of sexual harassment, first touched upon in a grammar task, was foregrounded in student presentations about an international case related to the Portuguese academic context. The first in-class reference to gender immediately gave way to vocal dissent; however, in the long term, the topic was mobilized in participants' linguistic production, both critically and uncritically.

Dissent in the classroom is inevitable; indeed, considering conflicting perspectives is an important tenet of critical thinking (Benesch, 2001; Fenton-Smith, 2016; Li, 2019). At the beginning of the research period, resistance to an exploration of sexism was vehemently voiced by an older male student in relation to a short reading task, adapted from *The Guardian* (Gordon-Smith, 2024) [Appendix N]. In a letter to a newspaper's

agony aunt, a male reader sought advice on how to proceed in a blossoming relationship with a woman who had turned out to be a believer of flat Earth conspiracies. The text was adapted to fit the lesson's theme of pop music, changing the conflict to one of musical taste: the woman became a Swiftie, or a Taylor Swift fan, while her male suitor preferred hard rock oldies and classical music. In this new frame, the writer's belittling attitude towards women became pronounced, expressed through his desire to educate his partner, and describing her in stereotypically objectifying terms, both as a caring mother, and as "the full package"; compared to Swift, a male pop singer was also deemed to be "at least a good musician". While the originally reported situation posed an interesting question about the uses of critical thinking, the column nevertheless uncritically reproduced a gendered stereotype, with men posited as teachers of uneducated women. Participants of English 1 opted for mitigation between the partners in their written reactions to the letter, noting that Taylor Swift "is not that bad." In contrast, Alberto, a Languages & Cultures sophomore retaking English 1 for a better grade, vocally expressed his dissatisfaction with any hint of gendered dissymmetry in the transformed text: "We are just looking at a text, we do not know their relationship, and we cannot know it on the basis of a letter. They are the only people who know how it is," he commented.

For the speaker, reality, as such, appeared to be ultimately unknowable beyond his immediate and intimately known contexts. Several of his peers nodded in agreement, and prompts underlining problems of sexism were treated with seeming distrust. Significantly, no one wished to challenge this older student, who, at the beginning of the semester, was more outspoken than incoming learners. However, it is also this researcher's perception that students find racial and LGBTQIA issues a safer discursive ground than gender; secondly, a widespread mistrust of media, experts, and objective truths had been observed over the years, alongside with an inflated belief in individual, opinion-based judgments of truth and falsity. This may also have to do with current trends against reading: Alberto was among those who admitted to not having looked at the text before. It must be mentioned, however, that he became a more critically involved participant as the semester progressed, underlining instances of gender- and race-based discrimination in a higher-level class he was simultaneously taking with the researcher.

Privileging gender hierarchy over the flat Earth movement in the English 1 classes may appear as the elimination of a potentially more popular, and more immediately productive

teaching moment for critical thinking. However, the emphasis on women led to longer-term results. Several of the learners' song analyses, created in 1-minute-long mp3 recordings in response to the first two weeks' musical focus, foregrounded gender issues in different ways. Lígia referred extensively to an academic article when arguing that American performer Madonna's *Like a Prayer* (1989) was about female empowerment. Inês found symbolism in the comparison of politicians to witches in the British rock band Black Sabbath's *War Pigs* (1970). The teacher's feedback asked about the discrimination implicit in this comparison, given that as an occult band, Black Sabbath seemed to be critical of women, not black masses per se. While Inês continued to emphasize the negative correlation, she did not, at the time, appear receptive to further questioning of the place of women in the lyrics. Gender was the major rubric of analysis for Diana, who had chosen to focus on the topic of sexual violence, as depicted in *Charlotte* (2000) by the all-woman metal band Kitty. As she noted,

> The lyrics of the song *Charlotte* make it perfectly clear that the theme is rape. […] For example, the **lyric* "you took something from me" implies that that something is the innocence, [the] **impurity* that victims feel like it is taken from them by their attackers. The music video of the song also helps with the symbolism. The video has amassed 1.9 million *YouTube* views, and it shows several women dressed in white chasing after a man who is an angel, but his wings are cut off. Considering the theme in the lyrics of the song, we can assume the man raped or sexually assaulted one of the women *on that angry mob, and they are chasing after him to make him pay for his crime. […] So, the song and video show anger and criticize the men that commit this crime, while simultaneously criticizing the lack of accountability and justice.

In this recording, Diana succinctly related gender to social justice. While providing context, she veered away from mere description, avoiding a frequent pitfall of EFL tasks (Santos, 2013). Although there were some errors ("lyric" in the singular; "purity" used with the incorrect negative prefix; the preposition "on" used instead of 'in'), she relied on high-level vocabulary throughout to sustain her argument. Fulfilling the task, she included phrases from Cookney and Fairclough's article (in addition to "has amassed",

Diana also mentioned “the deeply ingrained issues surrounding sexual assault” in other sections of her analysis, and incorrectly noted that the angel’s appearance “[had] some kinship with his crime”). She repeatedly referred to the video’s symbolism. Her academic resource, although shared by email, ultimately did not form part of the recording, and she was warned about plagiarism.

Gender was also at the forefront of two student presentations thematizing sexual harassment on campus. The pedagogical aims were to take seriously both Benesch’s (1999 and 2001) call for effecting social change, and the Numrich sequence’s ultimate goal of helping students apply critical thinking to their own local contexts (Beaumont, 2010). The case influencing this topic choice first surfaced in a chapter (Viaene et al., 2023) in the Routledge volume *Sexual Misconduct in Academia* (Pritchard & Edwards, 2023). Due to threats of legal action, the academic book has since been withdrawn. However, students presenting in groups of three had plenty of available material in English for researching, organizing and interpreting information. Vocabulary for discussions was utilized from a repurposed a tense review task (Appendix O).

Reactions to the issue were distinct in the two groups. While the smaller 4 pm group engaged in an intense discussion about the safety of women on campus, and located these in the wider framework of education, relying also on examples drawn from participants’ high school experience, learners at 2 pm listened attentively, but were less vocal. In both classes, awareness was raised about an anonymous online channel for reporting harassment, set up by the university in 2022, after the sexual harassment case had gained traction in Portuguese academia. Significantly, none of the groups accepted the effectiveness of this forum; both noted students’ disempowerment vis-á-vis established academic figures, especially in case of an eventual official complaint. Students seemed knowledgeable about the case not only from hearsay (“It was big… It happened in our [country]”), but as a result of graffiti still prominently and infamously displayed around the university town in question, identifying the accused by name; a photo of these was shared in both presentations. This reinforced the message of the withdrawn academic text, which was tellingly entitled “The Walls Spoke When No One Else Would” (Viaene et al., 2023).

4.7 Invisible Disability in the Classroom

The English classes are open to external students, provided there are vacancies left once all Languages & Cultures learners have been accommodated. The consequently incoming seniors and Erasmus students make the groups more heterogeneous; as older students, they are often more eager to contribute. A sense of interdisciplinarity is also developed in discussions and groupwork as a result. The setting therefore creates opportunities for those with a major in the Faculty of Arts and Letters, as well those from the STEM fields, to think outside of the box in very concrete terms.

One of the most vocal contributors in the 2 pm group, Iris was one such student. Completing her 4th year in psychology, she had returned for an extra year to make up for subjects not previously finished during the BA. Iris therefore took English 1 as a language class: an elective rather than an obligatory curricular subject. She often arrived to the lessons with crutches, and once notified the researcher by email that she would be arriving late because of an unspecified accident. However, it was not until the fourth teaching week of the semester that she stayed on after class to discuss alternative ways of the final assessment, and to disclose that she had to leave the group because of experiencing constant pain. It turned out that Iris had several chronic illnesses, which had interfered with the completion of her studies in the past; as opposed to the psychology classes, where attendance was not taken, having to be present in English 1 made it difficult for her to juggle her different responsibilities. Distressingly, and in spite of the systems being in place, the university had expressly prohibited hybrid learning.

Several important points about criticality were brought up in this short conversation between lessons. Iris remarked: “When you said we would be talking about social issues in class, I thought, do I know the depths of those.” She noted that university buildings were difficult to access: elevators were often hidden and located too far from the classrooms. She also mentioned deep-seated gender-based discrimination when using medical services, with more varied forms of analyses and care available for men as opposed to women. Iris based this observation on having distinctly different experiences from her brother, who shared many of her illnesses; rather than being further evaluated, she had been promptly turned away with a prescription of sleeping pills and the advice to take better care of herself.

The discussion led to an extended interview on Zoom, where Iris addressed both critical thinking and the cultural silence (Gulya & Fehérvári, 2023) surrounding the representation of disability in academic settings. Critical thinking was, on the one hand, seen as an individual enterprise that was at best complemented at university. Iris advocated for self-improvement via accessing, selecting and verifying online sources. At the same time, she also related criticality to what she identified as a missing sense of shared belonging in contemporary Portuguese society, expressed in a reluctance to "give more". Iris here referred to considering vulnerable others in holistic terms; this perspective was contrasted with majoritarian thinking, where she believed no "statistical" differences – that is, variables of age, gender, dis/ability, etc. – were assumed about individuals as a rule.

When asked about representations of disability in her former or current studies, including English courses, Iris noted that the subject was "rarely openly talked about", and emphasized the difference between visible and invisible conditions. Disability was all too frequently identified with "a person in a wheelchair that is paraplegic"; this definition was extended to local cases, such as that of a blind student in Iris's psychology class. A broad spectrum of representations would involve neurodivergent subjects, and importantly, invisible, but debilitating conditions, such as schizophrenia or autism. These should best be addressed in debates in an English class, Iris suggested. The two strands of discussion were brought together towards the end of the interview, when Iris further elaborated on the social embeddedness of disability, and slightly modified her previous stance on the relationship between criticality and in/visibility: "it's not really about disability or invisible disability, [it] is about everyone being able to exist in a community because we are social beings," she noted. Eloquently arguing for a multi-faceted, socially embedded understanding of disability, she further stated:

> it comes down to very fundamental things in our society, disability, and the way that everybody sees disability is pretty much… conditioned… by patriarchy and capitalism in general, because… we associate somebody's value with their ability to be productive... And we associate the ability to be productive to the ability to make money. [But] sometimes [when] we are being productive, we are not making money, something that is very hard, but it's very necessary for people. It's not even

> just people with disabilities. I think it's something that is important for everybody, and to prevent burnout, is [the] understanding that resting is productive.

The holistic view that emerges here is based on a problematization of activity as primarily a concern related to late capitalist modes of production; while the idea of "rest" is offered as a different lens through which to view the potential correlation between normatively and differently abled subjects.

Iris's position in this interview is supported by Gulya and Fehérvári (2023), who talk about a dearth of representation of disability in Hungarian public education EFL books, where most of the existing images and texts focus on elite examples: that is, on well-known subjects whose success story facilitates a narrative of overcoming – and thereby relativizing – disability. While neurodivergent conditions comprised only a handful of the Hungarian sample, an improving trend was observed in Swedish coursebooks. Instead of being characterized as passive and existing on the fringes of social groups and settings, disabled subjects in the latter volumes are increasingly more likely to be depicted as visible and active members of diverse, inclusive social groups.

The above present a strong case for including discussions and representations about disability in EFL classrooms, and exploring the complex ways this social variable intersects with gender, access to education, and, in local terms, an ethos of individualism in contemporary Portuguese society. Understanding how these interlocking systems of oppression operate requires a fully intersectional framework (Rathinapillai, 2022), the introduction to which usually takes place towards the end of the English 1 class. Nevertheless, the academic scaffolding in the preceding months could have incorporated specific material about the topic, rather than mere mentions of differently-abled subjects.

It could be argued that Iris's case represents a concrete example of controversial topics, or that within the framework of this research, it brings together theory and practice. However, that would diminish the pressing local and societal concerns raised above, and would reduce student voice to an illustrative example. What should be underlined instead is that narratives such as Iris's point towards long-awaited avenues for research into inclusive education in critical EFL and EAP. The interview also provides an instance of teaching when the teacher's critical thinking fell short.

4.8 Framing the Research 2: The Post-Survey

The final questionnaire (see Appendix B) distributed at the end of the research period served to collect student reactions to the criticality teaching module. To this end, different metacognitive strategies were addressed. The first aspect of criticality mentioned in the survey was thinking outside of the box (Question. 1). Among the discussed topics, the extended analysis of Childish Gambino's *This is America* was seen as primarily fulfilling this aim (for 8 respondents), with the creative writing task coming second (5), and the sexual harassment case related to Portuguese academia third (3). Liberal arts degrees and students' upcoming presentations were each chosen twice, while the coursebook's section on graduate employability was favored by 1 student. There was 1 non-specific answer ("Other"). Complexity in thinking, understood as the consideration of different perspectives (Q. 2), was seen as best fostered by the reading and discussion about liberal arts degrees and job prospects (6 answers). This was followed by the song and video analysis and the coursebook's graduate employability section (5 answers to each), the sexual harassment case (4), with Katriona's story and future presentations equally chosen once. The agony aunt activity was left unselected in both Qs. 1 and 2. Unbiased thinking (Q. 3) was understood to have been informed by the song analysis (6 votes), but also supported by the two topics thematizing the correlation between degrees and jobs (5 answers to each); the agony aunt exercise and the sexual harassment case were less popular (2 votes to each); an equally low number voted for, but did not further describe, "Other." O'Sullivan's autobiography was not selected.

Questions 4 to 6 allowed for a gradually more layered overview of final perspectives on criticality to emerge. A distinct improvement in critical thinking as a direct result of the course (Q. 4) was reported by 2 students ("strongly agree"), while 15 noted that their metacognitive skills had changed moderately, but positively ("agree"). Three respondents remained neutral, while 2 provided a negative answer ("disagree"). When asked differently in Q. 5, 18 stated that, while their thinking had not entirely changed, they had become aware of new perspectives during the research period; 1 student had developed an entirely new understanding of social issues, while 3 opted for neutrality. The 2 negative statements about the teaching module's effect on criticality were not selected by any of the respondents. Upon being asked for extended reflection in Q. 6,

the notion of learning from others, and utilizing novel and different perspectives, was mentioned in 16 cases, with the international insights of Erasmus students specified once. The option for a neutral position in the agony aunt exercise was praised (1 answer), while the lack of the module's any effect on students' criticality was reiterated twice, further explained by 1 participant as a result of his already existing "zero bias" attitude. There were 20 responses altogether.

The survey also asked about students' preferences for work forms (Q. 7). Open class feedback was deemed most useful for developing criticality (15 answers), with only a small fraction of respondents opting for individual or group work (3 and 2, respectively), giving peer feedback or listening to others (1 vote for each). The option of getting feedback from others, including peers and the teacher, was not selected. Q. 8 yielded a heterogeneous pool of individually suggested potential topics for higher-level English classes. These included various social issues, such as the extended discussion of feminism and disability; human and international rights; veganism and sexism, particularly sexist speech acts complementing the topic of harassment; mental health and the application of critical thinking to personal relationships; and nationality. Arts and languages were also mentioned, in the form of news and books. Further exploring criticality in relation to employability was brought up twice, while the usefulness of "delving into issues" was praised 4 times. To the first two subgroups were added mental health on the one hand, and "dance, opera or a specific painting", and the effect of English as a lingua franca on a non-English speaking country on the other in Q. 9. Several students used this question to express satisfaction with the social justice issues mentioned in the module (5 answers). Critical skills appeared to have wide future applicability (Q. 10): in academia, e.g. the oral exam in English 1 (5 responses), as well as other spoken (3) and written assignments (3); by providing an interpretive lens in everyday life (4), and in specific cases, such as when watching a movie (1) or learning about inequalities in sports (1).

In the open-structured Q. 11, a small majority of respondents provided positive feedback to the teacher (12 out of 21 answers), mentioning the interactive, dynamic and engaging materials and stimulating class atmosphere (7); equal speaking opportunities for all participants (2); and the improvement of language skills and learning focus (1). The most pressing issue emerging from responses was that of time

management (9). Students felt rushed when working in groups and individually; significantly, the problem surfaced even in otherwise appreciative feedback (with an overlap in 3 responses). Initial struggles with the complex materials and language of instructions were also reported (5), while others (2) noted their success in groupwork and open class feedback. Only 5 learners provided a detailed answer to Q. 12; among these, "too much homework" and the lack of daily vocabulary lists were noted; two were appreciative of the module, and one commented on the challenging nature of the class: "Way tougher than I thought it would be."

Responses showed students' careful negotiation of different aspects of criticality via in-class topics, activities, and work forms. Knowledgeable engagement with the topics suggests that the module was successful in introducing participants to multi-faceted analyses, and provide ideas for the practical application of critical thinking skills, which was seen as lacking in the pre-survey. That most participants noted some change in, but not a complete overhaul of, their thinking following the research period indicates that while transformation did take place, it was not as the consequence of an irresponsible ideological imposition, criticized by Pennycook (1999). It could be argued instead that learners could integrate emergent ideas while maintaining their own critical, scholarly identities. Post-survey results confirmed the researcher's findings, especially with regards to the interest in engaging with extended topics, and working together in open class feedback, thus reaffirming the importance of collaborative, dialogical exchange (Benesch, 2001). Problematically, answers indicated that preference for the latter might also have to do with the lack of time allocated for activities carried out individually and in small groups. Although instruction-checking questions were frequently used and extra time was provided, the experience of being rushed nevertheless emerged as a significant issue, affecting 41% of respondents. This might have been partially caused by the unexpectedly higher level of challenging university materials. However, this finding primarily points to the need for better time management and the elimination of any overplanning.

Another result that bears further analysis is learners' apparent disregard for receiving or providing feedback. This contradicts the researcher's class observation, whereby reactions to peer review appeared positive, with students responding to suggestions self-reflectively. Similarly, written response to writing tasks was engaged with

enthusiastically and in detail during the mentioning of good practices and error correction in the lessons. Individually sent audio feedback to song analyses prompted fewer reactions. This suggests that a more critical understanding this improvement-oriented form of engagement is needed; one that foregrounds a notion of feedback not only as communicative practice, but as an agentic (Pearson, 2017), yet socially constituted, reciprocal metacognitive strategy in the EAP setting.

4.9 Limitations

With the aim of finding a solution to a locally detected problem during a research period of 6 weeks, longitudinal results could not be obtained. Results are nevertheless transferable to other teaching contexts informed by critical pedagogies, and could productively inform comparative analyses carried out in EFL and CEAP classrooms. Thematizing different aspects of the topics discussed, or the utilization of class materials in different settings would also be possible, furthering the idea of critical dialogue; as would the reliance on the research framework presented in this essay. Several data sources were utilized to foster credibility, and to mitigate problems of bias, arising from the teacher-researcher's dual role during the criticality module. The main instruments also provided instances of student voice, challenging and at times contradicting the researchers' observation. This allowed for novel ideas, such as that of reciprocity in Iris' interview, to emerge. Future research could integrate the findings of this study for more comprehensive analyses of criticality.

5 Conclusion

Based on action research carried out over 6 weeks in two EAP groups at a Portuguese university, this study had the objective of promoting a critical attitude by the implementation of materials specifically tailored to the discussion of controversial topics. These utilized the correlation between aurality (in the form of songs and listening exercises), visuality (images and video lectures), and different forms of textuality (an autobiography, a letter to an agony aunt, a news report about academic misconduct, scholarly and/or research-based articles, and a subchapter from the main coursebook) and

were supported by grammar tasks from the ascribed textbook. The teacher-researcher's observations were juxtaposed by interviews with students and data from assignments, class observation, and questionnaires. Participants' linguistic production was anchored in social justice issues bridging the gap between abstract and local or personal experience; the teacher-researcher's own educational conduct was understood as problematizing practice (Pennycook, 1999), informed by transformative pedagogies and relying on collaboratively produced meaning. Based on survey results obtained at the beginning and the end of the teaching module, the study was successful in introducing incoming university students to a wider variety of perspectives or interpretive choices than they had entered the classroom with (Benesch, 2001). At the same time, the discussion of taboo topics and fake controversies did not prove to be polarizing. Extended analyses and unexpected topic choices, such as that of a creative, yet critical writing task, were popular and stimulating in the classroom; participants' existing background knowledge was mobilized for new communicative aims; and novel ideas, such as that of interdisciplinarity, gained traction. Research skills were nurtured and individual analysis preceding judgment and evaluation was encouraged and provided with feedback in open class feedback, as well as individually, both in written and spoken communication. While the initial objectives were to make the relationship between critical thinking and EAP explicit in the classroom, and students' linguistic instances were collected accordingly, criticality ultimately was seen as a skill that was best improved continuously and self-reflectively, lest important differences were disregarded.

Criticality is most often explained in terms of evaluation, synthesis, and the use of higher-order thinking skills. However, an important and unexpected finding that emerged from student responses was the need for thematizing reciprocity, whether in open class feedback, or in less popular but equally important forms of groupwork, pair work or peer review, understood as continuing, dialogical interaction. This theme was prominent in the two student interviews, where critical thinking was identified with the accumulation of knowledge through sharing reading experiences in a football coaching session, and the idea of "giving more" in diverse educational settings, strongly correlated to sociality. Future work on criticality therefore should address reciprocity as a significant critical skill; rather than a lower- or higher-order metacognitive strategy, it should be understood to inform all levels of engagement with a text in the EAP classroom.

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Appendices

Appendix A: The Pre-Survey

Student Survey

Thank you for participating in this research about critical thinking. First, you will be asked to answer a few questions about yourself. Then you will be given four questions about critical thinking. This survey takes about 20 minutes.

Personal Details

1) Field of study (e.g. Modern Languages, English with a German minor; Mathematics; etc.):

2) Which year are you in?

a) BA or BSc, 1st year
b) BA or BSc, 2nd year
c) BA or BSc, 3rd year
d) MA or MSc, 1st year
e) MA or MSc, 2nd year
f) Other:

3) Age:

18 19 20 21 22 Other:

4) Nationality:

Portuguese Brazilian Angolan Spanish Italian French

German Polish Other:

5) Are you an Erasmus student? If so, from what country?

No, I’m not. Other:

Please, answer the following questions!

1) Have you heard about critical thinking before? If you have, when and where?

2) What does the phrase ‘critical thinking’ mean to you? Describe it in your own words!

3) Finish sentence 1. Then choose and finish the correct statement from 2.

1 "The last time I thought about something critically was when..."

2 "The situation changed slightly as a result because..."

OR

"The situation changed entirely as a result because..."

OR

"Everything remained the same because..."

4) In what situations could critical thinking be useful? Briefly justify your answer!

Appendix B: The Post-Survey

Critical Thinking - Final Survey

Thank you for participating in this survey, which finalizes the critical thinking module of English 1. Filling in the survey takes max. 20 mins.

Personal Details

Due to changes in the class during the semester, please, first provide some information about yourself.

1) Field of study (e.g. Modern Languages, English with a German minor; Mathematics; etc.):

2) Which year are you in?

a) BA or BSc, 1st year
b) BA or BSc, 2nd year
c) BA or BSc, 3rd year
d) MA or MSc, 1st year
e) MA or MSc, 2nd year
f) Other:

3) How old are you? I'm...

18 19 20 21 22 Other:

4) What's your nationality? I'm...

Bissau-Guinean Brazilian French Italian Portuguese

Other:

5) Are you an Erasmus student? If so, where from?

No, I’m not. Other:

Questions about Critical Thinking

1) Critical thinking means thinking outside of the box. Which of the following topics has made you think outside of the box the most?

a) Agony Aunt (letter from a reader)
b) Katriona's story (from the placement test)
c) Childish Gambino's This is America (articles + videos)
d) Liberal arts degrees and career prospects (Chronicle of Higher Education article)
e) Graduate employability video lecture & discussion (EAP book)
f) Sexual harassment in Portuguese academia (student presentation)
g) The topic of my oral exam
h) Other:

2) Criticality also refers to complexity in thinking. Which topic has made you consider different perspectives the most?

a) Agony Aunt
b) Katriona's story
c) Childish Gambino's This is America
d) Liberal arts degrees and career prospects
e) Graduate employability video lecture & discussion
f) Sexual harassment in Portuguese academia
g) The topic of my oral exam
h) Other:

3) Critical thinking is related to letting go of bias, and entering a topic with an open mind. Which of these have helped you achieve that the most? You may choose multiple options.

a) Agony Aunt
b) Katriona's story
c) Childish Gambino's This is America
d) Liberal arts degrees and career prospects
e) Graduate employability video lecture & discussion
f) Sexual harassment case in Portuguese academia
g) The topic of my oral exam
h) Other:

4) Do you agree or disagree with the statement: My critical thinking has improved during the previous weeks.

strongly agree agree neutral disagree strongly disagree

5) How did these complex, controversial topics discussed in class affect your thinking? Please, choose one of the following!

a) I entirely changed my mind about a topic.
b) I didn't entirely change my mind about a topic, but I became aware of new perspectives.
c) I had the same ideas before and after class discussion.
d) Reading, talking, or writing about a topic mostly did not help me develop a more complex perspective.
e) Reading, talking, or writing about a topic did not help me at all to develop a more complex perspective.

6) Please, briefly comment on your previous answer, mentioning the topic(s) in question. (Your answer should be between 1-3 sentences.)

7) Which of the following activities helped you improve your critical chops the most?

a) working together in a group
b) discussing/debating a topic with the whole class
c) giving feedback to another student in writing
d) getting feedback from others or the teacher

e) working individually in class (reading or writing)
f) listening to others
g) researching a topic for my song analysis and presentation

8) Are there similar topics you would like to discuss in English 2, 3 etc.?

9) Is there a topic which should have been discussed during the semester?

10) The next task I am planning to use my critical thinking skills in is... (add your own!)

11) Please, provide feedback for the teacher! What went well, what could have been done better?

12) Is there anything else you'd like to mention about the module?

Appendix C: Consent to Research Participation

Research Study Title: Teaching Critical Thinking through Controversial Topics

Researcher: Nora Koller, Loránd Eötvös University, Budapest

Faculty Advisor: Dr Ildikó Lázár, Loránd Eötvös University, Budapest.

I am asking you to be in this research study because you are in my English 1 class in FLUC in the academic year 2024/2025. You must be age 18 or older to participate in the study. The information in this consent form is to help you decide if you want to be in this research study. Please, take your time reading this form and contact the researcher to ask questions if there is anything you do not understand.

What will I do in this study?

If you agree to be in this study, you will complete an online survey. The survey includes questions about critical thinking and should take you about 20 minutes to complete. You can skip questions that you do not want to answer.

Can I say "No"?

Being in this study is up to you. You can stop up until you submit the survey.

Are there any risks to me?

I don't know of any risks to you from being in the study that are greater than the risks you encounter in everyday life.

Are there any benefits to me?

I do not expect you to directly benefit from being in this study. Your participation may help me to learn more about student attitudes to critical thinking. I hope the knowledge gained from this study will benefit others in the future.

Why is the research being done?

The purpose of the research study is to collect data for my Master's Thesis in Teacher Training.

What will happen with the information collected for this study?

All information shared here is confidential. The answers will be collected and analyzed. Participation in this study is voluntary; your answers will have no bearing on your progress and evaluation in this course. Information provided in this survey can only be kept as secure as any other online communication.

Information collected for this study will be possibly presented at a scientific meeting.

Will I be paid for being in this research study?

You will not be paid for being in this study.

Who can answer my questions about this research study?

If you have questions or concerns about this study, or have experienced a research-related problem or injury, contact the researcher: nkoller.eng@gmail.com.

Appendix D: Interview Consent Form

Dear Student,

This interview collects data, opinions and experiences about critical thinking. The interview takes approximately 20 minutes. I will handle the data confidentially.

I would like to ask for your permission for me to make a voice recording of the interview and then make a transcription of it. I will transcribe it myself and will not give the recording to a third party. I will let you have the transcription, and you can then approve or modify the text of the interview. When you have approved the transcript, I will delete the recording and will only keep the transcript for data analysis. In the transcript and the file name I will only use your pseudonym.

In the course of the data analysis of the research and in the ensuing MA in ELT thesis, your answers and views will only appear under your pseudonym.

Thank you very much for agreeing to this interview.

Signature:

Email: thrashtray@gmail.com

Consent for the interview

I have understood the purpose of the interview and approve of the data handling procedures explained in the introduction. I am sending my consent with my (electronic) signature.

Date:

Name:

Signature:

Appendix E: Questions for the Semi-Structured Interviews

1 How have you been using critical thinking in class work?

2 What has informed your understanding of critical thinking in- and outside of the EAP classroom?

3 Have you been taught about critical thinking before?

4 When and where have you been able to successfully apply criticality (e.g. related to your field of study, work experience or internship, free time, further interests, etc.)?

5 Did critical thinking help you or other participants in this setting? How?

6 Do you have a working definition of critical thinking?

7 Could you recommend practical ways to acquire and improve criticality?

8 How could your approach to criticality be helped by, or incorporated into, the English lessons?

Appendix F: Post-Concurrent Verbalization. Sample Transcript

Recording made in relation to peer correction:

I think in many ways, this has been one of my favorite classes. It's very difficult to leave these lessons sometimes being full of energy, and that is because teaching here is based on the delivery method, but in this case, control was given over their listening skills, their peer correction skills, their speaking skills, and their critical thinking skills were developed by looking at different aspects of songs, etc., etc. And I think this was great. And then, after working in groups, they were able to work alone. So I think it was a variety of work forms. It was incredibly time consuming. So already, the selection, the distribution of the song analyses, we don't have the platform for that. I tried to use Drive, but then Drive mixed it up, and the internet connection is not always working, so, that's something that's difficult, that takes a lot of time. And also working with each other is not something that is prized. So students do not, as a rule, talk to each other that much.

And for that reason, I really felt that this was very good, that they could hear student voice, they could engage with student voice, and they could engage with their own student voice and improve their own student voice. So that's my take on this. Of course, as far as the teaching goes, I think a lot of improvements can be made, or should have been made. I was sort of hoping to pre-teach vocabulary related to the final presentation. So let's see.

Appendix G: The Metalanguage of Critical Thinking

Match the responses (1-7) with their interpretations (a-f) below!

1. Why argue with something as ridiculous as this?
2. It's definitely true/definitely false.
3. It's true! A friend of mine spent all day listening to Chappell Roan and ended up dropping out of college.
4. Who cares?
5. I don't know.
6. I'd say it's 50% true and 50% false.
7. I agree/disagree for a number of reasons but I'd need more information before I gave a definitive answer.

a) ___ Personal anecdotes hold no sway in academic thinking. You're right to justify your position with an example, but only those from academic texts or studies can be used to support a viewpoint.

b) ___ and ___ Sitting on the fence may feel safe. Perhaps you worry your answer is 'wrong' or that your opinion isn't important. However, opting out of a debate suggests a lack of engagement and is likely to lead to average marks.

c) ___ Be careful. Dismissing everything is as close-minded as believing everything. Critical thinking needs an open mind. Assuming you are right without considering other perspectives shows no deep thought.

d) ___ Shrugging your shoulders indicates no thinking at all.

e) ___ Yes! We have a burgeoning critical thinker in our midst.

f) ___ Is anything really so black and white? Total conviction of your own viewpoint suggests inflexible thinking with counterarguments ignored and debates simplified.

Appendix H: Creative Writing

WRITING: Read the following excerpt from an autobiography! What do you think happened next? Finish the following story in 10 lines!

I think we all have those teachers, the ones who like us. As a child I had a strong, warm temperament – I can see the spark in my eyes when I look at photos of back then. I was driven and some teachers loved me for it. And, of course, some didn't.

I loved Mrs Arkinson and I knew she loved me. Her eyes said so. The way she helped me said so. The pat on my head, the hand on my shoulder, the encouragement and rewards. When Mrs Arkinson was pleased with you, well, you felt like you could survive forever on that small nod or pat on the head. It was like she pushed confidence into you.

One day in Reception she called me up and told me that Miss Hall was going to need to speak to me in the bathroom and that I was to listen to what she had to say and everything would be fine.

I'd seen looks between them already, just before I was called up, and I had my guard raised. I could always sense these things, the shift in the room when there was trouble brewing. My mind had instantly raced with excuses for things I'd done and for things I hadn't done. I prepared for all eventualities, knew who I would pass the blame to, what I would deny. Whatever I was accused of I would reject or ignore, and it would go away eventually. When Miss Hall came to get me, one of the other kids in my class said, 'You're for it now, Katriona O'Sullivan, whatever you done.'

Appendix I: Paraphrase Matching Task

Match the following expressions (1-26) from the Childish Gambino text with their explanations (a-z)!

1. the black man's supposedly "joyous" song and dance routine

2. *it utilizes finely tuned choreography*

3. *The release of the video was particularly timely.*

4. *a Trump-endorsing Kanye West claimed slavery was "a choice".*

5. *This is America has amassed over 49m YouTube views.*

6. *deeply-ingrained issues surrounding race*

7. simultaneously criticizing

8. *placating audiences*

9. *the antithesis of*

10. the video achieved constant rotation

11. feelgood escapism

12. hard-hitting cynicism

13. buoyant song

14. rose-tinted

15. a call-to-arms

17. contorts his body

18. a slave archetype

19. a mainstay of performances

20. Jim Crow

21. it appears to have some kinship with

22. it pulls us towards the motivation behind

23. a fierce commentary

24. it is couched in mass appeal

25. bewitching performance

26. he leaves no misunderstanding about

27. cultural theorist

(a) a dazzling show, (b) a caricature of the slave, (c) a historical figure of the slave, (d) a song that teems with good feeling, (e) a stable element of song and dance numbers, (f) a vehement and intense take on the issue, (g) an academic who studies trends in the arts, (h) an invitation to fight, (i) appeasing television audiences, (j) dealing with serious problems with a self-deprecating attitude, (k) giving an (often unrealistically) positive view of the world, (l) highlighting the problems at the same time, (m) he makes it perfectly clear that, (n) historical and ubiquitous notions of difference based on the colour of one's skin, (o) it directs us to the causes of, (p) it displays many highly popular ideas, (q) it seems to be related to, (r) it uses sophisticated movement, (s) it was so successful, it was played constantly, (t) moves his body in a painful way, (u) running away from everyday problems by focusing on (some imagined) positivity only, (v) the complete opposite of, (w) the racialized entertainment habits which only look happy on the surface, (x) The video came out at just the right time. (y) The video has been watched almost 50 million times on the social media platform. (z) This famous presidential supporter suggested that black people were to blame for their own exploitation in the past.

Appendix J: Tasks for Cookney and Fairclough's Article (2018) and the Macat Video Analysis (2016)

Paratextual Questions

What do you know about the authors? Where can you find this information?

Questions About the Text:
(a) Structure/Organization

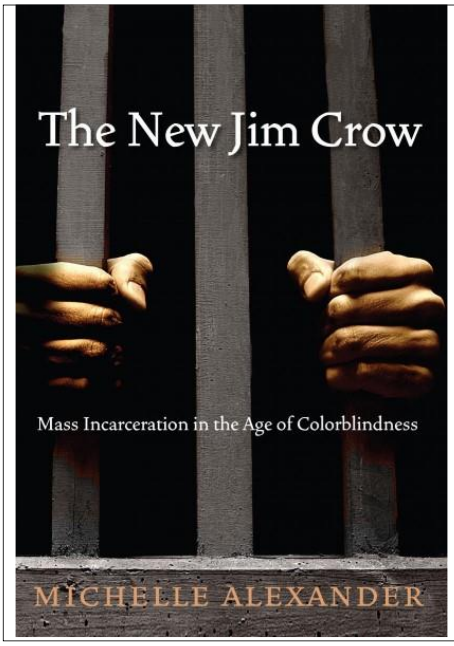
Is the text divided into different parts?

(b) Content-Related Questions

1. According to the authors, why was the release of the video timely?
2. What is the problem with the way popular culture usually treats audiences?
3. What is minstrelsy? How is it represented in the video?
4. What other songs/videos does *This is America* resemble?
5. Which political movement is mentioned in relation to these songs?
6. What film does the ending of *This is America* evoke?
7. Which media channels are combined in "musievideo-news"?

(c) Questions About Language/Grammar/Style

1. Which prefix did the authors use to express the following: half darkness?
2. Can you find passive forms in the text?
3. Can you find examples of cautious, tentative language?
4. Can you find phrases made up of adjective(s) + nouns?



Listening:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uWU6ZfnqNHM

Listen & answer the questions!

1) What were the Jim Crow rules?

2) How has Jim Crow returned to American society?

3) Why does the speaker use a military example to explain Jim Crow?

Further language:

Phrasal Verbs:

to deprive of
to consist of
to discriminate against
to be stripped of

Synonyms:

injustice, discrimination, segregation

synonym for *famous*: _____;
guilty of a crime: _____;
& for widespread: _____.

Passives:

to be perceived as

Antonyms:

to release ⇔ to imprison
[synonym ⇔ antonym]

Synonyms for "write/talk about":
demonstrate, highlight, focus on, introduce,note, explore

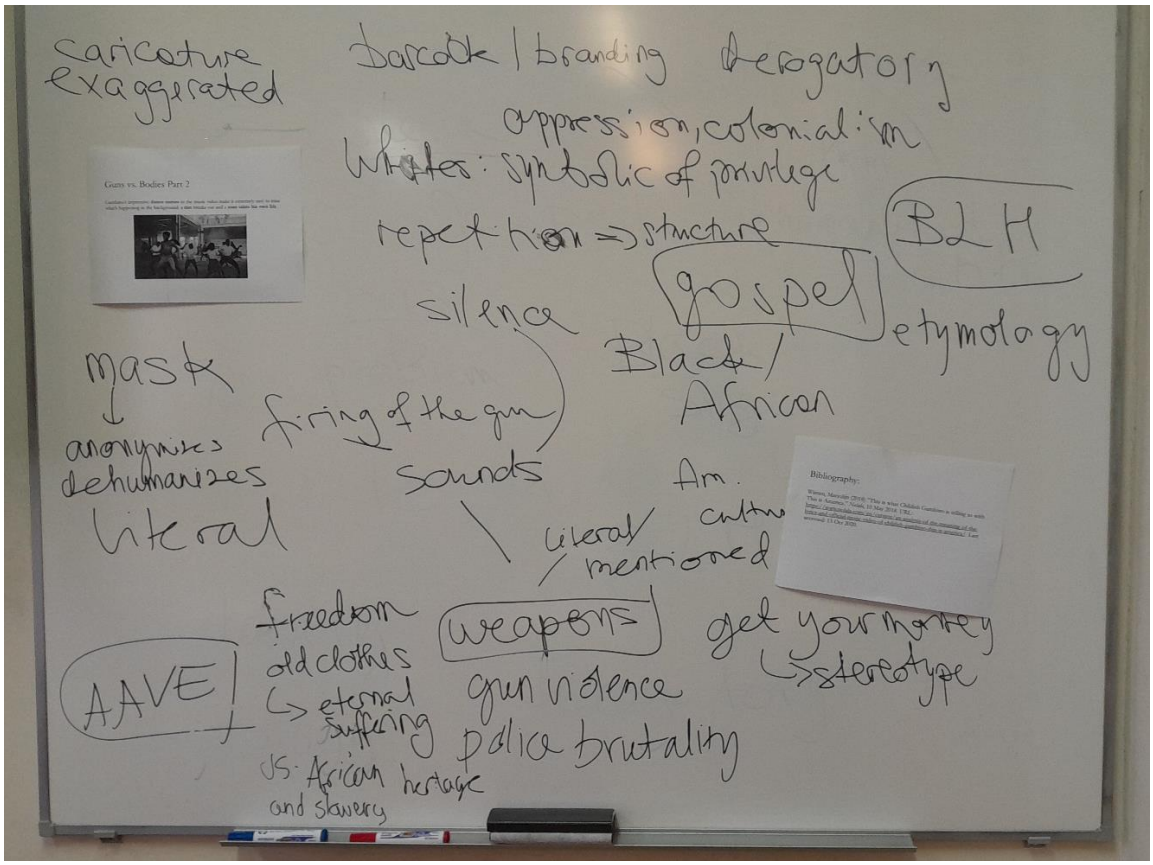
Prefixes:
multi- (_____),
non- (_____, _____)

Word families: e.g. race (n) – racial (adj)

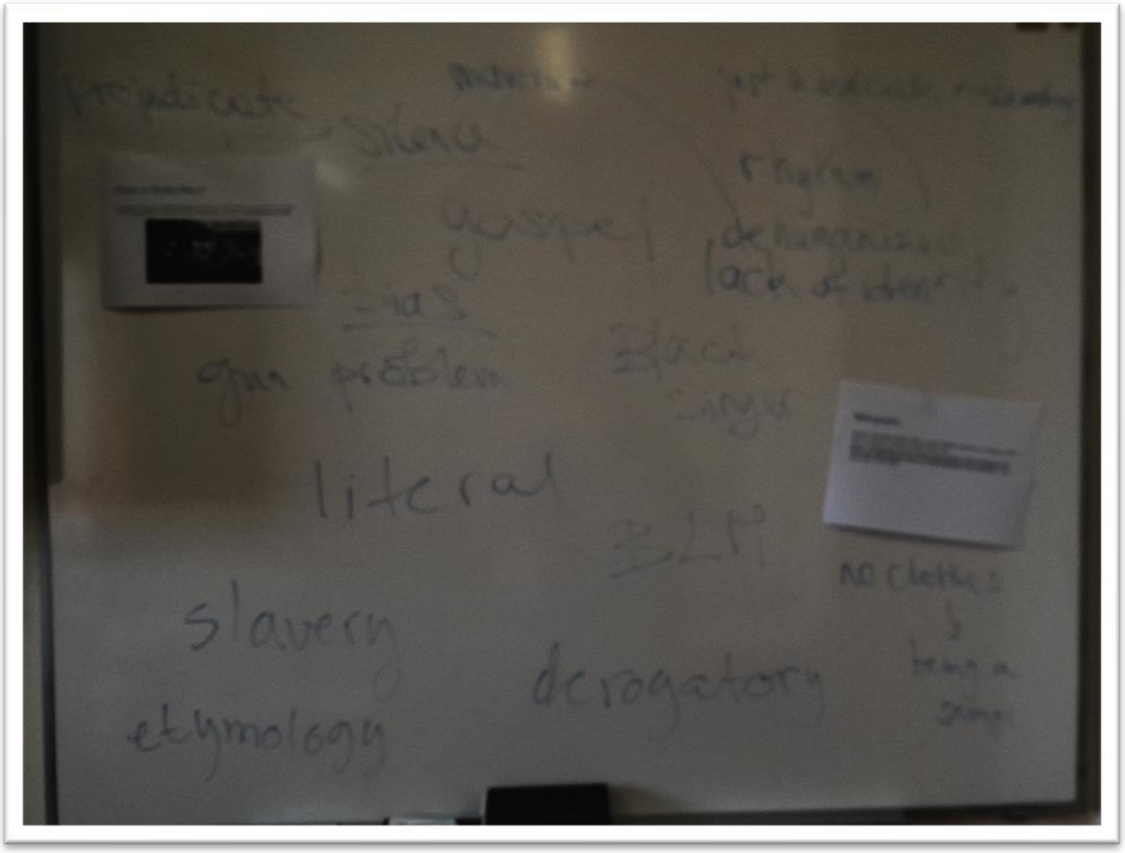
N	V	Adj	Adv
law	X- not in text	_____	X
racism	X	_____	X

Appendix K: The Board During the Discussion of Childish Gambino's *This is America* (2018)

2 pm group:



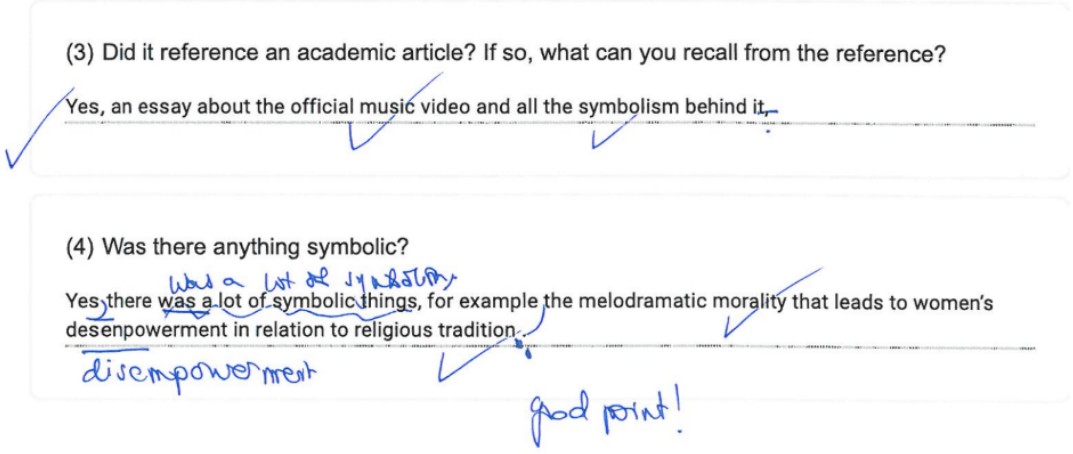
4 pm group:



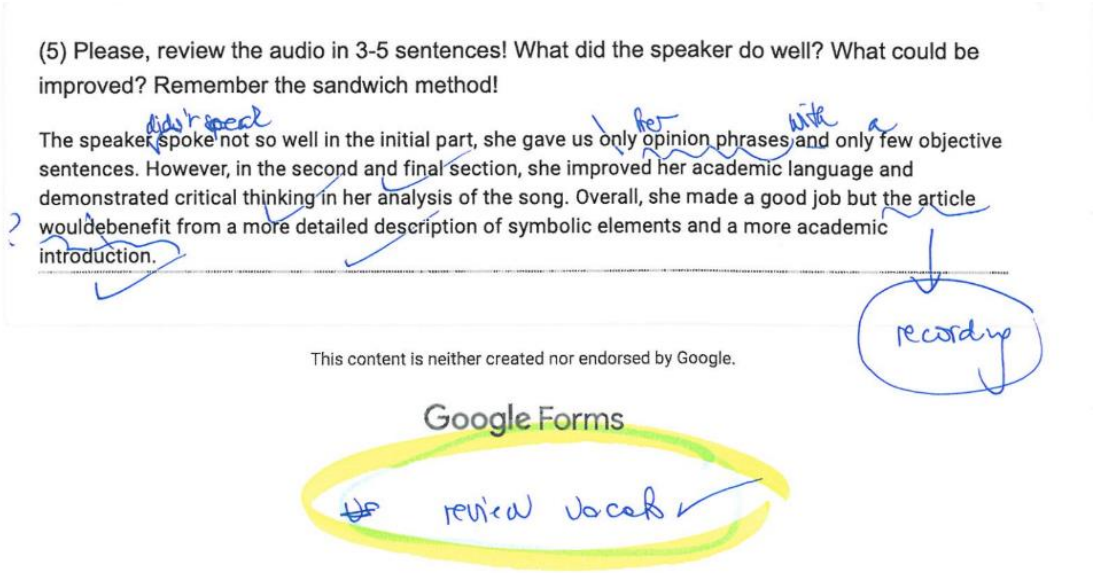
Appendix L: Questions from, and Sample Answers to, the Peer Correction Form

1) Whose audio did you listen to?
2) Which song was it about?
3) Did it reference an academic article? If so, what can you recall from the reference?
4) Was there anything symbolic?
5) Pelase, review the audio in 3-5 sentences! What did the speaker do well? What could be improved? Remember the sandwich method!

Sample answer A:



Sample answer B:



(5) Please, review the audio in 3-5 sentences! What did the speaker do well? What could be improved? Remember the sandwich method!

The speaker spoke not so well in the initial part, she gave us only opinion phrases and only few objective sentences. However, in the second and final section, she improved her academic language and demonstrated critical thinking in her analysis of the song. Overall, she made a good job but the article wouldebenefit from a more detailed description of symbolic elements and a more academic introduction.

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Google Forms

Appendix M: Tasks for Leckrone's Article (2020)

Graduate Employability

What do the following idioms mean?

1 to get the last laugh

2 to prove one's worth

3 it's a tough sell

Why would these two expressions appear in a text about humanities students?

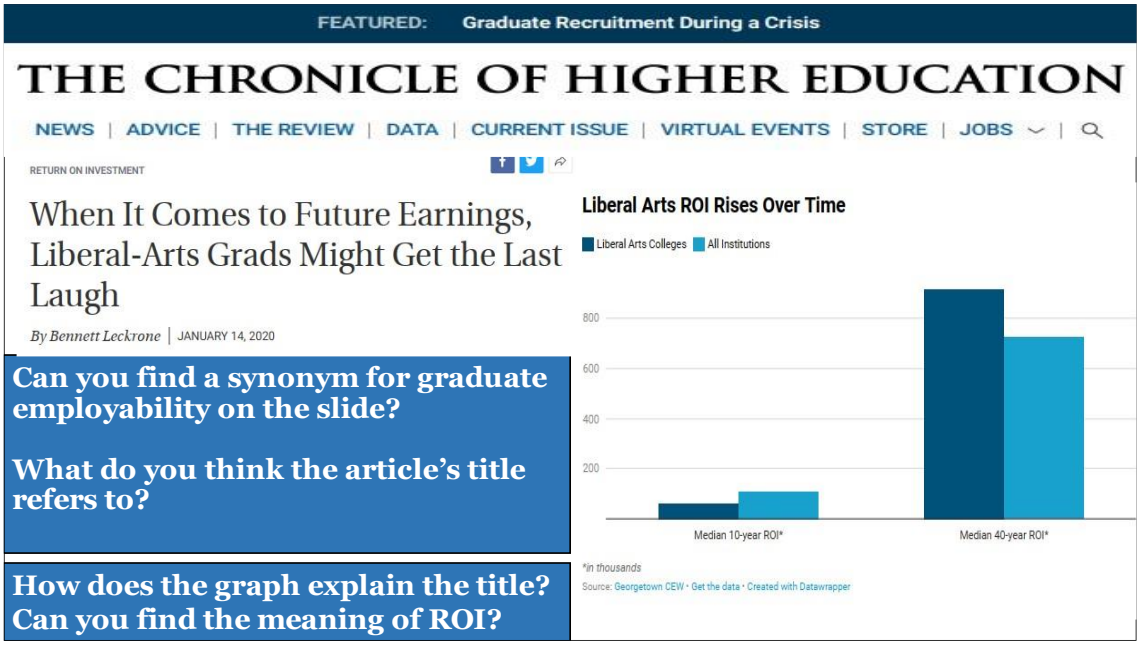
What does the acronym STEM stand for?

Find 3 pairs of antonyms and 2 of synonyms using the words below!

elite backgrounds	STEM fields
race and class divides	ivory tower
first-generation students of color	liberal-arts grads
to break down disciplinary stilos	social mobility

a willful disconnect from the matters of everyday life

science to become intertwined with the humanities



Can you find a synonym for graduate employability on the slide?

What do you think the article's title refers to?

How does the graph explain the title? Can you find the meaning of ROI?

Jumbled text: UCSTUDENT!

Now read the whole text, and answer the questions:

1 Which students are most likely to graduate?

2 What is the most important thing about going to college?

Put the jumbled paragraphs in the correct order!

_____ The return on investment, or ROI, from a liberal-arts education skyrockets as people's careers progress, the Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce concludes in the report, "ROI of Liberal Arts Colleges: Value Adds Up Over Time." Forty years after enrolling, a graduate of one of the 210 liberal-arts colleges analyzed for the report will have a median ROI that is nearly $200,000 above that of all U.S. colleges, says the study, published on Tuesday.

_____ If there's any drawback for liberal-arts grads, the latest report suggests, it's the long wait for the payoff. At 10 years after enrollment, the median liberal-arts ROI is only $62,000 compared with $107,000 for all institutions.

_____ The study of liberal-arts colleges builds on the center's November report, "A First Try at ROI: Ranking 4,500 Colleges," which examined the earnings value of higher education at all colleges. Both studies draw on data from the U.S. Department of Education's College Scorecard, an online college-comparison tool unveiled in 2015 by the Obama administration and expanded under President Trump to include program-level data on graduates' debt and earnings.

_____ Students from liberal-arts colleges don't merely recoup their tuition dollars in the long run. They eventually earn more than those who attended trade or business schools, a new report shows.

1. How does ROI increase?
2. What did the GUCEW report examine, and where did they find the data?
3. What is the disadvantage mentioned in the study?
4. Who was the scientist at the helm of the study?
5. What definition can you find for: long term earnings using net present value?
6. Why do liberal arts colleges have to prove their worth? List 5 reasons!
7. How could these colleges increase enrolment?
8. Why do private, non-profit academic institutions generate a high ROI? List 3 reasons!
9. What's an elite college, and which long-standing issue does it represent?
10. What is the impact of historically black colleges and universities? List 3!
11. Why is it unusual that HarveyMudd is seen as a liberal arts college?
12. Why are ROI data a moving target? What examples can you find for interdisciplinary work?

Appendix N: Letter to an Agony Aunt and a Related Exercise

Read this letter to a newspaper's agony aunt below. What is the major conflict in the text?

I am a divorced man, raising two sons alone and getting back into the dating world at 43 years old. I am a few months into dating this absolutely amazing woman and I've enjoyed it very much. She seems to be the total package in many, many ways! She is kind, thoughtful, empathetic, soft, genuine, intuitive, honest and many more beautiful characteristics. I truly am falling for her and I feel we could have a long, beautiful future, but I just recently found out she is a die-hard Taylor Swift fan – or as they say, a "Swiftie". And it's not only Swift, it's also Harry Styles – at least he's a good musician. I was absolutely shocked. At first, I thought she was kidding. After some discussion, it turns out she deeply believes every line in their songs has an important message, suggests that I don't keep up with the times, and does not seem very receptive to learning more about music.

I cannot eloquently explain how disappointed I am, or why! It defies all logic, observable facts, and is absolutely absurd. I feel like I've lost so much respect for her and I cannot seem to reconcile that feeling with how I care about everything else she is. And to make matters worse, she is teaching her kids to listen to the same stuff. I am a classical music-oriented man who occasionally listens to hard rock oldies, and I could even sit her down and show her how to play the piano, but I doubt that would go well!

How should I handle this? She seems annoyed when I bring it up, and I probably didn't handle it very well at first. I seriously care for her but I also am struggling with respecting anyone who spends their time with such nonsense from TikTok. Please help!

Answer the following questions:

1. Why is the writer's love interest otherwise "the full package"?
2. How does he think he could help her?
3. How does the writer distinguish between two artists? In your opinion, why does he make this distinction?
4. Which two, conflicting feelings does the writer mention?
5. According to the man, what is the woman's main source of information?

You now have some understanding of critical thinking. Based on that, answer the reader's letter in 5-7 lines!

Appendix O: A Repurposed Tense Review Task with a Vocabulary Slide

Task: Identify the tenses (active and passive) in the text below!

UC Santa Cruz Has Fired A Professor After He Violated The University's Harassment Policy

Gopal Balakrishnan's dismissal arrives after a lengthy university investigation and years of student protests.

Nidhi Subbaraman
BuzzFeed News Reporter

Last updated on September 24, 2019, at 7:13 p.m. ET
Posted on September 24, 2019, at 11:58 a.m. ET

Gopal Balakrishnan, a tenured professor in the humanities division at UC Santa Cruz, has been fired after a months-long investigation into complaints of misconduct, the university confirmed to BuzzFeed News. Student groups had been fighting for a decision for more than a year.

At least four complaints against Balakrishnan had been filed with the university's sex discrimination office. "The complainants' trauma has rippled through our campus and university system," said UC Santa Cruz spokesperson Scott Hernandez-Jason, in an email to BuzzFeed News.

Balakrishnan was a tenured Marxist historian at UC Santa Cruz. He had been on paid leave since fall 2017 and was suspended without pay on Aug. 15 this year. He will have finished his official duties by the end of September.

Rumors about Balakrishnan's behavior toward students had sparked a Me Too–style campaign. "I'm grateful, but the university will have to do more to prevent this behavior," Harlander told BuzzFeed News. "The university will have to drastically change its systems. because Gopal Balakrishan is not the only one at that university or in the UC system that is a sexual predator. And there are many people who know that."

This March, Harlander sued Balakrishnan, claiming he had sexually assaulted her. That case is ongoing in the Superior Court of California in the County of Santa Cruz. Others were also speaking up. By October, four students will have been seeking legal help against the professor.

In past comments to journalists, Balakrishnan has denied wrongdoing. Balakrishnan and his lawyer have not responded to a request for comment for this story. He will be speaking to reporters at a later date.

BuzzFeed have been covering the story since 2018.

#metoo vocabulary

to violate the university's harrasment policy
dismissal
investigation into
student protests
complaints of misconduct
to confirm
the complainants' trauma
university spokesperson
a tenured Marxist historian
to sue
to drastically change
sexual predator
to seek legal help
a request for comment
to deny wrongdoing
sexual assault
to be on paid leave
to be suspended