

**Enhancing Critical Thinking of
Undergraduate Thai Students through
Dialogic Inquiry**

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Abstract

This thesis sets for itself the task of testing the viability of a dialogic model of learning as a methodology for teaching critical thinking in reading and writing to undergraduate students of Thai in Thailand. To this end, we conducted an experiment involving twenty-one undergraduate students of Thai at KhonKaen University, Thailand. This study presents the intellectual background of the pedagogic framework supporting the experiment and a discussion of its outcomes. The assessment of the results of the experiment focuses on the forms of evidence resulting directly from this pedagogic framework. The study concludes with a number of considerations for future research in critical thinking which our project helped us to identify.

For the purpose of our work, we adopt the model of dialogic learning which involves students in looking for perspectives enabling them to challenge, and as a result to enhance, the relevance of the understandings in which they frame their interactions. The process is dialogic because it involves students in working with different points of view by identifying challenging perspectives, constructing conflicting arguments and exploring the strategic potential that the interaction of these arguments may have on the students' initial assumptions. In this sense, the concept of dialogue that we use refers to the methodology of students' inquiry (learning), rather than a specific form of linguistic genre. In our view, this definition is suitable to all fields of inquiry considering that each field deals with evaluation of the strategic (enabling) power of its assumptions.

In the course of this work, we establish the relevance of the above concept of dialogic inquiry against a multitude of ideas regarding the suitability of different approaches to the teaching of critical thinking. We illustrate that, typically, teaching approaches value questioning as a means for generating reasoned arguments. However, the originality of the dialogic model used in this thesis lies in its ability to focus pedagogic environments on students' strategic engagement in social interactions, rather than on the process of questioning alone. Consequently, in our study we assess the quality of students' learning by identifying the contexts indicating the quality of students' social engagement.

These included gauging the community's interest in the students' project, the depth of students' exploratory work, their ability to work together and students' own personal involvement in their project. These outcomes helped us to reflect on the quality of the teaching model which we designed in order to promote the critical thinking process.

The emphasis on students' strategic engagement in social interactions allowed us to break away from the conventional concerns with the link between classroom learning and real-world tasks. Instead, our students engaged in the task of creating a Thai News Network (TNN), an Internet-based broadcasting channel, involving students in generating for themselves the meaning of the objectives of their academic subject in the contexts of challenges that they experienced when creating the channel and its (news) articles. Our data analysis shows that the concept of a Thai News Network proved very successful despite the conventional beliefs that Thai students would find it difficult to be critical thinkers. As we demonstrate throughout the entire thesis, the main issue in teaching critical thinking is not, as it is often assumed, to ask students to critique the teacher or other authority texts. Rather, it is to create conditions enabling students to identify, and to work with, conflicting perspectives in order to create for themselves increasingly better informed and more inclusive strategies for acting in the world. This may not be an original purpose, but our study offers an original pedagogic framework for facilitating this objective.

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