



Crossing Over Comfort Zone: Affective Support in EFL Taiwanese Students' Critical Online Discussions with a Western Facilitator

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Abstract

In the cyber era, critical thinking has become crucial for English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students who must discern English online information varying in degrees of accuracy and validity. According to social constructivist approach, critical thinking can be best developed by having social interactions with more capable peers. Nevertheless, Taiwanese students are under the influence of harmony and disagreement-avoidance Confucius Heritage Culture (CHC), thus lack overt discussions. The purpose of this research is to incorporate a western online facilitator to develop Taiwanese EFL students' critical thinking attitude with affective support in asynchronous discussions and emailing. Both the Taiwanese instructor (the author) and the Scottish professor concentrated affective support. The former dealt with face-to-face and online program structuring, by McCormick and Davenport's (2004) shepherd leader model. The Scottish facilitator provided short video, and critical online comments by Rogerian principles of unconditional positive regard. There were two sources of data: the standardized critical thinking pre-test and post-test in California Critical Thinking Dispositions Inventory and the focus group results in the second semester. The result showed that the Taiwanese research participants improved significantly in their overall critical thinking attitudes and dispositions except Open-mindedness ($p=.135>.05$). However, focus group result indicated that the affective support from their online interactions with the Scottish facilitator helped form meaningful one-on-one relationship and stepped out of CHC comfort zone to express disagreement and argue for their existing stance publicly. Nevertheless, language hindrances, and cultural affective support is needed to minimise cultural embarrassment between CHC EFL students and with a western facilitator for optimal critical thinking development.