

**USING CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS TO RAISE CRITICAL  
LANGUAGE AWARENESS IN JAPANESE MEDICAL STUDENTS: AN  
EXPLORATORY ACTION RESEARCH PROJECT<sup>1</sup>**

**by**

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## **ABSTRACT**

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is a tool for textual analysis commonly used in the social sciences for uncovering hidden ideologies within discourses. It has been proposed (Cots, 2006; Wharton, 2011) that CDA might also be used as the basis for ESL/EFL classroom activities in order to raise Critical Language Awareness (CLA), defined as a conscious attention to how the properties of language are used to construct identities and ideologies (Fairclough, 1992a). This paper describes an exploratory action research project on the use of CDA-based activities in a Japanese medical university, and their subsequent effects on levels of CLA. An initial baseline cycle was conducted to establish existing critical language awareness, followed by two further cycles, each introducing elements of CDA. Data was collected through writing tasks at the end of each cycle and subjected to thematic analysis. The results of this analysis were indicative of a development in levels of CLA in some students, and suggested a path of progression from basic analyses to more sophisticated critical stances. It is hypothesised that linguistic, motivational, and cultural factors may have contributed to a lack of progression in other students. The implications of these findings are discussed and recommendations made for future research.

## **KEYWORDS**

Critical Discourse Analysis

Critical Language Teaching

Action Research

Critical Language Awareness

Critical Thinking

Thematic Analysis

# CONTENTS

|                  |                                       |    |
|------------------|---------------------------------------|----|
| <b>CHAPTER 1</b> | <b>INTRODUCTION</b>                   | 1  |
| <b>CHAPTER 2</b> | <b>LITERATURE REVIEW</b>              |    |
| 2.1              | Introduction                          | 3  |
| 2.2              | Critical language teaching            | 3  |
| 2.3              | Critical language awareness           | 8  |
| 2.4              | Critical discourse analysis           | 10 |
| <b>CHAPTER 3</b> | <b>METHODOLOGY</b>                    |    |
| 3.1              | Introduction                          | 15 |
| 3.2              | Research problem                      | 15 |
| 3.3              | Description of research methodology   | 18 |
| 3.4              | Design of AR cycles                   | 23 |
| 3.5              | Data collection                       | 27 |
| 3.6              | Data analysis                         | 28 |
| <b>CHAPTER 4</b> | <b>ANALYSIS AND RESULTS</b>           |    |
| 4.1              | Introduction                          | 31 |
| 4.2              | Thematic analysis of student writings | 31 |
| 4.3              | Student journals                      | 48 |
| <b>CHAPTER 5</b> | <b>DISCUSSION OF RESULTS</b>          |    |
| 5.1              | Introduction                          | 50 |
| 5.2              | Pre-existing levels of CLA            | 50 |
| 5.3              | An emergent criticality               | 51 |
| 5.4              | Factors affecting CLA                 | 52 |

|                     |                                      |    |
|---------------------|--------------------------------------|----|
| <b>CHAPTER 6</b>    | <b>CONCLUSIONS</b>                   |    |
| 6.1                 | Summary of findings                  | 56 |
| 6.2                 | Towards the future                   | 57 |
| 6.3                 | Implications of this study           | 59 |
| <b>REFERENCES</b>   |                                      | 60 |
| <b>APPENDIX I</b>   | Classroom activities: Baseline Cycle | 67 |
| <b>APPENDIX II</b>  | Classroom activities: CDA Cycle 1    | 74 |
| <b>APPENDIX III</b> | Classroom activities: CDA Cycle 2    | 80 |
| <b>APPENDIX IV</b>  | Template for student journal         | 85 |

## LIST OF TABLES AND FIGURES

### TABLES

|  |              |    |
|--|--------------|----|
| Description of ideologically significant texts | Table 3.4.1  | 24 |
| Emergent themes: Baseline Cycle                | Table 4.2.1  | 32 |
| Emergent themes: CDA Cycle 1                   | Table 4.2.2  | 38 |
| Emergent themes: CDA Cycle 2                   | Table 4.2.3a | 43 |
| Comparison between CDA Cycle 1 and CDA Cycle 2 | Table 4.2.3b | 48 |
| Contents of student journals                   | Table 4.3    | 48 |

### FIGURES

|  |               |    |
|--|---------------|----|
| Cots's CDA framework                                       | Figure 2.4.4  | 13 |
| Cyclical AR model  | Figure 3.3.2  | 19 |
| Action research cycle (Baseline)                           | Figure 3.3.3a | 21 |
| Action research cycle (CDA)                                | Figure 3.3.3b | 22 |
| Baseline Cycle: Thematic map                               | Figure 4.2.1a | 34 |
| Baseline Cycle: Distribution of total number of themes     | Figure 4.2.1b | 35 |
| Baseline Cycle: Number of advanced themes vs. basic themes | Figure 4.2.1c | 36 |
| CDA Cycle 1: Thematic map                                  | Figure 4.2.2a | 40 |
| CDA Cycle 1: Distribution of total number of themes        | Figure 4.2.2b | 41 |
| CDA Cycle 1: Number of advanced themes vs. basic themes    | Figure 4.2.2c | 42 |
| CDA Cycle 2: Thematic map                                  | Figure 4.2.3a | 46 |
| CDA Cycle 2: Distribution of total number of themes        | Figure 4.2.3b | 46 |
| CDA Cycle 2: Number of advanced themes vs. basic themes    | Figure 4.2.3c | 47 |

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Critical approaches to second language education have, in recent decades, had a significant impact on how teachers go about the business of language teaching (Akbari, 2008). Areas such as language policy, pedagogical practice, research practice, and textual analysis have all been influenced by a critical rethinking of practices (Pennycook, 1999).

But, what does it mean to be critical? Traditionally, a critical approach to teaching and learning meant the application of higher order logical skills. While these skills are still valued, in recent years the word critical has also taken on a socio-political meaning, referring to a reflective awareness of power relations within society. According to Norton and Toohy (2004, p. 1):

Advocates of critical approaches to second language teaching are interested in relationships between language learning and social change. From this perspective, language is not simply a means of expression or communication; rather, it is a practice that constructs, and is constructed by, the ways language learners understand themselves, their histories and their possibilities for the future.

Critical language teachers are, therefore, concerned with both the power relations in society, and how they are mediated by language. Guiding learners to an awareness of how language is used to reproduce and maintain power relations is, therefore, an important part of critical second language teaching (Luke, 2004). Fairclough (1992a) calls this awareness Critical Language Awareness (CLA), and it grows from a conscious attention to the properties of language and how they are used to construct identities and ideologies.

While many recent university EFL courses aim to promote traditional critical thinking skills, CLA is often overlooked. In my own teaching context, a Japanese medical university, students are often encouraged to engage critically with ethical issues, yet issues of ideology and power relations are rarely covered. This may well be a missed opportunity. Iniquitous power relations often lie at the heart of such issues as euthanasia, abortion, and organ donation. Raising CLA might, therefore, prove a productive way of encouraging students to consider such issues at a deeper, more reflective level.

In order to enhance CLA, both Cots (2006) and Wharton (2011) have advocated the use of activities based on elements of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). CDA is a critical textual analysis tool commonly used in social research (Fairclough, 2003). It can be viewed as the application of CLA to textual analysis. However, rather than simply being aware of critical language issues, critical discourse analysts seek out actual instances in order to uncover hidden relationships between discourses and society.

There have not, as yet, been any studies into the effectiveness of these activities. This paper, through the use of an action research project, aims to explore the use of CDA-based activities and their effects in a Japanese EFL context. Following a literature review, the research project will be described, and the results analysed and discussed.

## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.1 Introduction**

This chapter aims to establish how Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) might be used in the language classroom as a means of raising Critical Language Awareness (CLA). The first section commences with an overview of critical approaches to teaching followed by a discussion of the appropriateness of critical pedagogies to Asian contexts. The next section focuses on how these critical pedagogies might be realised in the language classroom through the raising of awareness of critical language issues. Finally, in the third section, the suitability of CDA as a tool for raising CLA will be discussed and a simplified CDA framework will be introduced.

### **2.2 Critical language teaching**

#### **2.2.1 What does “critical” mean?**

Arising out of the Frankfurt School, a group of scholars associated with the Institute of Social Research at the University of Frankfurt, Critical Theory draws on a long tradition of German philosophers, including Marx, Kant, Hegel and Weber. Concerned with the relationship between Marxist theory and the changing nature of capitalism, they hold the view that society is shaped by injustice and oppression (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2003). Simpson (2009, p. 430) defines a critical stance within Critical Theory as a “philosophical attitude towards social phenomena that critiques and questions the origins of dominance as an aspect of the struggle for a better world”.

Critical Theory is therefore concerned with identifying and critiquing the power relations

responsible for the injustice and oppression within society, with a view to enacting social transformation. Thus, Critical Theory has typically focused on issues in which these inequalities are most obvious – issues such as class, race, gender and sexuality (Pennycook, 1999).

### **2.2.2 A critical approach to education**

Influenced by Critical Theory, Paulo Freire (1968/1970) advocated education as a means to address social injustice and enact social change. Critical educators view traditional education as essentially an exercise in power, reproducing and supporting the same iniquitous power relations present wider society. Education therefore plays a part in the marginalization of different class, race and gender groups (Giroux, 1983). By critiquing existing classroom practices, critical educators seek to redress these inequalities and support learners, learning, and social change (Norton & Toohey, 2004, p. 2). Following this idea, critical pedagogy can thus be seen more as a self-reflexive stance toward education, rather than a particular set of pedagogical practices (Akbari, 2008).

### **2.2.3 Critical pedagogies in language teaching**

Originally advocated for language learners in migrant communities, often on the margins of society and facing discrimination, critical pedagogies are increasingly being implemented in non-native speaking contexts (Crookes, 2010). While the social circumstances of second language and foreign language learners may differ, TESOL is essentially still a “pedagogical site and institution for educating the racial and linguistic Other” (Luke, 2004, p. 25). Areas open to critique in language teaching are the teacher-student relationship, classroom practices,

classroom materials and language policy (Norton & Toohey, 2004).

Some have argued that critical pedagogies overly politicise teaching and are harmful to the learning process (Snowden, 2008; Waters, 2009). Critics warn that advocates of critical pedagogies seek to impose a neo-Marxist ideology on learners, one in which all relationships are reduced to those between oppressors and the oppressed (Hammersley, 2004). In their view, language teachers are moving away from their primary role – the teaching of language.

It is important to note however, that rather than being a distraction from language teaching, critical pedagogies are an alternative *way* of teaching, a way which stresses the link between “word and the world” (Akbari, 2008, p. 282). It may be that critical language teaching actually fosters a deeper understanding of language by encouraging students to consider the links between language and culture (Wharton, 2010, p. 221).

#### **2.2.4 Critical thinking in Asia**

It has also been suggested that critical pedagogies are particularly inappropriate for East Asian contexts, although Shin and Crookes (2005) concluded there was historical evidence for critical inquiry and dialogue in Korea. More recently there have been a number of initiatives implementing critical pedagogy within Asia (see Crookes 2010 for specific examples).

One of the reasons put forward for the unsuitability of critical pedagogies in Asia is a perceived lack of critical thinking skills in Asian students (see Crookes, 2010; Stapleton, 2001). It has been claimed that critical thinking is an unconscious social practice – a

culturally-based concept acquired through socialization, and as such cannot be taught (Atkinson, 1997). In this view, therefore, non-native English speakers unfamiliar with the social practice find critical thinking tasks more difficult (Ramanathan & Kaplan, 1996). More specifically, it has been claimed that critical thinking is a particular product of individualistic Western culture (Fox, 1994), and is therefore especially problematic for group-orientated Asian cultures (see Hofstede, n.d.) such as those found in Korea, Japan and China (Atkinson, 1997; Ramanathan & Kaplan, 1996).

Such characterizations are, however, controversial. For some, narrowly defined Western notions of critical thinking fail to take into account the diversity and complexity of other educational traditions in which criticality is expressed differently (Ryan & Louie, 2007; Turner, 2006). One example is a difference in rhetorical style. Hinds (1987) argues that when writing in English, it is the writer's responsibility to explicitly state and guide the reader through the logical steps in any argument, whereas in a reader-responsible language such as Japanese the topic is implied, leaving the reader to fill in information and transitions. Following on from this, Turner (2006) believes that, rather than being deficient in critical thinking skills, Asian students simply lack familiarity with local stylistic and academic conventions.

For Gieve (1998) and Benesch (1999), the problem also lies in how critical thinking is defined. They define Atkinson (1997) and others' view of critical thinking as *monological* – a view which portrays critical thinking as the kind of higher order logical thinking and questioning approach traditionally promoted and valued in Western education. Rather, they envisage critical thinking as a socially-aware reflective *dialogue* in which students and teachers' assumptions are questioned and defended; “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, p. 125). Benesch (1999, p. 573) thus sees dialogical critical thinking as “expanding students’ understanding beyond what they have already considered to promote tolerance and social change” – a view which owes more to Critical Theory than traditional ideas of critical thinking.

### **2.2.5 Cultural stereotypes**

Also problematic are representations of Asian students and their cultures. Kumaraveivelu (2003, p .710) notes that Asian students are often stereotyped as “[being] obedient to authority, [lacking] critical thinking skills, and [not] participating in classroom interaction”, while labels such as “collectivism, harmony, indirection, memorization and conserving knowledge” are applied to their cultures (Kubota, 1999, p. 14). Portrayals such as these promote a culturally deterministic way of thinking and fail to take into account individual variation in students and the rapid rate of cultural change (Kubota, 1999; Raimés & Zamel, 1997; Zamel, 1997).

Stapleton (2001) contends that the perceived lack of critical thinking skills in Asian students may, in fact, be due to a lack of familiarity with the content cultural contexts of particular issues, and a lack of shared assumptions in common with Western researchers. Topics such as censorship, freedom of speech, gender issues, sexuality, death penalty and gun control frequently occur in writing textbooks in American universities (Ramanathan and Kaplan, 1996), issues which, in Japan are less culturally relevant (Stapleton, 2001), with the resulting lack of familiarity hinders students’ critical thinking performance. By using issues which were more familiar to Japanese students, such as the importation of rice, Stapleton (2001)

found evidence for critical thought in students' writings.

## **2.3 Critical language awareness**

### **2.3.1 A critical approach to language**

However, looking beyond the ideological battleground of pedagogical practices, *language itself*, as part of the wider semiotic system, is “infused with ideological, historical and political symbols and relations” (Akbari, 2008, p. 277). Language teaching therefore occupies a special role in education in that the subject being taught is also a tool for the reproduction and maintenance of unequal power relations.

If a critical stance is generally concerned with critiquing power relations within society, a critical approach to language is therefore concerned with how these dominant power relations are reproduced and maintained within discourses. According to Fairclough (1992b, p. 12):

Critical approaches differ from non-critical approaches in not just describing discursive practices, but in showing how discourse is shaped by relations of power and ideologies, and the constructive effects discourse has upon social identities, social relations and systems of knowledge and belief.

In the language classroom, critical educators are therefore concerned with raising in students an awareness of these issues – what Fairclough (1992a) calls *Critical Language Awareness* (CLA). CLA is concerned with noticing how language is used to maintain power relations within society, for example by drawing attention to how grammatical and lexical choices can reflect the underlying ideology (see Morgan, 2004). According to Clark and Ivanic (1997, p.

224), CLA gives students the means to “challenge those [discourse] conventions which are disrespectful or disempowering of any social group”. CLA can therefore be seen as a crucial element of critical pedagogy in language education (Morgan, 2004; Reagan, 2006; Wharton, 2011).

### **2.3.2 CLA in the classroom**

While CLA is seen by Fairclough (1992a) as a democratic right, a prerequisite for citizenship, and by Reagan (2006, p. 4) as “a characteristic of democratic schooling”, the relevance of a critical approach to the task of language learning has been questioned (Snowden, 2008; Waters, 2009).

Critical literacy, however, offers one way to enhance criticality whilst achieving real learning outcomes. Luke and Doohy (2009) define critical literacy as the use of texts to reveal and challenge cultural, social and political relations, in other words the raising of CLA through reading. In addition, by making learners consider the different ways in which meanings can be constructed, it has been argued that critical reading skills also benefit language proficiency (Janks, 2008; Wallace, 2003). For example, grammatical features such as modality and transitivity, which are essential elements of the critical analysis of ideologically significant texts (see Bloor & Bloor, 2007; Fairclough, 2003), can form the basis of critically aware language lessons (Cots, 2006; Morgan, 2004)

It has been suggested (Cots, 2006; Wharton, 2011) that the social research tool, Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), might be modified and applied to the language classroom in order to raise CLA. In the next section of this chapter CDA and its potential use as a critical

pedagogy will be discussed.

## **2.4 Critical Discourse Analysis**

### **2.4.1 What is Critical Discourse Analysis?**

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is the study of how social identities, relations and power relationships are constructed in written and spoken texts. As with Critical Theory in general, critical discourse analysts are particularly concerned with the unequal and dominant nature of these relations, and the role texts play in reproducing and maintaining them (van Dijk, 2009). In other words, CDA attempts, by means of linguistic analysis, to uncover the often opaque connections between discourses and social reality, revealing the inequalities of power which shape our world. In common with Critical Theory, proponents of CDA also seek to enact social change through their critiques (Fowler, 1996; Fairclough, 2003; van Dijk, 2009).

It is this emphasis on the social which differentiates CDA from more conventional linguistic analyses: according to Bloor and Bloor (2007, p. 2), “linguists, in general, are concerned with the way in which language or discourse ‘works’ ... critical discourse analysts, on the other hand, are interested in the ways in which language and discourse are used to achieve social goals”. Despite the name *Critical Discourse Analysis*, CDA may therefore best be considered as a social research tool rather than a branch of linguistics (Fairclough, 2003).

### **2.4.2 Methods of CDA**

CDA is a multidisciplinary approach, which draws on elements of anthropology, philosophy, psychology, rhetoric, sociolinguistics, and literary studies, as well as linguistics (Wodak &

Meyer, 2009, p.1). Theoretically, CDA has its roots in three other related intellectual traditions: discourse analysis, feminist post-structuralism, and critical linguistics (Rogers et al, 2005). The influence of these intellectual traditions, in addition to its multidisciplinary nature, have resulted in a variety of approaches within CDA itself – each drawing on a particular theoretical background. Much of Fairclough’s work (1989, 1992b), for example, is influenced by Foucault’s (1969/1972) theories of discourse, as well as Halliday’s view of language as a social practice (Halliday, 1978, 1994); whereas approaches such as the Discourse Historical Approach (DHA) (van Leeuwen & Wodak, 1999) and the social actors approach (van Leeuwen, 1996) are more grounded in Critical Theory.

These approaches can also be seen as differing in methodology as well as theoretical background. Fairclough, for example, uses a closed framework and applies it to ideologically significant texts, using various examples from the text to illustrate his claims (Fairclough, 1999, 2003, 2009). Other approaches, such as DHA and the use of corpus linguistics, are more inductive, using large data samples and detailed case studies to uncover new insights into the relationship between language and the social reality it describes (Mautner, 2009; Wodak & Meyer, 2009). Rather than applying a framework, analysts look for patterns in large data sets in order to seek new insights (Wodak & Meyer, 2009, p. 19).

### **2.4.3 Criticisms of CDA**

CDA has proved to be controversial, prompting heated debate. Widdowson (1995, 1998, 2004), has been a particularly outspoken critic, especially of the work of Fairclough. For Widdowson, the combination of theories that lies at the heart of the multidisciplinary nature of CDA has led to confusion and compromise, resulting in a theory lacking in analytical rigor

and “profligate with terms whose conceptual significance is uncertain” (1995, p. 515). Even Fowler, an originator of critical linguistics, is concerned that “critical linguistics will come to mean loosely any politically well-intentioned analytic work on language and ideology, regardless of method, technical grasp of linguistic theory, or historical validity of interpretations” (1996, p. 6).

One of Widdowson’s biggest criticisms is that CDA is largely interpretive rather than analytical – an exercise in text description (Widdowson, 1998). Ideological intent is inferred from textual features, but this may not be the same as what the writer intended or what the text means to other readers. Ideology is thus read into texts, rather than out of them. This means that critical discourse analysts effectively impose their own ideology on texts by “the careful selection and interpretation of whatever linguistic features suit their own ideological position and disregarding the rest” (Widdowson, 1998, p.146).

While data driven, inductive methods such as DHA and corpus methods go some way towards addressing the issue of researcher bias (Mautner, 2009), even staunch proponents of CDA acknowledge that it is impossible for analysts to be objective and free from ideology (Beaugrande, 2006; Fairclough, 2003) – for Van Dijk (2001), an overtly political stance bias is even a matter of pride. For this reason, a self-reflexive stance is advocated, one in which the researcher critically reflects on their own ideology and practices (Chouliaraki & Fairclough, 1999; Billig, 2000).

#### **2.4.4 CDA in the language classroom**

While the full frameworks for CDA are often complex (for examples see Fairclough, 2003;

Wodak & Meyer, 2009), activities which draw on elements of CDA have been advocated for use in the language classroom to develop critical language awareness (Cots, 2006; Wharton, 2011). Wharton (2011) uses a bureaucratic text, in this case a government form relating to divorce, to show students how lexical choice and underlying assumptions are used to mediate the relationship between citizens and state. Cots (2006), on the other hand, supplements textbooks with carefully designed consciousness-raising activities which lead students towards a socially-aware critique of their textbooks. For designing activities and presenting instances of language use to students, Cots uses a much simplified version of Fairclough's (1992b) CDA framework (Cots, 2006, pp. 344 – 345):

Fig 2.4.4. Cots's CDA framework (continued on next page)

**A Social practice**

- A.1 What social identities does/do the author(s) of the text represent?
- A.2 What is the relationship between the social identities the author(s) represent(s)?
- A.3 What is/are the social goal(s) the author(s) has/have with the text?
- A.4 To what extent is the text necessary to accomplish the goal(s)?
- A.5 In what kind of social situation is the text produced? How conventional is it?
- A.6 Does/do the author(s) represent or appeal to particular beliefs?
- A.7 What are/may be the social consequences of the text?

### **B Discourse practice**

B.1 How conventional is the text taking into account its situation of use?

B.2 Does it remind us of other texts we have encountered either in its form or in its content?

B.3 Can we classify it as representative of a specific type?

B.4 Is the text more or less accessible to different kinds of readers?

B.5 Does it require us to 'read between the lines'?

B.6 Does it presuppose anything?

B.7 Who are the producer(s) and intended receiver(s) of the text?

### **C Textual practice**

C.1 If the text is co-operatively constructed (for example, a conversation), is it obvious in any way that one of the participants is more in control of the construction than the others?

C.2 How are the ideas represented by utterances, sentences, or paragraphs connected in the text?

C.3 Does/do the author(s) follow any rules of politeness?

C.4 Are there features in the text that contribute to projecting a specific image of the author(s).

C.5 Is the author's attitude expressed in the text?

C.6 How does syntactic structure as well as lexical choice affect the meaning? Are there alternatives?

C.7 Are there any relevant terms, expressions, or metaphors that contribute to characterising the text?

To date, however, there has been relatively little research conducted into the effectiveness of these CDA-based activities in raising CLA in EFL students. The remainder of this paper will therefore constitute an original piece of research investigating the use, in an EFL context, of consciousness-raising activities based on elements of CDA methodology

### **3. METHODOLOGY**

#### **3.1 Introduction**

The next section of this paper will describe the design of an action research project designed to investigate the use and effects of CDA-based consciousness-raising activities in an EFL context. First the research problem will be described, followed by an overview of the research methodology and design of the research project. Finally, methods of data collection and data analysis will be described.

#### **3.2 Research problem**

The participants were first year medical students attending a non-elective general English course at a Japanese medical university. The class of 50 students meets once a week for 90 minutes. The course lasts one semester, a total of fourteen classes. Historically, in Japanese high schools, English has been taught through grammar-translation with a focus on receptive, rather than productive language skills. Questions based on grammatical knowledge, translation and reading comprehension form the basis of university entrance exams (Sakui, 2004). Therefore, while most of the participants in this project have good grammatical knowledge and reading skills, there is a wide variance in oral and written production skills.

The course is topic-based and covers all four skills, focusing on issues of medical and scientific interest. A textbook, *“Thinking Critically About Health Issues”* (Ashida & Barron, 2010), has been used in conjunction with authentic materials from the international media. Each unit of the textbook begins with a reading comprehension task followed by discussion and grammatical exercises. As can be seen in the following examples, the textbook promotes

critical thinking by encouraging students to consider a medical issue, in this case organ donation, from various viewpoints and then discuss their own stance:

In some countries, written consent by the family suffices for the donation of organs if a written consent by the donor is not available. What do you think of this system? What can be the advantages and what can be the problems?

Why do you think “brain death” and donor cards are not widely accepted by people in some countries?

What is your idea on the market of organs? (Ashida & Barron, 2010, p. 49)

Whilst the textbook does seem to encourage students to adopt a critical, questioning approach towards ethical issues, the kind of critical thinking skills it promotes are monological rather than dialogical. As discussed previously, Gieve (1998) defines monological critical thinking as the kind of higher order logical skills valued in Western academia, a questioning approach in which all sides of an argument are considered. However, in a dialogical approach, the hidden assumptions and presuppositions underlying the argumentation are also examined and discussed (Benesch, 1999).

Although the discussion questions encourage students to reflect critically on the issues raised, questions relating to textual analysis do not address issues of CLA. Textual analysis is limited to basic comprehension tasks, and students are not invited to critique the socio-political context and the underlying assumptions of the text itself. The following examples are again taken from the same unit unit covering organ donation:

What happened to Mrs. Ito?

What was her condition?

Had Ms. A. Ito stated her wish regarding organ donation?

(Ashida & Barron, 2010, p. 49)

Given the lack of activities relating to CLA presently in the course, it was decided to investigate how supplementary activities might be used to stimulate CLA in students. As discussed previously, both Cots (2006) and Wharton (2011) advocate the use of CDA for raising students' awareness of critical language issues.

Due to the lack of previous research relating to the effectiveness of CDA-based activities in enhancing CLA, this research project was intended as an exploratory study. After an initial baseline cycle to establish existing awareness of critical language issues, a series of action research cycles were developed in order to investigate the use of CDA-based activities and their effects on CLA. While exploratory in nature, this research project also aims to investigate the following questions:

- What signs of pre-existing CLA do students display?
- What effect, if any, do CDA-based activities have on students' CLA?
- What other factors may have an effect on CLA?

### **3.3 Description of research methodology**

#### **3.3.1 Qualitative research methods**

As the purpose of this study is to investigate and explore the effects of CDA-based activities, rather than test any particular hypotheses, qualitative research methods were selected. According to McKay (2006, p. 7), the following are some features of qualitative research:

The research question is arrived at inductively. The researcher observes and formulates questions

The purpose is to contextualise and interpret data

The research design evolves over time. Once the data is gathered, the researcher looks for patterns

Qualitative methods therefore seem best suited to situations such as this where the research questions are vague and relatively little is known about the research topic.

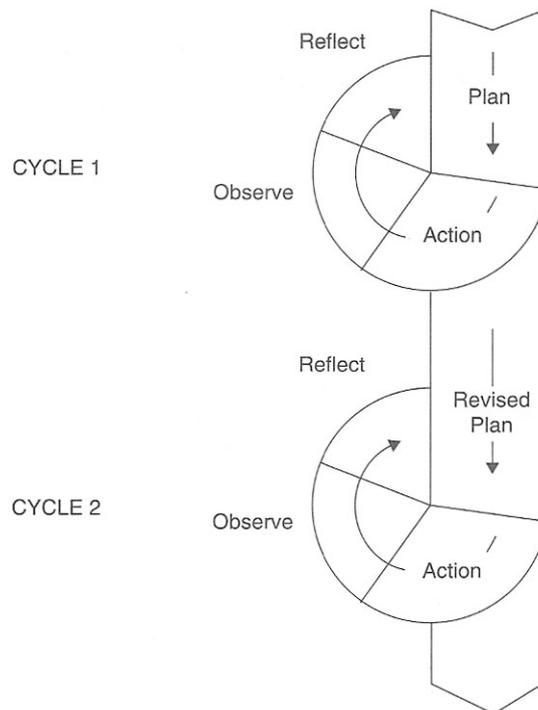
#### **3.3.2 Action research**

For this project, action research (AR) was chosen as the research methodology. While most often regarded as a tool for improving teacher practice through research (Burns 2005; Norton, 2009), the cyclical and reflective nature of AR makes it a very flexible tool for exploratory investigations where little is known about the research topic.

Whilst there is often a tendency for research and practice to follow divergent paths, AR provides a framework in which they are mutually supportive (Johnston, 2003). Kemmis and

McTaggart (1982, p. 5) define AR as “trying out ideas in practice as a means of improvement and as a means of increasing knowledge about the curriculum, teaching and learning”. The AR process is described as spiralling and iterative process with the next cycle being driven by the results of the previous cycle. The cycles are then continued until the action researcher is satisfied with the results. Kemmis and Taggart (ibid.) identify four steps in the AR cycle: planning, action, observation, and reflection. These steps can be conceptualised as follows:

Fig 3.3.2. Cyclical AR model (based on Kemmis and McTaggart, 1982, from Burns, 2010, p. 9)



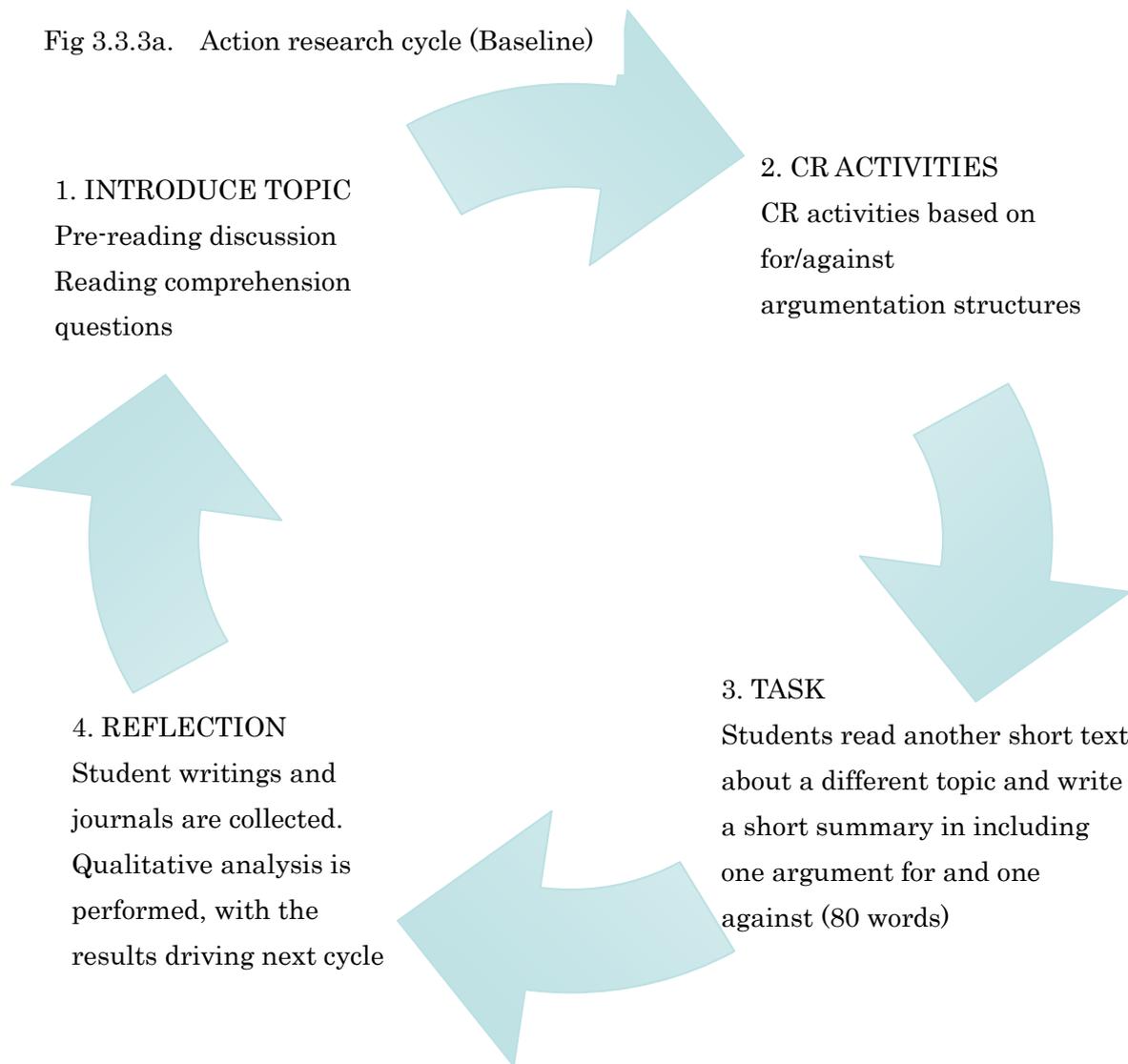
Kemmis and McTaggart (ibid.) envisage AR as a tool for implementing and refining pedagogical innovations and interventions. However, their iterative model is equally valid for an exploratory project such as this. In exploratory AR, however, rather than refining pedagogical practice, the researcher is concerned with discovering and exploring new areas of interest. Thus, the analysis of data from the previous cycle is used to suggest new avenues

of research and guide the design of the next cycle.

### **3.3.3 Overview of action research project**

This action research project consisted of three cycles: one initial baseline cycle followed by two cycles featuring CDA-based consciousness-raising (CR) activities. The initial baseline cycle was designed to establish whether students already utilise elements of CLA when reading texts (see Appendix I for classroom materials). For this reason, classroom activities focused on monological critical thinking skills, considering the arguments for and against an issue without critiquing the social context. Therefore, any signs of CLA displayed in this cycle would be part of students' existing sets of skills.

Fig 3.3.3a. Action research cycle (Baseline)

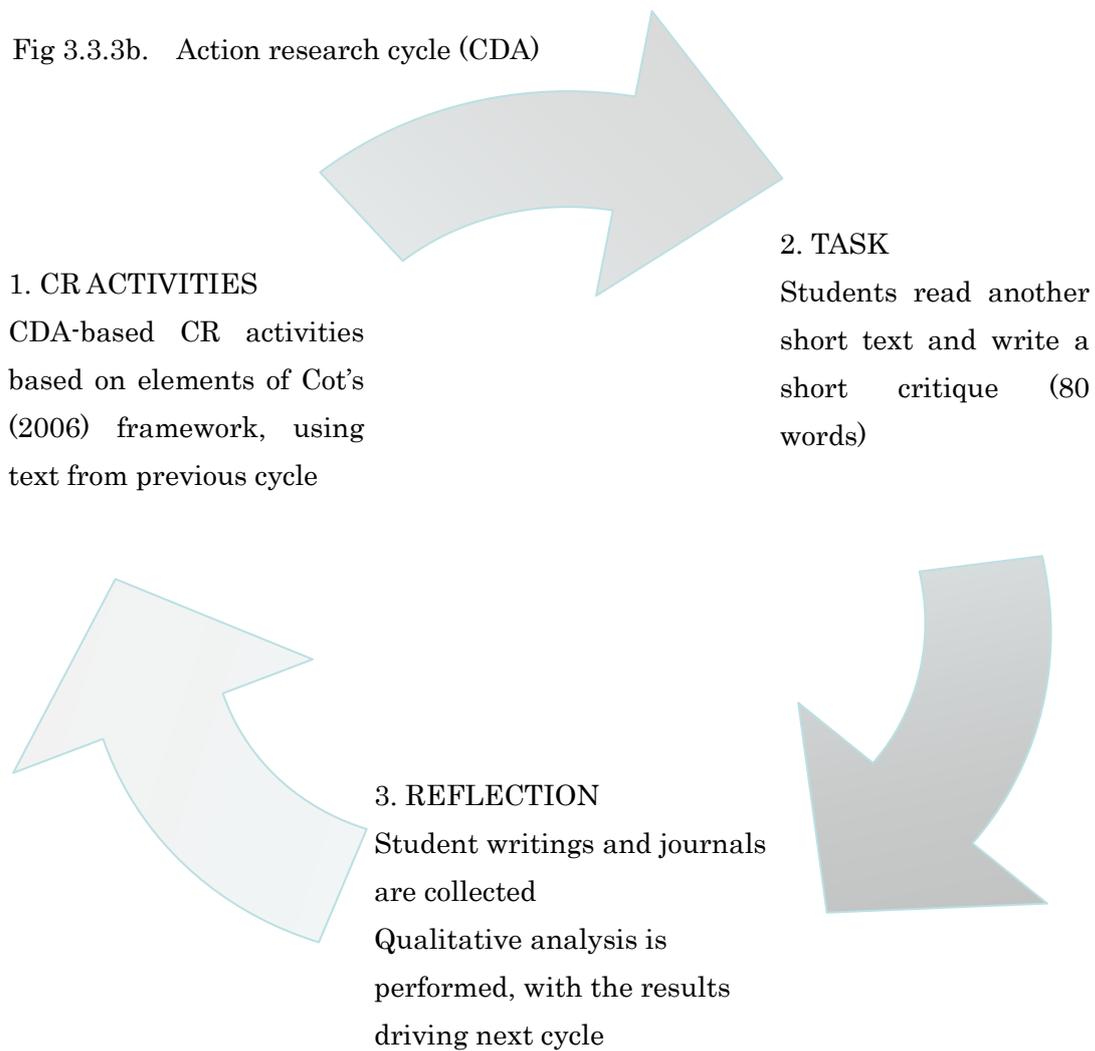


First the topic of the text, in this case a ban on smoking in public places, was introduced by means of a pre-reading discussion. Then students read a for/against type text relating to the issue. Next, they were given CR activities based on for/against argumentation structures. Finally, students were given another ideologically significant for/against type text relating to a different topic and asked to write a summary of around 80 words. Student writings were then collected and analysed for emergent themes relating to CLA.

The results of the thematic analysis were then used as the basis for the CR activities for the first cycle of CDA activities. In this cycle (see Appendix II), the same text provided the input,

along with the new CDA-based CR activities. Recycling the text in this way helped students notice features such as the identity and ideological stance of the writer – features which they had missed in the previous cycle. After the CR activities, students were given another text to analyse and then asked to write a short critique of 80 words. Again, thematic analysis was performed on the students’ writings, and the findings used to form the basis of the next CDA cycle.

Fig 3.3.3b. Action research cycle (CDA)



Thematic analysis of writings from the first CDA cycle revealed a lack of awareness of how textual features, such as vocabulary, are used to construct ideology. Raising awareness of these features therefore provided the basis of the CR activities for the next cycle, and the

process was repeated.

### **3.4 Design of AR cycles**

#### **3.4.1 Selection of texts**

As the purpose of CDA is to uncover the social realities and power relations reproduced in discourses, it was necessary to use authentic texts – to do otherwise would have resulted in the researcher imposing his own interpretation of social reality on the texts. Ideologically significant texts which challenged the students' social identities and attitudes as medical students and future doctors were chosen in order to promote dialogical critical thinking. For example, one text was written from a patient's point of view, another was written by opponents of animal testing. In addition, the following selection criteria were also used:

- The text should cover an issue of medical or scientific interest
- The text should be short enough to be covered in one class
- The text should be comprehensible to students (linguistically and culturally)

However, finding texts which met all the selection criteria proved difficult. Especially problematic was the comprehensibility of the texts, with most authentic texts reviewed beyond students' levels of cultural and linguistic knowledge. It was therefore decided to simplify some texts in order to make them accessible to EFL students. Bearing in mind Widdowson's criticism that by controlling access to texts, new discourses can be imposed upon them (1998, p.145), care was taken to preserve the integrity of the original texts as much as possible.

The ideologically significant texts chosen and the alterations made are as follows:

Table 3.4.1. Description of ideologically significant texts

| Cycle                  | Text   | Alterations  |
|------------------------|--|--|
| Baseline Cycle: Text 1 | Open letter from disability rights group regarding assisted dying<br>(see Appendix I)          | Adapted from a longer pamphlet<br>Shortened, some idiomatic expressions substituted<br>(full text from <a href="http://www.radar.org.uk/radarwebsite/tabid/109/default.aspx">http://www.radar.org.uk/radarwebsite/tabid/109/default.aspx</a> )<br>(update 11 <sup>th</sup> May 2012: text has been removed from website) |
| CDA Cycle 1: Text 2    | Pamphlet opposing the use of animals in the testing of household products<br>(see Appendix II) | Text used in original form   |
| CDA Cycle 2: Text 3    | Pamphlet opposing use of GM foods (see Appendix III)   | Adapted from a longer pamphlet.<br>Shortened and some idiomatic expressions substituted (full text available at <a href="http://www.gefreebc.org/content/pdf/health_risks.pdf">http://www.gefreebc.org/content/pdf/health_risks.pdf</a> )  |

### 3.4.2 Design of consciousness-raising activities

As discussed previously, CDA and critical language teaching both share the aim of promoting CLA. Given the complexity of most CDA frameworks (see Fairclough, 1989, 2003; Wodak & Meyer, 2009), Cot's (2006) simplified CDA framework was chosen as the basis for constructing consciousness-raising questions based on authentic texts. According to Cot (2006, p. 337) the aim is to "make students 'interpret' the text ... in terms of representations of social structure and ideological presuppositions that the author makes, and the ideological effects these representations may have on the audience."

Although much simplified, Cot's CDA framework still comprises of twenty-one individual points covering three areas of CDA: social practice, discourse practice, and textual practice. Therefore, for each cycle, elements of Cot's framework were selected based on prominent features of the text and thematic analysis of student writings.

Thematic analysis of student summaries of Text 1 from the Baseline Cycle revealed students had not commented on the overt stance of the text and the social identity of the writer. The section of Cot's (2006) framework relating to social practice therefore formed the basis of the CR activities. As can be seen below, these questions were designed to make students think about the identity, worldview, and purpose of the writer:

1. Who do you think wrote this text?

---

2. Why did they write the text? What is the purpose of the text?

---

3. What is the writer's opinion about euthanasia?

---

4. Do you *think* the writer agrees (A) or disagrees with the following statements?

Disabled people are treated as equal members of society ( A / D)

Society should have a more positive attitude to sick and disabled people ( A / D)

Society values disabled people less than other people (A / D)

5. Did the article change your opinion about euthanasia and terminal illness? Why /  
Why not?

Thematic analysis of student critiques of Text 2 showed that most had not commented on the persuasive strategies used by the writer. These strategies included argumentation structures and the use of emotive pictures and language. Cots's questions relating to textual practice therefore formed the basis of the CR activities for the second CDA cycle:

1. What does the picture show? How does it make you feel?
2. What are some strong, emotional words used in the pamphlet? Do you know other words with a similar meaning?  
e.g.) agonising ==> painful
3. What things does the writer focus on? What things does the writer not talk about?

Although this research project finished after the second CDA cycle, the AR cycles could be continued to cover further areas of Cots's framework.

### 3.5 Data collection

In order to gain as many insights as possible and triangulate the results, three methods of data collection were employed: output from written tasks, classroom journals, and teaching logs.

The written tasks required students to write a short summary or critique of approximately 80 words about a text they had just read. The tasks were as follows:

Baseline Cycle: Summarise one argument for, one argument against and state the opinion of the writer

CDA Cycle 1: Critique the text by stating the identity, worldview and purpose of the writer

CDA Cycle 2: Critique the text by stating the identity, worldview, purpose of writer and persuasive strategies used by the writer

Students were also asked to write classroom journals, in order to collect information about the classroom activities from the learners' perspective. The introspective nature of classroom journals makes them an invaluable source of information regarding affective and instructional factors that affect learning (McKay, 2006). Parkinson and Howell-Richardson's (1989) loose framework for classroom diaries was used. This framework gives the learner loosely defined categories in which they are freer to choose the topics about which they want to write. The categories are:

- in-class activities
- out-of-class activities (not applicable in this research project)

- my problems
- what I have learned

(from Parkinson & Howell-Richardson, 1989, p. 129)

It was hoped that, by adopting this looser framework, a wider range of data relating to affective factors and student attitudes would be captured. Students were asked to fill out the journals (see Appendix IV) at the end of each class on a voluntary basis as, according to McDonough and McDonough (1997, p. 127), making class journals a compulsory requirement may limit their usefulness.

Also, in keeping with the reflective nature of action research (Burns, 2010; Norton, 2009), I also kept an extensive log of activities both in and out of the classroom throughout this research process.

### **3.6 Data analysis**

Qualitative analytical methods such as thematic analysis are appropriate in situations such as this where little is known about the research area and more in-depth information is required (Norton, 2009, p.116). The student writings were analysed using thematic analysis which is a qualitative method for identifying, analysing, and reporting themes in data. According to Braun and Clark (2006, p. 82) a theme should “[capture] something important about the data in relation to the research question, and represents some level of *patterned* response or meaning within the data set”. Thematic analysis offers the following advantages (adapted from Braun & Clark, 2006):

- Flexibility

- Can usefully summarise key features of a large body of data, and/or offer a ‘thick description’ of the data set
- Relatively easy and quick method to learn and do
- Accessible to researchers with little or no experience of qualitative research
- Results are generally accessible to educated general public
- Can highlight similarities *and* differences across the data set
- Can generate unanticipated insights
- Allows for social as well as psychological interpretations of data

As I was new to qualitative research, and this project required the identification of patterns across large amounts of written data, thematic analysis appeared to be an appropriate choice.

Performing thematic analysis requires the researcher to analyse the whole data set and search for emergent themes. Thematic analysis is a data driven approach – in other words the emergent themes are derived from the data rather than coded according to a pre-existing framework. It is also important that the themes relate directly to the research question rather than the question asked of the participants: in this case, the researcher looked for themes relating to CLA, as opposed to themes directly related to students’ stances on topics such as euthanasia or animal testing. These emergent themes are then grouped into categories, which are then consolidated into overarching global themes which best describe patterns in the data. In this project, the process of thematic analysis outlined by Norton (2009, pp. 118 - 122) was used:

Stage 1: Immersion – familiarise yourself with the data and note down any general themes

Stage 2: Generating themes – closely reread each transcript and generate as many categories as possible

Stage 3: Deleting categories – delete categories which overlap

Stage 4: Merging categories – revisit the themes and merge them into global themes

In practice, however, this process proved much more time consuming and complex than anticipated. The deletion and merging of categories inevitably necessitated the revisiting of student writings in order to ensure that the data did indeed fall within the new thematic categories.

Also, in order to compare individual student performance and identify trends across cycles, the additional step of counting the themes and matching them back to each individual student was taken. While the analysis in this project is essentially qualitative, counting the themes also allowed limited quantitative analysis to be performed. In this way, some of the results could be presented graphically, thus providing additional insights.

Once the thematic analysis is completed, the resulting thematic network can be graphically presented using a thematic map (Attride-Stirling, 2001). The resulting global themes were then used to guide the design of the next cycle of action research.

## **4. ANALYSIS AND RESULTS**

### **4.1 Introduction**

This section of the paper will describe the results obtained from thematic analysis of student writings. In addition to a qualitative description of the data, limited quantitative methods in the form of counting of themes and graphical representations will be employed. Following this, the data obtained from student journals will also be described.

### **4.2 Thematic Analysis of Student Writings**

#### **4.2.1 Baseline Cycle**

For the Baseline Cycle, students were required to summarise a text about voluntary euthanasia; quoting one argument for, one against, and the opinion of the writer. The themes revealed during analysis naturally fell into two categories: *basic* and *advanced* themes. Basic themes were defined as those judged to be necessary for completion of the writing task; emergent themes in addition to these were labelled advanced themes. For example, merely stating the writer's opinion was a basic theme. However, if this was supported by making reference to the text, it was classed as an advanced theme. Other advanced themes included considering the identity and the worldview of the writer.

Table 4.2.1 Emergent Themes: Baseline Cycle

|                        | <i>Emergent Themes</i>                                    | <i>No. of references<br/>(N=48)</i> |
|------------------------|---|-------------------------------------|
| <i>Basic themes</i>    | quotes arguments from the text                            | 46                                  |
|                        | states writer's opinion                                   | 38                                  |
| <i>Advanced themes</i> | supports writer's opinion by making reference to the text | 21                                  |
|                        | considers the identity of the writer                      | 14                                  |
|                        | evaluates the worldview of the writer                     | 5                                   |

While most students successfully completed the task and the two basic themes were evident, a significant proportion of the students also went on to use more advanced themes. Almost half referred to the text in order to support the writer's opinion. Some examples are as follows:

“But at RADAR, they are opposed to euthanasia because being able to kill oneself is not a human right.” [Student No. 53]

“At RADAR, they are opposed to this because it is our duty to protect human life but not to help end it” [Student No. 83]

“However, at RADAR they are opposed to euthanasia because they think some patients may worry that they are an emotional and financial burden on the family and may decide to end their lives even though they really wish to live.” [Student No. 74]

Fewer students, fourteen in total, referred to the identity of the producer of the text as the disability rights group, RADAR. As can be seen in the previous examples, however, most of the references were in passing, with little or no analysis or comments on its potential significance. Five students did, however, consider the writer's underlying set of beliefs, namely that disabled people have the right to live equally and enjoy the same quality of life as other people:

“The writer thinks that assisted suicide makes the lives of sick and disabled people are worth less than others. He or she thinks our right to live equally must be protected.” [Student No. 74]

“The writer thinks our right to live equally must be protected.” [Student No. 59]

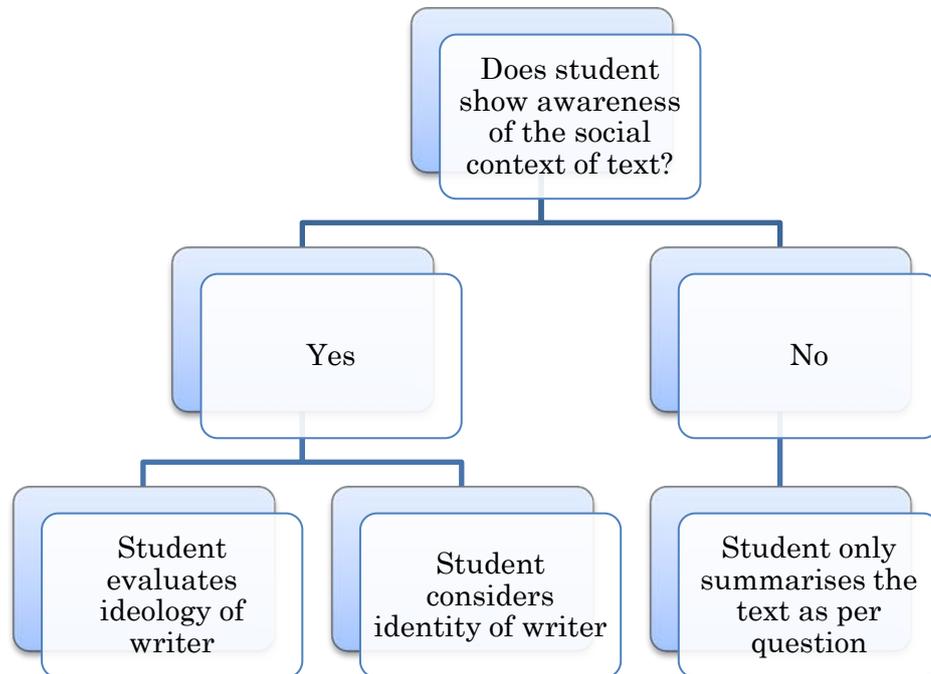
Interestingly, though the text focused on the inequalities faced by disabled people in society, only three students mentioned the issue of discrimination:

“Making euthanasia legal may make discrimination problem worse. We mustn't make it to protect our right to live equally.” [Student No. 85]

“If we allow euthanasia, it makes discrimination problem worse.” [Student No. 54]

It was also possible to group the themes under one overarching theme: Does the student show awareness of the social context of the text? This is illustrated in the following thematic map:

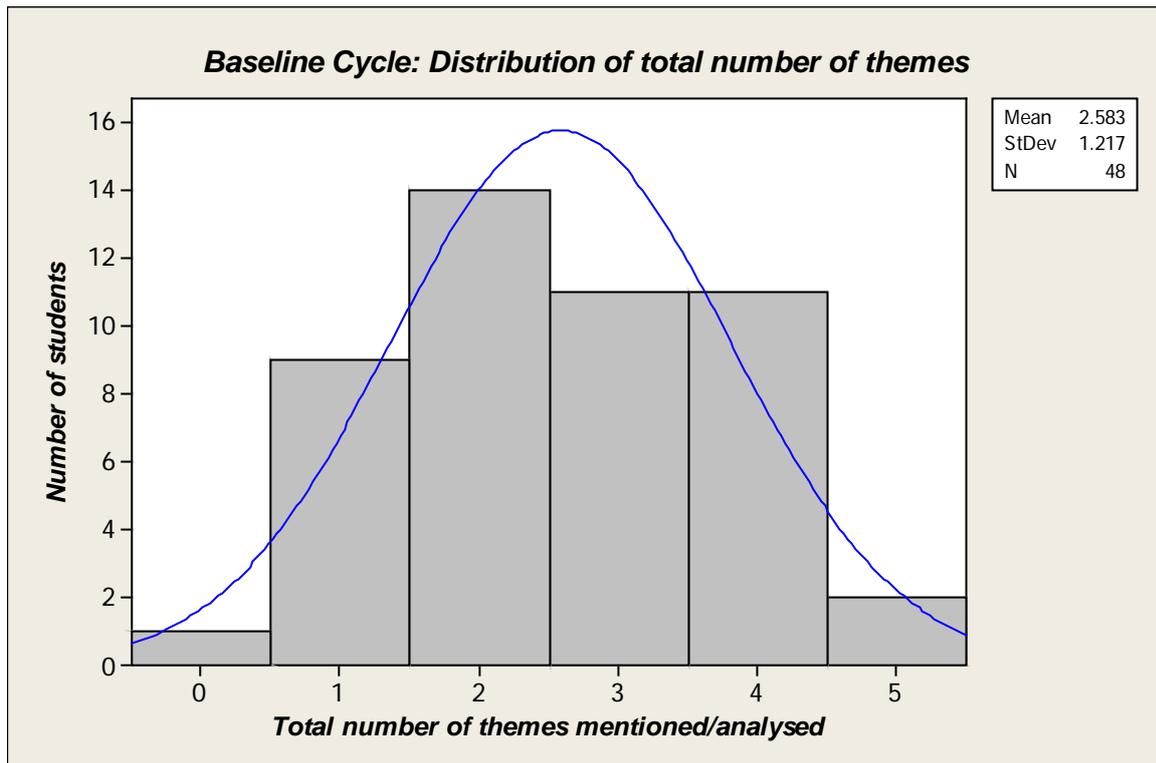
Fig 4.2.1a Baseline Cycle: Thematic map



While some students did show awareness of the social context of the text, it is important to note that, in general, these features were not analysed and did not form part of a critical stance towards the text. In other words, students stopped short of displaying *critical* language awareness.

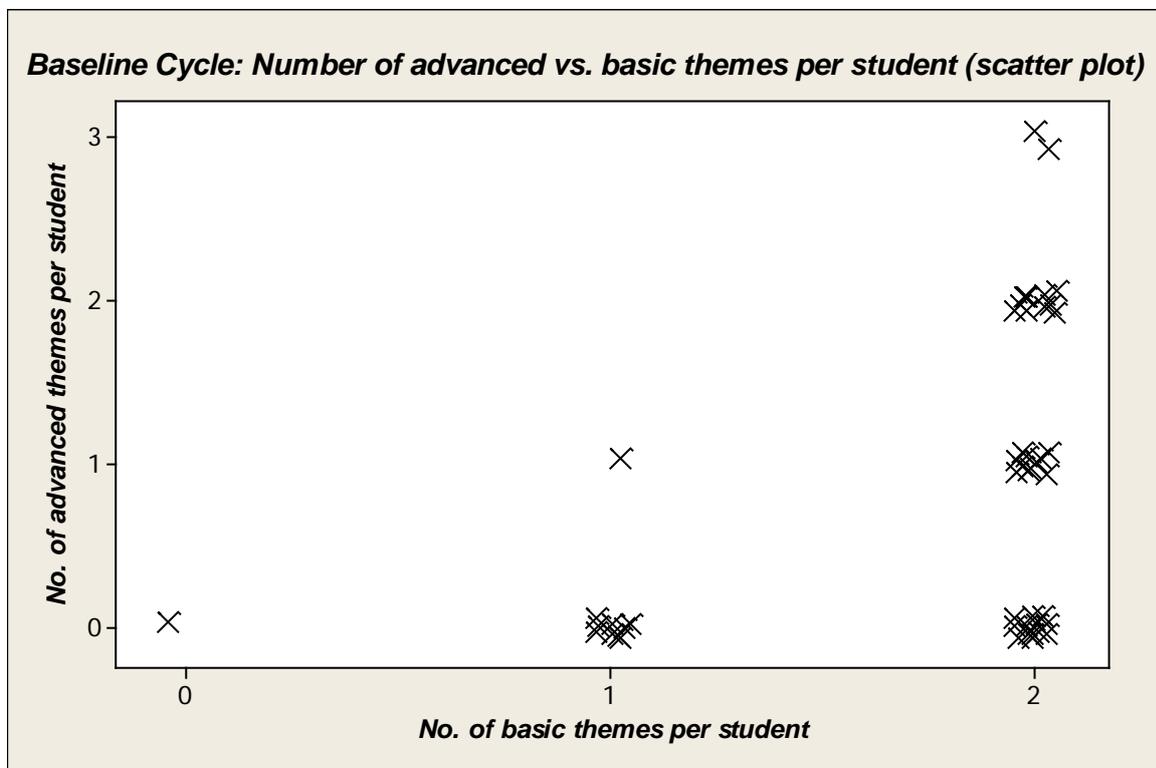
Analysis of the total number of emergent themes also revealed that, on average, students mentioned and/or analysed two or three themes, with a mean of 2.583 themes. Graphical representation of the data shows a normal distribution, with exactly half the students making use of more than two themes:

Fig 4.2.1b.



The number of advanced emergent themes was then plotted against the number of basic themes for each student in order to determine if there was any correlation. In the following scatter plot (Fig 4.2.1c), each student is represented by a black cross. As can be seen from the density of clustering, there is a clear correlation between the number of basic themes and the number of advanced themes used. All but one of the students who made use of advanced themes also incorporated both basic themes.

Fig 4.2.1c.



#### **4.2.2 CDA Cycle 1**

Having established the level of CLA in the Baseline Cycle, the next cycle introduced CDA-based CR activities. The content of the activities was determined by the overarching theme derived from the thematic analysis in the Baseline Cycle: Does the student show awareness of the social context of the text? Questions from Cots's framework relating to the social practice aspect of CDA were therefore chosen as the basis for the CR activities. The activities were designed to encourage students to consider the social identity of the writer, his/her worldview and purpose in writing. After completing these activities, students were then asked to write a critique of another text. The writing task asked students directly to comment upon the social practice aspect of CDA covered in the CR activities. Again, it was possible to separate the emergent themes into basic and advanced categories, with basic themes defined as those themes necessary for task completion (see Table 4.2.2).

Table 4.2.2.

## Emergent themes: CDA Cycle 1

|                        | <i>Emergent Themes</i>   | <i>No. of references<br/>(N=50)</i> |
|------------------------|--|-------------------------------------|
| <i>Basic themes</i>    | considers identity of the writer                                       | 49                                  |
|                        | evaluates the worldview of the writer                                  | 41                                  |
|                        | comments on the purpose of the text                                    | 45                                  |
|                        | reports on whether the pamphlet changed his/her opinion                | 49                                  |
| <i>Advanced themes</i> | refers to the wider social practice of animal testing                  | 15                                  |
|                        | makes further inferences and elaborates on the worldview of the writer | 10                                  |
|                        | comments on lack of balance in the text                                | 2                                   |
|                        | comments on the emotive language used in the text                      | 1                                   |

As can be seen in Table 4.2.2, nearly all students mentioned/analysed the four basic themes required to successfully answer the writing question. Many students also went on to refer to the wider social practice of animal testing, in particular comparing the use of animals in product research to the use of animals in medical research, drawing on their own social identities as medical students:

“I’ve heard about testing medicines, but not about product testing. I think it’s a pity...” [Student No. 85]

“[The article] makes me think that we should respect animals more. However, we have to do animal testing because it make it possible to cure many people.”

[Student No. 90]

While most commented that the writers believe in animal rights, ten students also elaborated further, analysing and making inferences about the writer’s worldview:

“They think that animals have a mind and they also have a right to a peaceful life.” [Student No. 66]

“Their worldview is that animal rights and human rights are equal. And they probably want to emphasize animals’ rights.” [Student No. 71]

“They seem to think many animals sacrifice for humans’ greed.” [Student No. 79]

“They think human beings and other animals are equal, and it’s not good to kill animals to save human beings.” [Student No. 85]

While students were not directly asked to comment on discourse features, two students did note the lack of balance in the text:

“However, we have to judge what they tell us is true or false before thinking about their opinion.” [Student No. 74]

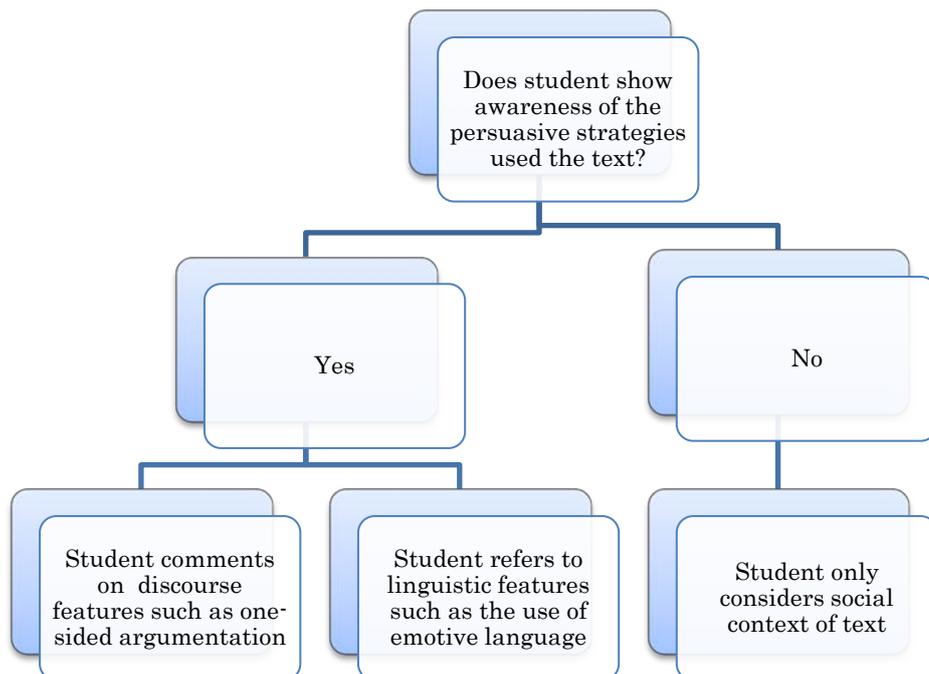
“They show animal testing as a perfectly bad thing and there are no good points on animal testing.” [Student No. 96]

Another student also noticed how emotive expressions were used in the text to persuade the reader:

“But I feel they wrote excessive expression a little.” [Student No. 87]

Once again it was possible to position the emergent themes under one overarching theme, “Does the student show awareness of the persuasive strategies used in the text?” While almost all students had considered the social context of the text as demanded by the question, several students had also considered how the writer used discourse and textual features to persuade his/her readers.

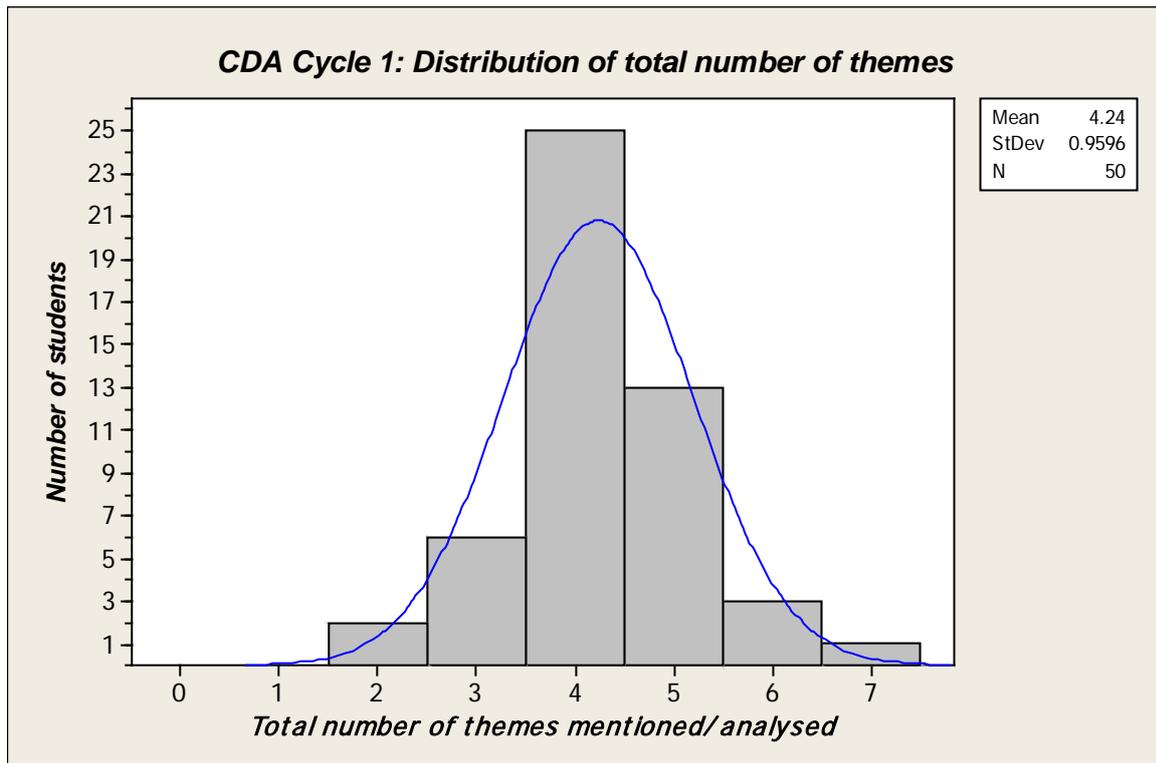
Fig 4.2.2a. CDA Cycle 1: Thematic map



An analysis of the total number of emergent themes showed that students used a mean of 4.2 themes each and the distribution of the results formed an almost perfect normal curve.

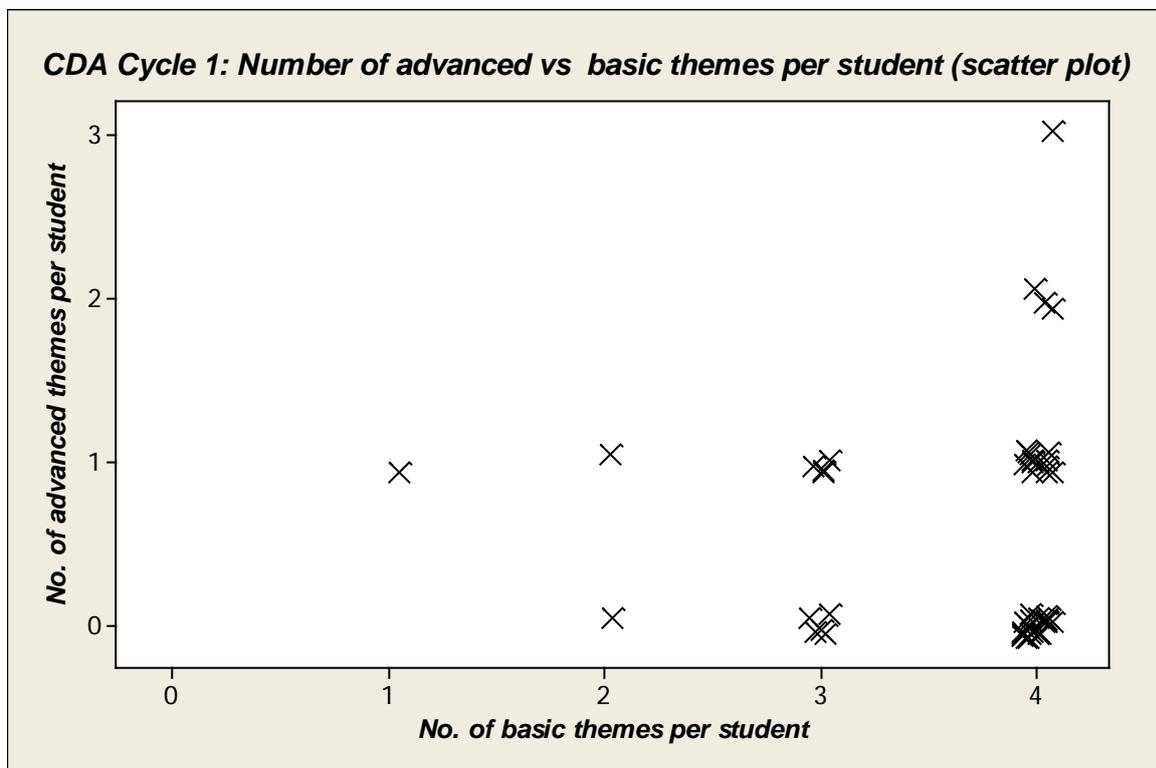
Compared to the Baseline Cycle, more students successfully completed the writing task, with a higher proportion of students incorporating all four basic themes.

Fig 4.2.2b.



Plotting the number of advanced themes used per student against the number of basic themes again revealed clustering on the right side of the chart, indicating that students who mentioned/analysed advanced themes had also made use of all the basic themes. In fact, only students who used all four basic themes incorporated more than two advanced themes. It therefore seems that basic themes are a prerequisite for the incorporation of more advanced themes.

Fig 4.2.2c.



### 4.2.3 CDA Cycle 2

The overarching theme derived from CDA Cycle 1, “Does the student show awareness of persuasive strategies?” was used as the basis for the CR activities for CDA Cycle 2. Elements of persuasive strategies are covered in two areas of Cots’s (2006) framework – both in

questions relating to discourse practice and questions relating to textual practice. However, for reasons of simplicity, just one aspect, that of textual practice, was chosen as the basis for CDA Cycle 2. The CR activities asked students to consider how textual features such as lexical choice, pictures and argumentation strategies can be used to persuade the reader. Again, students were asked to write critiques, which were then analysed.

Table 4.2.3a. Emergent themes: CDA Cycle 2

|                               | <i>Emergent themes</i>  | <i>No. of references</i><br><i>(N=43)</i> |
|-------------------------------|---|---|
| <b><i>Basic themes</i></b>    | considers the identity of the writer  | 42  |
|                               | evaluates the worldview of the writer   | 40  |
|                               | comments on the purpose of the text   | 43  |
|                               | mentions the use of persuasive strategies by the writer   | 41  |
| <b><i>Advanced themes</i></b> | elaborates on persuasive strategies used by writer (e.g., choice of vocabulary, selection of scientific data) | 20  |
|                               | makes inferences and elaborates on worldview of writer  | 4   |
|                               | mentions other aspects of the use of GM crops   | 1   |
|                               | refers to other textual features (e.g., title, use of paragraph headers)                                      | 1   |
|                               | comments on lack of balance in the text   | 4   |
|                               | comments on use of scientific data to lend authority of text  | 2   |

The thematic analysis again revealed an increasing richness and sophistication in advanced themes emerging from the students' work. A large proportion of students elaborated on the persuasive strategies used in the text, alluding especially to the cherry picking of scientific data to create a sense of alarm:

“In order to persuade us, they use only some examples which tell us the danger of GM products.” [Student No. 76]

“The writer try to persuade us by focusing on only bad side of GM food, and by picking up only experiments whose results make us feel that we don't want even to touch GM food.” [Student No. 85]

“They try to scare us, make us dismiss from eating GMO foods by using specific examples of studies. They also use examples of popular foods such as potatoes and soy.” [Student No. 71]

Again, several students offered analysis of the worldview of the writer, beyond simply stating his/her opposition to GM foods:

“He thinks food safety should be insisted on because it is an important factor in health.” [Student No. 104]

“Their world view is that organic food is good and GMOs are dangerous. They hate GMOs and want to support organic farmers.” [Student No. 53]

One student also considered the advantages of GM foods, commenting on the wider context of GM foods:

“They don’t write the advantage points of GM foods, like cheaper food or help people in poor countries.” [Student No. 71]

Interestingly, two students also commented on how the use of scientific data lends authority to the text, and question the use of experimental data:

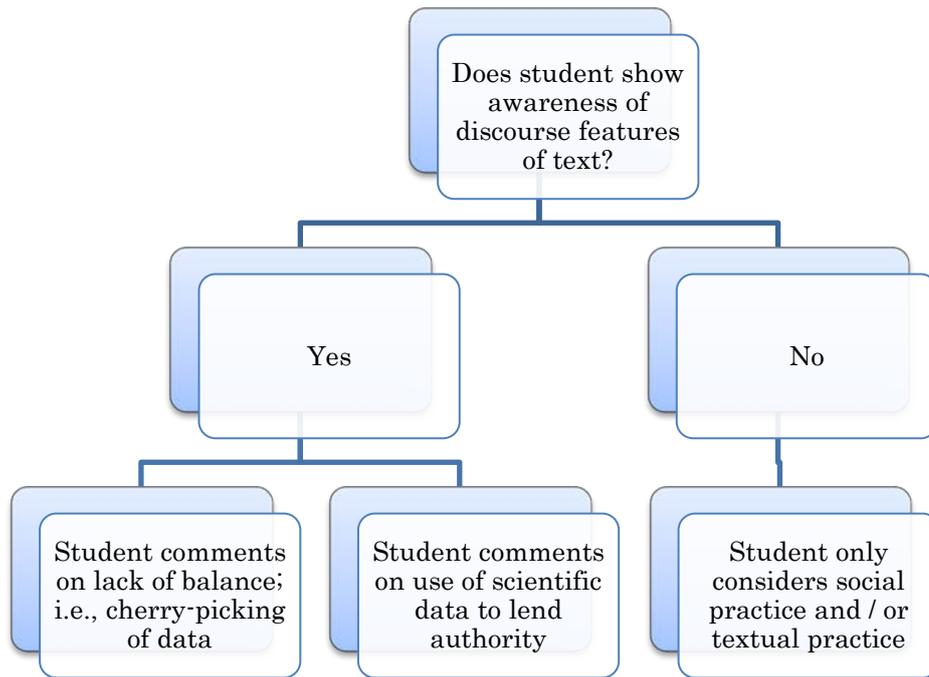
“The writer talks about scientific experiments because we trust scientists.”  
[Student No. 71]

“To make us believe, he uses scientists’ data. But that data is from rats and pigs, not humans.” [Student No. 95]

Also on this occasion these emergent themes could be grouped under a new overarching theme: Does the student show awareness of discourse features of the text? While most students commented on how the writer tried to persuade readers using emotive language, several students also considered discourse features such as one sided argumentation and the use of scientific data to lend authority.

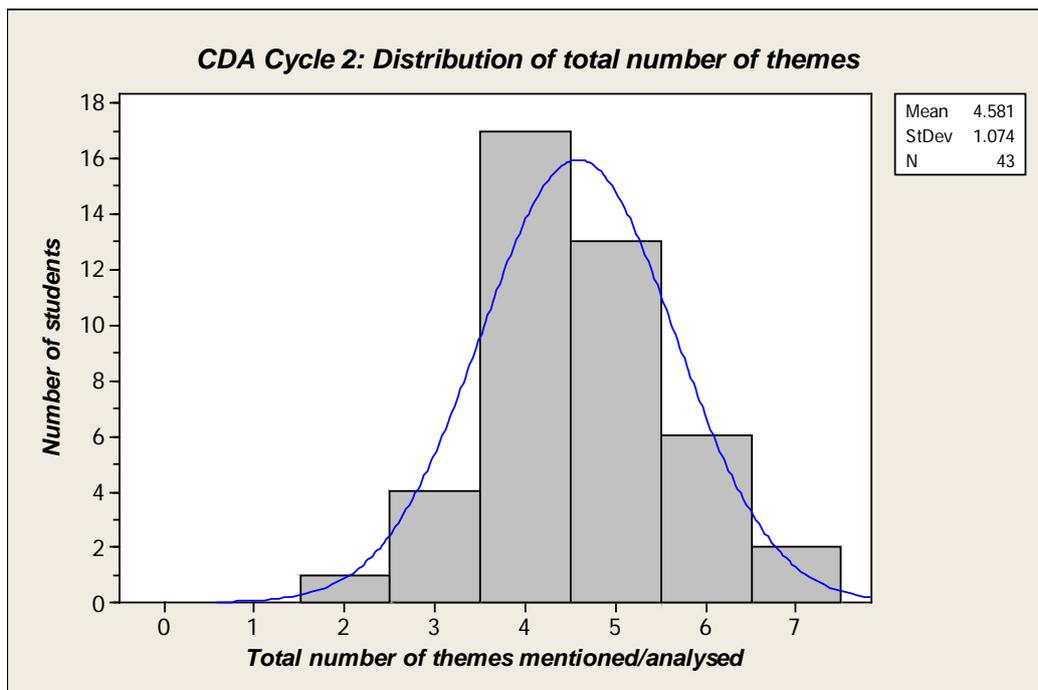
Fig 4.2.3a.

CDA Cycle 2: Thematic Map



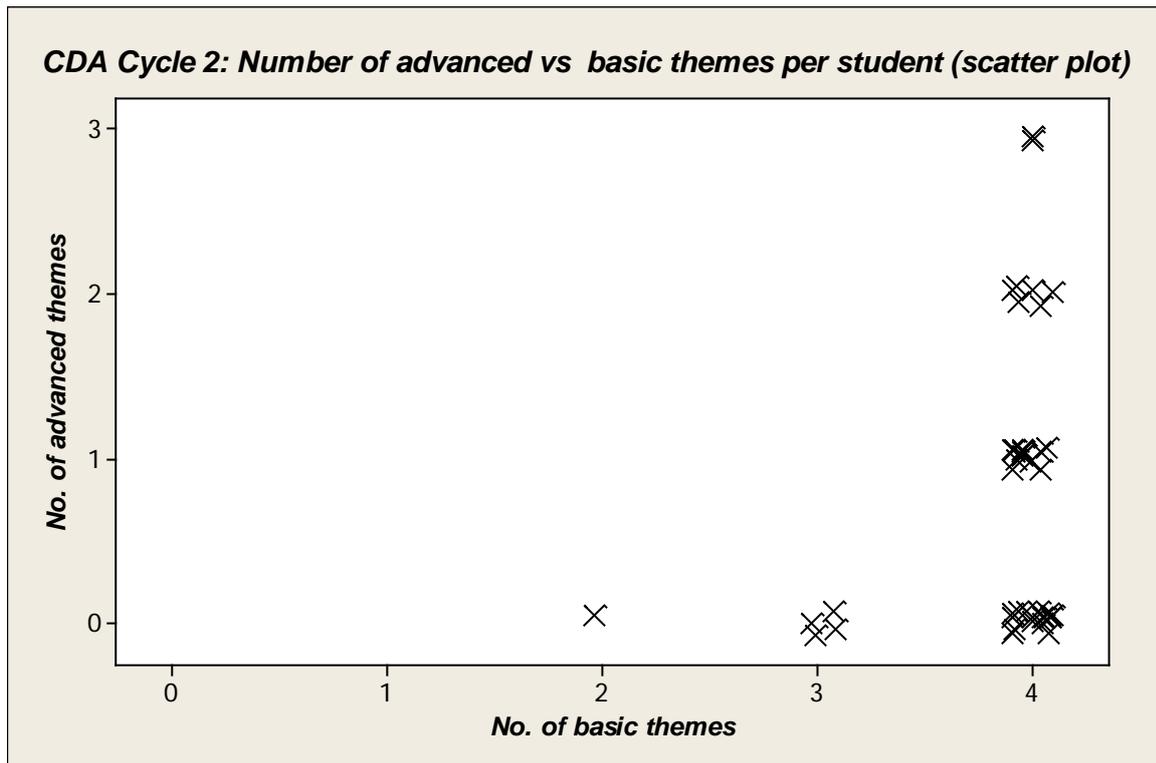
Similar results to previous cycles were noted in that the mean of emergent themes was 4.581 per student. This being said, the histogram clearly shows an increased proportion of students using more than four themes, possibly indicating increased criticality.

Fig 4.2.3b.



Plotting the number of basic themes versus the number of advanced themes again shows clustering on the right side of the chart. However, in this cycle there is a much clearer correlation, showing that almost all students who made use of advanced themes also incorporated the four basic themes.

Fig 4.2.3c.



The total number of themes mentioned/analysed in CDA Cycle 2 was compared to the total number of themes in CDA Cycle 1. While not conclusive, the results do seem indicate that, in addition to an increased sophistication in the emergent themes, there was also a general increase in the total number of themes incorporated in CDA Cycle 2:

Table 4.2.3b. Comparison between CDA Cycle 1 and CDA Cycle 2

|   | <i>N</i> | <i>Mean difference</i> |
|---|----------|------------------------|
| Number of students using less themes in CDA Cycle 2 | 10       | -1.500                 |
| Number of students using more themes in CDA Cycle 2 | 18       | +1.684                 |
| Number of students using the same number of themes  | 13       | 0.000                  |

### 4.3 Student Journals

It was hoped that student journals would provide an additional source of data, allowing for a detailed description of the learners' thought processes and opinions. However, the data produced was limited, with just 28 journals returned over the three cycles. In addition, the data produced as not as rich as was hoped for, with most journals comprising of less than 20 words. The contents of the student journals are summarised in the following table:

Table 4.3. Contents of student journals: All cycles

|   | N = 28 |
|---|--------|
| Number of students who wrote about a subject other than English                     | 3      |
| Number of students who identified the topic of texts as the main learning outcome   | 13     |
| Number of students who identified aspects of CLA as the main learning outcome       | 10     |
| Number of students who identified communication skills as the main learning outcome | 2      |

On the whole, the journals seem to have caused some confusion among students. Despite

giving what I thought to be explicit instructions, several students wrote about other classes they had attended, such as German or medical ethics. Several students also seem to have misinterpreted the topic headings in the journals. Under the topic heading “Problems I had”, for example, one student wrote “My father is a heavy smoker”. Perhaps a clearer topic heading, such as “Problems I had *in this English lesson*” would have helped avoid such confusion.

Reflecting on the data obtained, it therefore seems that the execution of this part of the research project was flawed. The following problems have been identified:

1. Students were unfamiliar with journals and unsure what to write
2. Due to the open nature of the journals, many students wrote very brief answers
3. Topic headings were not explicit enough
4. The lack of anonymity may have discouraged some students from submitting journals

Therefore, had students been familiar with and/or trained in the use of journals before the research project, more usable data could have been obtained. However, despite these failings, some useful insights were obtained. These will be discussed in relation to the results obtained from the thematic analysis in the next section of the paper.

## **5. DISCUSSION OF RESULTS**

### **5.1 Introduction**

Earlier, in Chapter 3 of this paper, three broad research questions were set out:

- What signs of pre-existing CLA do students display?
- What effect, if any, do CDA-based activities have on students' CLA?
- What other factors may have an effect on CLA?

In this section of the paper, the results will be interpreted and discussed in relation to these questions.

### **5.2 Pre-existing levels of CLA**

Thematic analysis of student writings from the Baseline Cycle revealed that many students had noticed and mentioned the identity of the writer, as well as the underlying ideology of the text. However, these themes were never developed and incorporated into a critical stance towards the text. The results from the Baseline Cycle therefore are suggestive of a lack of CLA in the students' writings.

However, it is important to note that this does not preclude the pre-existence of CLA in the students. Rather, it simply suggests that, in general, the students do not use critical language skills when performing basic reading and writing tasks in English.

As discussed previously, the perceived critical ability of Asian students is a contentious issue, further clouded by the fact that, in many studies, students are operating in a second language and unfamiliar cultural context (Bennett Moore, Faltin, & Wright, 2010). In these situations, language proficiency and familiarity with the target culture has an impact on how critical thinking skills are manifested (Stapleton, 2001). In other words, any perceived lack of critical skills may, in fact, be due to a lack of cultural and linguistic knowledge combined with the cognitive constraints of operating in a foreign language.

### **5.3 An emergent criticality**

Although the evidence for a pre-existing awareness of critical language issues is inconclusive, the results from CDA Cycles 1 and 2 do seem to demonstrate a developing criticality. Not only did more themes emerge as the cycles progressed, but many of these new themes also demonstrated an increasing sophistication. In CDA Cycle 1, for example, when students were asked to consider the social identity and worldview of the writer, many went further and elaborated on the wider social practice of animal testing, as well as making inferences about the worldview of the writer beyond those obvious from the text. A developing critical stance can be seen in many students in which they consider more deeply both the social circumstances in which the text was produced and the social practices it describes.

Again, in CDA Cycle 2, the majority of students seemed to have adopted a more sophisticated stance towards the text. Though the writing question asked students to identify persuasive strategies used in the text, many students elaborated further, going on to comment on other textual and discourse features of the text.

In addition to an overall increase in sophistication in critical stances between each cycle, the proportion of students who used all the basic themes also increased. This can be seen in an increased clustering towards the right side of the scatter plots with each cycle. The scatter plots also show a correlation between the number of basic themes and the number of advanced themes, indicating that students who used advanced themes had mostly also used all the basic themes. This suggests that there is a progression from basic to advanced themes: Only when a student has covered all the basic themes can he/she progress onto more advanced themes.

## **5.4 Factors affecting CLA**

### **5.4.1 Linguistic factors**

Comparing the data collected in this research project with work and grades from other areas of the course produced a positive correlation between general English ability and performance on the writing task. In other words, students with higher level English skills tended to develop a more sophisticated critical stance towards the texts.

A lack of English ability could have a two-fold impact on performance in the task. Firstly, CLA requires a conscious noticing of linguistic features (Fairclough, 1992a), and is therefore dependent on the ability to fully comprehend the texts. Secondly, some critically aware students may have been unable to communicate their thoughts effectively in English. Both factors were noted by students in their journals, with several citing an inability to communicate in English and unfamiliarity with vocabulary:

“I found that I didn’t know a lot of words.”

“I don’t know the English word I wanted to tell.”

“It’s not easy for me to write about what I want to say in English.”

#### **5.4.2 Motivational factors**

In addition to English ability, motivation may also have been a factor constraining the development of criticality. The scatter plots show a dense clustering to the bottom right of the charts, representing the large proportion of students who had used all the basic themes, yet had not used any advanced ones. This shows that many students completed the task without going on to offer further analysis. This finding was supported by my teaching logs in which I noted that many students stopped writing when they appeared satisfied that they had fulfilled the word count. Subjectively, it seemed to me at the time that the writing tasks did not fully engage students, and appear to have been treated more like examination questions.

Coming towards the end of the class and designed primarily as instruments of data collection, perhaps the writing tasks were perceived by students as having no real learning outcomes or purpose. It is also worth noting that this English course is non-elective; students have to attend whether they are interested in English or not. While more motivated students who had an active interest in English may have been more prepared to write at length, other students simply wrote what was asked of them. There is very little data relating directly to this issue in the student journals, but one student noted that the class was not as interesting as usual, focusing less on conversational practice. While other student journals were more positive,

many noted their learning outcomes in terms of the topic of the texts, rather than what I assumed to be the focus of the lesson – the critical analysis of those texts. Here are some examples of learning outcomes stated in student journals:

“I learned animal testing is very cruel.”

“Product testing tortures animals. I was shock to hear that.”

“Smoking causes so much harm.”

This seems to indicate that a proportion of students either did not notice the main learning objective of the lesson, or regarded it as secondary to what they learned from the contents of the texts. Confusion over the lesson objectives combined with a perceived lack of relevance may therefore have contributed to some students failing to engage fully with the writing tasks.

### **5.4.3 Cultural factors**

Asian and Western modes of learning are often represented as binary opposites: Asian education is criticised for its reliance on rote learning and the unquestioned role of the teacher as a transmitter of knowledge; whereas Western learning is praised for its critical approach, in which students are encouraged to to question everything and to discover for themselves (Ryan & Louie, 2007).

While such stereotypes may be misleading, there certainly seem to be differences in both

learning and pedagogical styles. According to Hofstede's data (n.d.), East-Asian countries such as Japan, South Korea and China have a high Power Distance Index (PDI). According to Hofstede, PDI is "the extent to which the less powerful members of organizations and institutions (like the family) accept and expect that power is distributed unequally". In an educational context, this translates to an increased deference for teachers. Students may, therefore, find it more difficult for to question their teacher for fear of causing their teacher a loss of face.

In addition to a high PDI, Japan and South Korea also score very highly on Hofstede's Uncertainty Avoidance Index (UAI), which "deals with a society's tolerance for uncertainty and ambiguity". As a result, students may be fearful of making mistakes and feel less comfortable exploring novel learning situations. This may explain why East-Asian students often feel unqualified to question what is being taught until they fully understand the subject (Chuah, 2010), a view echoed in Ryan and Louie's interviews with Chinese students studying in the UK (Ryan & Louie, 2007). Therefore, the cultural factors of high power distance and uncertainty avoidance may together explain some students' lack of progress beyond using basic themes, possibly leading to a fossilised position. However, it must be noted that these factors do not necessarily preclude underlying critical language skills; rather they can be seen as placing constraints on their expression.

## 6. CONCLUSIONS

### 6.1 Summary of findings

In summary, the findings of this study are as follows:

- There appears to be a progression from basic to advanced themes. Once a student has covered all the basic themes, advanced themes become possible. It does not appear possible for students to progress onto advanced themes unless all the basic themes are covered
- The correlation between English ability and the sophistication of the critical stance suggests that with a higher level of English a higher level of criticality is possible
- Lack of motivation may limit the progression of some students from basic to advanced themes
- A combination of cultural factors such as high power distance and uncertainty avoidance indices may mean some students are less willing to express their criticality, again resulting in a failure to progress beyond basic themes

As discussed previously, the data do seem to indicate an emergent CLA in many of the students, the expression of which seems to be constrained by second language ability, motivational factors, and cultural norms. The mechanism behind this developing criticality

seems subtle and complex, with CR activities encouraging students to be more reflective, learning to apply underlying, universal reasoning skills to the critical analysis of texts. As the development of CLA appears to be constrained by second language ability and motivational factors, those learners with greater English proficiency and higher motivation would be expected to develop CLA more rapidly and to higher levels.

It was hoped that the student journals would yield more insights into the interplay between the development of CLA and cultural and motivational factors. Unfortunately, the data set was too small for any meaningful patterns to emerge. The comments of some students did, however, touch upon issues of critical awareness:

“I learned that there was various approval or disapproval of euthanasia and assisted suicide.”

“All essays have their writer’s opinion.”

“I learned there are some views of euthanasia. I thought the most important thing is to think about the patient’s opinion.”

“I learned that when I read anything, it is important to consider who wrote it and why.”

This indicates that for some students, at least, Critical Language Awareness was a clear learning outcome of the lessons.

## 6.2 Towards the future

Following on from the findings of this study, there appear to be several potential areas for future research:

1. What is the nature of the relationship between culture and critical expression?

From the results of this study, it is hypothesised that students from societies with a high PDI and UAI, such as Japan, might be more reticent in expressing criticality. A comparative study of students from different cultural backgrounds may provide useful insights into this issue.

2. When should CDA-based activities be introduced into an English course?

The findings of this study suggested a link between CLA and English proficiency. Therefore, should CDA-based activities only be introduced into advanced courses? Or, do students benefit from a gradual introduction from an earlier stage?

3. How can we get past the motivation barrier to CLA?

It is suggested that low motivation may limit the development of CLA. How can CDA-based activities be made more engaging? Are there more engaging alternatives to CDA-based activities?

### **6.3 Implications of this study**

The results of this study do seem to show that CDA-based activities can be a useful tool in raising consciousness of critical language issues. Despite some students failing to progress beyond a certain level, a significant proportion of students went on to display a surprising level of sophistication in their critical stances.

While the utility of critical approaches to language teaching is questioned by some (Snowden, 2008; Waters, 2009), the results of this study do seem to indicate that the activities fostered a more reflective and critical consideration of texts. This development of criticality seems especially relevant to medicine, a subject in which students are expected to engage critically with complex ethical issues. The teaching of Critical Language Awareness would therefore also seem a useful addition to English courses in other contexts where there is an established need for sophisticated critical thinking skills, such as law.

The CDA-based activities did, however, have their drawbacks. CDA is a tool for textual analysis, and finding texts which were illustrative of particular aspects of CDA, whilst at the same time being accessible to EFL students, proved to be quite a challenge. In addition, the repeated reading and analysis of texts may have been demotivating for some students.

As English ability and motivation have already been identified as possible limiting factors for the development of CLA, perhaps a more productive approach would be to incorporate aspects of CDA into lessons as and when they seemed relevant, rather devote entire lessons to critical analysis. In this way, students would be able to gradually develop critical awareness alongside general English proficiency.

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## APPENDIX I

### Classroom materials: Baseline cycle

# Smoking!



1. With a partner ask and answer these questions.

|  | My answers | Partner's answers |
|--|------------|-------------------|
| Do you smoke?  |            |                   |
| <i><b>IF YES...</b></i>                              |            |                   |
| How many cigarettes do you smoke every day?          |            |                   |
| Do you enjoy smoking?                                |            |                   |
| Do you want to quit?                                 |            |                   |
|  |            |                   |
| <i><b>IF NO...</b></i>                               |            |                   |
| Have you ever tried smoking?                         |            |                   |
| How was it?  |            |                   |
| How do you feel about other people smoking near you? |            |                   |

2. With a partner, make a list of some places where you can and can't smoke.

| <i>Places you can smoke</i> | <i>Places you can't smoke</i> |
|-----------------------------|-------------------------------|
| e.g. in a park              | e.g. in a cinema              |
|                             |                               |
|                             |                               |
|                             |                               |

3. Discuss the following question with a partner.



In Japan can you smoke in bars and restaurants?  
How about in other countries?

## **Should Japan Ban Smoking in Public Places?**

Recently, many countries such as the UK and New Zealand have banned smoking in public places. People caught smoking in restaurants and bars now have to pay large fines. Now that other countries have banned smoking, should Japan also make restaurants and bars smoke-free zones?

The most important reason for banning smoking in public places is that breathing tobacco smoke damages our health. While it has been known for a long time that smoking can cause serious conditions such as cancer and heart disease, recent studies have shown that smoking also damages the health of non-smokers who breathe in second hand smoke. This means that smoking damages the health of everybody.

In addition to health risks, there are also social reasons for banning smoking. Many non-smokers don't like the smell of smoke. As a result, they avoid going to bars and restaurants where smoking is allowed. In addition, a smoking ban would help many smokers quit their habit. It can be difficult to stop smoking if you go to bars where everybody else is smoking. Therefore, banning smoking would make going out more enjoyable for everybody.

On the other hand, some people oppose a smoking ban. Their reasons are mainly economic. The government collects a lot of taxes from the sale of tobacco. So, if less people smoke we may have to pay more tax on other things. In addition, many bar owners worry about the cost of a smoking ban. A lot of their customers smoke, and they might stay at home if smoking is banned. This means that some bars and restaurants may close and the staff lose their jobs.

As well as the economic reasons, many people believe that smoking is a question of personal choice. They believe every person has the right to smoke if they want to. The government shouldn't tell people what to do.

In conclusion, it seems that a ban on smoking in public places is a good idea. It is true that a ban may cost a lot of money, however our health is more important. While people have a

right to smoke, they should only be allowed to smoke in private. Smoking in public damages the health of everybody.

***Comprehension questions. Please choose T/F***

1. Smoking is banned in all public places in Japan. T / F
2. Smoking also damages the health of non smokers. T / F
3. A smoking ban would mean that more non smokers go to bars. T / F
4. Most bar owners support a ban on smoking. T / F
5. The government gets a lot of money from smokers. T / F

2 Look at the essay

Can you find two main reasons for supporting a ban on smoking in public places?

i) \_\_\_\_\_

ii) \_\_\_\_\_

What details does the writer give to support each reason?

i) \_\_\_\_\_

ii) \_\_\_\_\_

Can you find two main reasons against a ban on smoking in public places?

i) \_\_\_\_\_

ii) \_\_\_\_\_

What details does the writer give to support each reason?

i) \_\_\_\_\_

ii) \_\_\_\_\_

Is the writer for or against a ban on smoking in public places?

\_\_\_\_\_

1. This is called a “for and against” essay.

It has 3 main parts.

**introduction:** First, the writer introduces the topic.

**body:** Then, the writer lists the reasons for and against. It’s important to keep the reasons for and against together. You should always support your reason with details.

**conclusion:** Finally, the writer summarises the topic and gives their opinion.

**Look at the essay and mark the introduction, body and conclusion.**

Now, read this short “for and against” essay.

### **Euthanasia and Assisted Dying**

At RADAR, our mission is to empower disabled people and change the way we are viewed by society. For a long time we were neutral on the issue of voluntary euthanasia and assisted suicide. However, as the debate continues, it is clear that the voice of disabled people is being ignored.

Many people support voluntary euthanasia and assisted suicide. They give several reasons. The first reason is that while everybody has a right to live, and many people believe they also have a right to die. People with terminal illness are often in great pain, and may wish to end their lives. They should be free to choose when they die.

Another reason is that the families of terminally sick people also suffer. It is difficult to watch a loved one die in pain. The families often have to care for them night and day. Many families feel it would be better for their loved ones to die sooner and more peacefully.

However, we at RADAR are opposed to euthanasia. Firstly, being able to kill oneself is not a human right. It is our duty to protect human life, not to help end it. Secondly, because of modern medical techniques, terminal patients do not suffer as much. They can now spend their final days peacefully.

It is true that the families also suffer, but we must consider the rights of the patients first. If we allow euthanasia, some patients may worry that they are an emotional and financial

burden on their family. Therefore, they may decide to end their lives, even though they really wish to live.

The concept of assisted suicide means that the lives of sick and disabled people are worth less than others. We face discrimination every day, and making euthanasia legal will make this problem worse. Our right to live equally must be protected.

euthanasia: 安樂死      assisted suicide: 自殺関与      terminal illness: 末期疾患  
financial burden: 財政負担



## APPENDIX II

### Classroom materials: CDA Cycle 1

Look at the text from last week's class again, and answer the questions on the next page:

#### **Euthanasia and Assisted Dying**

At RADAR (the Royal Association for Disability Rights), our mission is to empower disabled people and change the way we are viewed by society. For a long time we were neutral on the issue of voluntary euthanasia and assisted dying. However, as the debate continues, it is clear that the voice of disabled people is being ignored.

Many people support voluntary euthanasia and assisted dying. They give several reasons. The first reason is that while everybody has a right to live, and many people believe they also have a right to die. People with terminal illness are often in great pain, and may wish to end their lives. They should be free to choose when they die.

Another reason is that the families of terminally sick people also suffer. It is difficult to watch a loved one die in pain. The families often have to care for them night and day. Many families feel it would be better for their loved ones to die sooner and more peacefully.

However, we at RADAR are opposed to euthanasia. Firstly, being able to kill oneself is not a human right. It is our duty to protect human life, not to help end it. Secondly, because of modern medical techniques, terminal patients do not suffer as much. They can now spend their final days peacefully.

It is true that the families also suffer, but we must consider the rights of the patients first. If

we allow euthanasia, some patients may worry that they are an emotional and financial burden on their family. Therefore, they may decide to end their lives, even though they really wish to live.

The concept of assisted dying means that the lives of sick and disabled people are worth less than others. We face discrimination every day, and making euthanasia legal will make this problem worse. Our right to live equally must be protected.

**Answer these questions**

6. Who do you think wrote this text?

---

7. Why did they write the text? What is the purpose of the text?

---

8. What is the writer's opinion about euthanasia?

---

9. Do you **think** the writer agrees (A) or disagrees with the following statements?

Disabled people are treated as equal members of society ( A / D)

Society should have a more positive attitude to sick and disabled people ( A / D)

Society values disabled people less than other people (A / D)

10. Did the article change your opinion about euthanasia and terminal illness? Why / Why not?

---

---

---

---

When you read anything, it is important to consider who wrote it and why. Think about the following questions when you read:

1. Every writer has an **opinion** (Who wrote this? What is their opinion?)
2. Every writer has a **purpose** (Why did they write this?) Are they trying to give you useful information? Are they trying to change your view? Are they trying to sell you something?
3. Every writer has a different **world view** (世界観). In other words, everybody sees an issue in different ways.
4. Often writers are **biased** (色眼鏡で見る). They only support one side.
5. Often writers want to **change our thinking**

Think about these questions as you read the pamphlet on the next page.

Copy of pamphlet, *Here Kitty, Kitty*, removed for  
copyright reasons.

Now, summarise the text in 4 or 5 sentences

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Discussion:

First answer these questions then discuss with a partner.

1. Do you agree with animal testing on cleaning products and cosmetics? Why or why not?
2. Do you agree with testing medicines on animals?
3. In Britain and America, many products have a label which says "This product was not tested on animals". How about in Japan? Do you think this is a good idea?

## Writing task

Now, write a short essay (about ten lines), answering these questions:

Who do you think wrote this pamphlet?

What is their worldview? (世界観)

Why did they write it?

Did it change your opinion about animal testing?



## APPENDIX III

### Classroom materials: CDA Cycle 2

Look again at the pamphlet from last week's lesson and answer the questions on the next page

Copy of pamphlet, *Here Kitty, Kitty*, removed for pamphlet reasons.

1. Who wrote this pamphlet?
    - a. an animal rights group
    - b. a scientist
    - c. the government
    - d. a journalist
  
  2. Why did they write this pamphlet?
- 

**This pamphlet is an example of *persuasive* (説得力のある) writing.**

**Writers try to change our opinion by *persuading* (説得する) us.**

**Here are some ways:**

- **sometimes they use pictures to make us feel emotional (感情の)**
  - **sometimes they use emotional words**
  - **sometimes they try to scare us, make us feel angry or make us feel sad.**
  - **they focus only on one side of the issue**
- 

Now look at the pamphlet again and answer these questions ***with a partner***.

3. What does the picture show? How does it make you feel?
  
4. What are some strong, emotional words used in the pamphlet? Do you know other words with a similar meaning?  
e.g.) *agonising*                      *painful*
  
5. What things does the writer focus on? What things does the writer *not* talk about?

6. Now, read this new text and answer the questions on the next page

Copy of pamphlet, *Health Risks of GM Foods*,  
removed for copyright reasons.

7. Vocabulary: Match the words and the meanings

|                      |  |                                       |
|----------------------|--|---------------------------------------|
| 1. toxic             |  | a. accidental damage to other areas   |
| 2. radically         |  | b. something that kill bacteria       |
| 3. collateral damage |  | c. babies, children                   |
| 4. mutation          |  | d. inability to have offspring        |
| 5. evaluation        |  | e. a change in the DNA                |
| 6. antibiotic        |  | f. a chemical that kills insects      |
| 7. pesticide         |  | g. poisonous, harmful                 |
| 8. infertility       |  | h. a test                             |
| 9. offspring         |  | i. changed                            |
| 10. altered          |  | j. 10 years                           |
| 11. overlooked       |  | k. in a big way, a very different way |
| 12. decade           |  | l. not noticed, missed                |

8. Questions: True or False

- a. The writer believes that GMO foods are safe T/F
- b. When we make GMOs, the DNA is damaged in unknown ways T/F
- c. The writer believes GM soy causes more allergies than normal soy T/F
- d. GM food damages the livers of humans T/F
- e. The long-term effects of GMOs may be difficult to see T/F

9. Discussion questions: Discuss with a partner

- a. Are GM foods available in Japan?
- b. What do you think about this article? Do you think GMOs are dangerous?

c. If GM food was cheaper than normal food, would you buy it?

10. Summary: Write a short summary of the article 20-30 words.

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**11. Writing task:**

Now, write a short essay (about ten lines), answering these questions:

Who wrote this pamphlet? What is their worldview? (世界観)

Why did they write it?

How does the writer try to persuade (説得する) the reader?

## APPENDIX IV

### Template for student journal

# Classroom Diary



Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Number: \_\_\_\_\_

Please write some comments about these topics

*What I did in today's class*

*What I learned*

*How I felt about the class*

*Problems I had*

*Other comments*