Report from the Field

From Theory to Practice: A Mixed Approach to Teaching Critical Thinking, Argumentative Writing, & Rhetoric in an Asynchronous Writing Course

This report from the field considers a few implications for teaching critical thinking ("CT") and writing based on a meta-analysis research study that examines various approaches to teaching CT. While the study offers a definition of CT and reaffirms the effectiveness of a mixed approach to teaching CT over the general, immersion, and the infusion approach, it stops short of delineating a mixed approach to teaching CT in an argumentative writing class coinciding with a pandemic era. This report segues from a mixed approach theory to teaching CT to highlight its practice in an asynchronous writing course and students' response.

English Courses Today and Practice

Today, it is not uncommon in a four-year university, or even two-year community college, for students enrolled in a first-year writing course to encounter topics touching on literary analysis, rhetorical analysis, or argumentative writing (ADE, 2018). Advocating for a mixed approach in teaching composition and critical thinking seems a little less controversial considering the menagerie of majors and interests of students enrolled in a writing course. A mixed approach to teaching writing, one that combines rhetoric, dialectic, and logic, can be conceived in pedagogical theory. But it is in the classroom practice, lessons, activities, and assignment designs where I believe the battle is won or lost in this enduring debate. In a pandemic era, teaching CT in a writing course must be visually engaging, practically intense, inviting students to reflect on their CT learning journey.

CT from a Student-Focused Perspective and their Disposition

I agree with Kathleen Blake Yancey (2015) that "writing is indeed very different from one discipline to the next, though there are patterns of similarity—chiefly, an attention to writing process, a valuing of evidence, and a concern for audience" and that certain "writing cultures" that can help student apply critical thinking skills will "have common points of reference" (p. 13). Whenever I am teaching a first-year writing course, during the introductory stage, I ask students the following question: "What do you hope to gain out of this class?" Diligent students who have read my course syllabus often try to tailor their response to the class theme, saying something to this effect: "I want to learn how to write better arguments." But most of the responses I get from students are almost always very predictable: "I want to be a better writer." But what does it mean "to be a better writer?" This is another question that I ask my developmental composition students, who typically respond by offering me a portrait of someone they know who writes well, reads well, speaks well, or analyzes well. To skirt the problem of students giving me predictable generic responses, I now devise introductory surveys which I post electronically on our college's learning management system for them to complete as part of the course orientation.

Yancey writes: "As important in this endeavor to support students' thinking and writing is that students participate in processes of exploration into, and explication of, what we might call disciplinary ways of knowing, an exploration that is contextualized by each student's prior knowledge. Given that each student brings with him or her unique prior knowledge and experiences contextualizing the college intellectual journey, each one needs to map that journey—metaphorically and sometimes quite literally" (p. 2). In addition, Yancey makes clear that "Such a journey includes both learning about disciplinary similarities and differences and articulating what they mean for thinking and writing in a given discipline—for members of a discipline and for those outside the discipline—as well as for thinking and writing across disciplines" (p. 2). However, I believe that this "journey"[i] needs to begin with a reflective activity on what students believe, hold true, understand, or accept as CT.

In my more advanced composition classes, I am usually interested in hearing what students have to say about CT before I begin teaching it to them as I know and understand it. So last spring semester, I asked 17 students this question: "Share some of your thoughts when you hear the phrase *Critical Thinking.*" I got 15 different answers! Yet in most answers were key phrases and terms that one would easily find in Harold Bloom's (1956)

evergreen taxonomy of learning objectives associated with metacognition: evaluation, analysis, in depth thinking, meaning making, problem solving, create, research, share, and so on.

Without a doubt, students bring their own set of assumptions, expectations, career goals, disciplinary training, professional training, interests, beliefs, cultures, and experiences to a writing class. In theory, students can have an opinion, a belief, an expectation on what they need to do to become a better writer and agree on baseline skills they will need to learn to make better arguments, but in practice, they might struggle to adapt to these skills, or when challenged, resort to their echo chambers. As Abrami et al (2008) put it, the "Delphi panel maintained that it was possible to possess the cognitive skills necessary to carry out CT but lack the affective dispositions—the general habits and attitudes—to exercise these skills. Consider the example of a person who possessed the cognitive skills associated with CT but who lacked the disposition to learn about or discuss social issues—it would be difficult to call this individual an effective critical thinker" (p.3). As I will show in this report, some students' ability to absorb CT skills and other methodologies for effective argumentations often clash with their dispositions, writing attitudes and beliefs.

Defining CT and the Best Approach to Teaching It

It is a disjunctive fallacy to define CT or limit its teaching to the infusionist, the specifist, or just the generalist. Davies (2008) has argued that the debate between the "generalist" and the "specifists" rests on the fallacy of false alternative (Davies, 2006 p.332). Rather than prolonging this perennial debate on defining CT, the debate must shift to the practice of teaching CT, course design and assignment design for CT and practical examples how this may be done or not done in a writing course. It is with this approach in mind that I situate my mixed approach to teaching CT in an asynchronous writing course.

In a meta-analysis research study published by Abrami et al (2008), the authors defined CT as "…the ability to engage in purposeful, self-regulatory judgement" (p.1122).This is in fact a short summary of the sophisticated definition of CT by the American Philosophical Association's panel of 46 experts as highlighted by Facione (1990): "We understand critical thinking to be purposeful, self-regulatory judgment which results in interpretation, analysis, evaluation, and inference, as well as explanation of the evidential, conceptual, methodological, criteriological, or contextual considerations upon which that judgment is based" (p.3). Not seeking to rehearse all the details of this informative meta-analysis study on CT and dispositions, for the purpose of this report, I shall focus on a key takeaway from the summary of research over the years on CT the study highlights, a takeaway from the definition of CT it presents, and some practical applications and considerations in designing assignments and activities in the classroom that might help develop students CT skills in understanding arguments and articulating them in a fair way before going on to critique them.

Mixed Approach to Teaching CT is the Most Effective, So What?

The mixed approach, not general approach, not immersion, approach, not infusion approach, "…that combine both content and critical thinking instruction significantly outperformed all other types of instruction" on CT (Abrami et al, p.1117). The other CT approach closest in effectiveness to the mixed approach is the infusion approach, which

demands "…well-understood subject matter instruction in which students are encouraged to think critically in the subject" (p.1106). The authors inform us that students who engage in collaborative group work have a slight advantage in learning CT skills over students who do not engage in such. They find that "…improvements in students' CT skills and dispositions cannot be a matter of implicit expectation. As important as the development of CT skills is, educators must take steps to make CT objectives explicit in courses…" (p. 1121). As noted earlier, I endeavor to be explicit in teaching CT objectives starting with my course syllabus to my class activities and assignments.

Institutional Context: First-Year Writing in Community College, & CT
For example, English 102 Composition serves as an advance English course taken by first year college students at XXX, Additionally, the course continues from English 101, where emphasis is on the writing of expository prose. The catalogue describes ENG 102 as "reading literature and writing various prose. Introduces methods used in writing investigative papers." I will focus on English 102 Composition at X and the three out four course objectives as I applied them to teaching argumentative writing. Below are the learning objectives contained in my literary analysis assignment:

- Demonstrate proficiency in interpreting, analyzing, and responding.
- Demonstrate proficiency in the academic research process, which includes gathering data, using the library, taking notes, evaluating source material, drafting, and revising the research paper, putting the research paper in finished form according to the MLA format.
- Demonstrate an understanding of the elements of literature, such as structure, imagery/symbolism, point of view, setting/atmosphere, theme, and style.

From Theory to Practice: Course Goals in an Asynchronous Writing Course
In teaching this course, I foresaw that some of my students would have some issues with grammar mechanics. I anticipated that some of them would have some experience responding to various persuasive writing prompts and encountering rhetorical terms like logos, ethos, and pathos. I expected that many of them would be shocked, cynical, or surprised when their various arguments are intensely scrutinized, put under the light of reason, logic, and evidence. What I could not anticipate entirely was some of my students' struggle to identify the various audiences invoked by an argument, the basic rules of logic, and the presence of logical arguments manifested in practical forms such as in visual images.

In spite of this, my goal was to challenge my students not to take the part of least resistance in crafting argumentative essays: that if they should give their viewpoints and reasons for them, they should not walk away without taking into consideration an alternative or possible objections to their arguments; that if they were to engage in summarizing a position of an author, they should also grapple with how the author's main idea and supporting idea work together; that if they should seek to explain an author or writer's motivation, they will be able to, without imputing their own prejudice onto the author, identify the author's method of argumentation, and explain the type of rhetorical device that the author used to develop his/her argument. More so, I believe that in a civil society, if students cannot articulate an opposing position in its best light, they cannot fairly participate in a civil debate or discussion.

As Brian Jackson (2007) writes on John Dewey's perspective on the importance of communication skills for civic citizens: "…civic communication must be more engaging, poetic, analytical and deliberative than the mere exercise of the 'inalienable sacred authority' of free speech afforded the individual in classical liberalism" (p,189). On this score, I wanted my students to take on the role of neutral mediators as they craft summaries before they move on to the role of arbitrators, analyzing, critiquing, and offering their own judgment on viewpoints with which they disagree. While I had a clear idea of how my lessons objectives were going to be incorporated in activities and assignments, the practical implementation of my pedagogical goals were not so successful for many reasons—from the lack of cooperation of some students assigned to work in group, the disruption caused by the pandemic in students lives, the struggle of some students to adapt to e-college and their time management skills in an unusual era, and insufficient time to achieve all my course objectives in a 13-week course.

Teaching an argumentative writing class online with a focus on CT in a pandemic era and teaching the class face to face are two different pedagogical tales. In a face-to-face class, students may arrive class, listen to lecture and are generally invited, not mandated (at least I do not do that), to respond to questions or provide their thoughts on the readings. But in my asynchronous online class, students *had* to participate on discussion forums. To be clear, during my class orientation, I made students aware that group work, participation on online discussion board posts were non-negotiable unless they had strong reasons for not being able to participate. Contributing to the discussion board forum was a particular struggle for my ESL students in the course, many of whom told me they needed more time to think and plan out their responses. But so was it for my native speaker students, especially those who thought they could just skim through reading a writing prompt and respond to it without dedicating sufficient time to draft, revise, and publish their work on the discussion forum. As an act of mercy, I often extended the deadlines for posts or graded their late work.

I planned activities and assignment around the following topics: Literary analysis, argument mapping, rhetorical analysis, cognitive bias and summary, civility, democracy, openness, critical thinking, democracy, debate, arguments, literary devices and propaganda, argument exercises and critical research. *Everything's an Argument* was our main course textbook. The book had selected chapter topics such ones as reading, understanding, analyzing, and identifying arguments. It was modern, up to date with my mostly Generation Z students, touching on social media, smart phones, visual images, and many contemporary issues. Yet, the book was less than perfect for my course goals; I incorporated simplified notes from my reading of "identifying an argument" section in the book into an electronic document I distributed to students to help them easily navigate topics better. The book placed undue emphasis on the illogicality of some political officials as though illogicality was a phenomenon to be observed on only on one side of the political aisle and not in another. In addition, the book neither made a clear distinction nor did it discuss the difference between inductive and deductive reasoning, something that I thought was important to introduce students to the laws of logic, reasoning, and evidence. To expose students to more diverse perspectives, readings, and critical essays, we had course readings, notably articles from Michael Roth "Young Minds in Critical Condition," Molly Worthen "Stop Saying I Feel Like," John McWhorter's "When Slogans Become

Arguments," Steven Pinker's "Mind Over Mass Media," and even the movie from a mostly African American cast members, *The Great Debaters*.

Course Breadth: Readings, Materials, Activities, & Assignments

The class first meeting, week, activity, assignment, and discussion board post were all necessary for me to cue students about the direction of my course, which is encapsulated in the following theme: *Literary Analysis, Critical Thinking, and Research*. Short video clips I had found on YouTube and reading materials I had found online were just enough to help me illustrate and discuss my class theme. Since the class was asynchronous, students only needed to complete assignments and activities by their due dates. Some of the topics we covered during the first week of class were on feedback and writing attitude and the difference between analysis vs literary analysis. I was particularly interested in reading what students had to say about feedback and how they respond to it or even use it in writing, at work, or daily their lives. By having them read excerpts from Sheila Heen and Douglas Stone's book *Thanks for the Feedback* and watch a YouTube video workshop on feedback presented by Heen in which she discusses "The Science of Feedback." I wanted students to have some familiarity with the research on feedback and the variety of documented human responses to it and connect to one or more points of the empirical study to their experience. Since I was going to be given them some critical feedback, I wanted to gain a better understanding of how each of my student preferred to receive feedback and how, if possible, I could make necessary adjustments in communicating writing feedback to them.

Feedback and Teaching CT to Students: The Student Receiver Is in Charge

For students to understand an instructor's personality, attitude, or character, I believe this can shape their reception or rejection of feedback either in part or in its entirety. Since I was going to be doing some highly level critiquing of their writing from their discussion board posts' claims, evidence, arguments, response, to the conclusion of their papers or discussion board post, having them complete an activity on feedback and writing was rather taking them through a reflective process of their own disposition towards feedback—whether they liked it or not. Some of them do not. I once had a student in a writing course who was too sensitive to be getting what she believes were "too much constructive criticisms" feedback from me. In her final reflection essay, she told me instead what she wanted more: praise comments such as "You did an awesome job." Stumped by this student request in a reflection essay paper, I asked her, in my feedback comments, to describe *what* feedback was as she saw it. She never replied. Some students will accept feedback if it is critical and constructive. Unfortunately, not all students—and people—take it that way. As Heen rightly puts it, "it's the receiver who's in charge of what they take in, what sense they make of it, and whether and how they choose to change. It does not really matter how authoritative or powerful or even skillful the giver is" (The Science of Receiving Feedback, 1:18-1:29).

The first assignment I gave students in the course was a literary analysis assignment, and it was based on the movie *The Great Debaters*, a 2007 featuring Denzel Washington as Melvin Tolson, the debate coach who inspired his students to win college debates using logic and persuasive reasoning skills. I had the following as core learning objectives for this movie assignment:

- Use **appropriate rhetorical and literary modes,** critical thinking skills in reading, writing, analysis of a film.
- Demonstrate **careful reading and evaluation** of arguments and literary devices, terms/tools highlighting a person's motivations, conflicts, problems, or resolutions

This assignment was introduced to them in week two, along with a series of other scaffolding activities. Two main ones pertained to the analysis of visual images from the pandemic times and other key events that coincided with pandemic: the George Floyd police brutality protests and the January 6, 2021, attempted insurrection in the Capitol. I made this decision as these were the topics dominating the air waves prior to the start of my course, and I wanted students to be rhetorically aware of the arguments and debates surrounding these tragic and unfortunate events in our nation, especially the clickbait driven headlines dominating the news on the internet, television, and on social media platforms. So, I had planned that students will respond to the images in two phases, phase 1 and phase 2. Below are the instructions I gave students for part I:

Instructions:

- Select only ONE image below and analyze it according to the best of your ability. Be sure you state the image number/title that you are analyzing.
- End your analysis with a slogan that best captures your argument. For the purposes of this discussion board, we will define a "slogan" using Merriam Webster's definition, "a word or phrase used to express a characteristic position or stand or a goal to be achieved"

And the instructions for part II:

Instructions:

- Revisit your discussion board post "Evaluating & Responding to Images-Part I"
- Evaluate your analysis according to the criteria below and re-write (yes, write) your evaluation/analysis of the image (in a much more refined manner) again in Part 2

Criteria for Analysis

- **Purpose:** The goal of the image is usually made clear by the context, social, historical, religious, political, or aesthetic. Can you find the purpose of your image?
- **Composition:** How the contents of an image have been selected and arranged matter. Which details have been included or and which ones have been excluded? Composition may help explain what is emphasized in the photo and what is de-emphasized. What can you say about the composition of the image you analyzed?
- **Argument:** All visual images make some kind of argument. There is often an argumentative strategy used to communicate the message. What can you say about the argument in the image you analyzed?

In reviewing their response, about a third of my students did not do so well in part II, despite my clear instructions. These set of students repeated what they did in part I, reaffirmed popular cliches from the news and commentaries about the image, or failed to discuss or analyze the composition of the image, or only presented a superficial analysis that reaffirmed their own bias, not attempting to be neutral with the information they have

with them in plain sight. More than two thirds of my students struggled with composition criterion for interpreting their selected visual, and this category of students were the ones who presented a superficial analysis of the image or simply reechoed popular news headlines and viral commentaries that mostly fell along partisan political lines.

Figure 1: George Floyd Protest in Harlem, New York
Photo Credit: David 'Dee' Delgado/Getty Images

In one of the visual images assigned, (see Figure 1) a student made the following comments in phase II of the visual analysis exercise: "No one who supports the police can be moral." It came from a student whom I had observed written a series of cogent discussion board posts and well-reasoned arguments in her essays. Surprised by her apparent hasty generalization in her visual analysis, I personally reached out to her. I asked her for her thoughts on my feedback and if she had any questions for me. She made clear in no uncertain terms that she did not agree with my criticism. So, I reexplained that she had committed a logical fallacy by assuming that *all* people who support the police *are* immoral. Presenting an example on how she could still make a fair and more reasonable argument, I said she could make the case that the protesters were protesting *some* immoral police officers, especially the ones involved in the George Floyd murder or *some* immoral police officers still serving in uniform. She confidently said to me, "I still stand my ground on what I said." She did not see my point. I had given her a constructive criticism, feedback meant to help her detect a weakness in her argument, one that could shut down an opportunity to dialogue with people who support the police but are against racial discrimination and police brutality. I did not push the argument further with her, although I did mention that my criticism would make sense when we cover logical fallacies.

We can wax eloquent on the different strategies for teaching CT, rhetoric, or arguments to students. We can use tact and a soothing cadence to get students to see the internal inconsistencies in their arguments. We can invite students for a dialogue when they seem to have dropped a level in their analysis. But as Heen wisely noted on the limitation of receiving feedback, "it's the receiver who's in charge of what they take in, what sense they make of it, and whether and how they choose to change. It does not really matter how authoritative or powerful or even skillful the giver is." Some students are comfortable retaining beliefs based on their cognitive biases. But not all students.

Caitlyn was one such student who demonstrated resilience when I gave her a constructive criticism in a post she had submitted for part II. She said the following in her reflection essay:

> I was thoroughly confused when I had received that feedback the second time and did not understand what I had done wrong at first. But after I had read and reread the feedback and what I was being I asked to do for part II, I started to put the pieces together. I do know that for the future if I ever get any assignment similar in what the outcome to me as a student is supposed to be, I will need to carefully read what is being asked before applying my knowledge of concepts in my response, and I will need to develop a stronger sense of analysis of what I am given and how I critically think about it before submitting the assignment.

If students could identify all their missteps before critically responding to a prompt, they would have no room for growth in their learning of CT skills. If we are willing to accept that teaching CT is hard, we should not be flummoxed when students struggle to respond to the prompt completely or make a botched attempt doing so (Van Gelder, p. 42, 2005). Caitlyn had a "growth mindset" and was thus expanding her critical reasoning skills by identifying her own points of weaknesses in reasoning, but the other student had a "fixed mindset" (Dweck, 2016).

When I covered the CT unit in my course, I called the two main assignments for this unit "Viewpoint Summary and Argument Mapping" and "Room for Debate Essay." These two assignments piggy-backed off the literary analysis unit. In the "Viewpoint Summary and Argument Mapping," my goal was to get students to pay more attention to the connections between claims, evidence, conclusion, methods of argumentation, and some writers beliefs or viewpoint. It is a well-known fact that asking students to write summary essays builds their understanding of the material (Graham, S., MacArthur, C. A., & Fitzgerald, J, 2013). But it is a struggle for some students. If students cannot identify the main and supporting ideas of an essay, they will struggle to understand its purpose. If students do not understand the purpose of a text and are asked to summarize it, their summary of the text will hardly show understanding—it is likely a slanted version of the author's perspective. If students cannot fairly outline an argument, they cannot fairly critique it. If they attempt to critique it, they likely will be critiquing a strawman argument. If students are critiquing strawman arguments, their maturity in critical reasoning and reading skills are in doubt.

Argument Mapping, CT, and College Composition

One benefit of having student produce a viewpoint summary of a piece before they go onto map out one or more arguments of the author is that even if their summary of the argument is reflective of a confirmation bias that they have and have brought to the summary, that bias is most like going to be challenged if they are asked to produce an argument map of it by representing it in visual format. Argument Mapping is "a more transparent and effective way to represent arguments and so they make the cooperation of critical thinking straightforward, resulting in faster growth in critical thinking skills" (Van Gelder, p 45, 2005). When reading and writing summaries for essays, I introduced students to the basics of argument mapping as outlined by Tim Van Gelder, but I add another perspective to this—a five-step procedure I developed to help students map out the main argument of an essay. The steps are as follows:

1. Locate the main idea/conclusion
2. Identify supporting claims

3. Separate the main claim from the supporting claims
4. Apply the substitution test
5. Arrange, structure, and formalize the argument

In support of my five-step method, here is a paragraph excerpt taken from "Too Much Phone Use Can Hurt. But You Can Protect Your Teen" an article in Time magazine, Jean Twenge writes:

> And in the real world, percent variance is irrelevant — parents are not keeping a tally of how much of their kid's happiness is linked to technology use compared with uncontrollable factors like genetics and past trauma. Instead, they want to know whether too much tech time is linked to depression, and all of the large studies show this is true. Whether heavy digital media use causes depression or unhappiness is less clear; several studies suggest that it might, but more experiments are needed in order to say for sure. However, this doesn't mean we should do nothing. Had public-health advocates waited for absolute experimental proof that cigarettes caused lung cancer, they might still be waiting to take action.

Students who were able to identify Twenge's method of argumentation, and the type of argument she made here were able to accurately summarize her main idea. They recognized that this key paragraph was essential to her main argument. But students who mistook Twenge's proposal style argument for a cause-and-effect argument, got their facts wrong in their summary essay and misrepresented her main argument. They had struggled to summarize the reading because they could not identify her main argument.

Mapping Jean Twenge's Argument

1. **Locate the main idea/conclusion**: "However, this doesn't mean we should do nothing." is the main idea/conclusion because it is the focus of this paragraph's argument and, indeed, the entire essay. As Twenge makes clear in her next sentence, we ought to do something. Denying this would nullify her main argument.
2. **Identify supporting claims**: "Instead, they want to know whether too much tech time is linked to depression, and all of the large studies show this is true. Whether heavy digital media use causes depression or unhappiness is less clear; several studies suggest that it might, but more experiments are needed in order to say for sure. Had public-health advocates waited for absolute experimental proof that cigarettes caused lung cancer, they might still be waiting to take action" are the supporting claims for the Twenge's main idea because they serve as the reasons or evidence for holding her position. In addition, her position that we [parents] ought to do something is further strengthened.
3. **Separate the main claim from the supporting claims**
   Main Claim: Parents should [take actions to] reduce digital media usage of their kids.
   Supporting Claim 1: Digital media might not be the cause of depression, but that does not mean we should not act.
   Supporting Claim 2: Studies show more than two hours of digital media a day cause unhappiness.

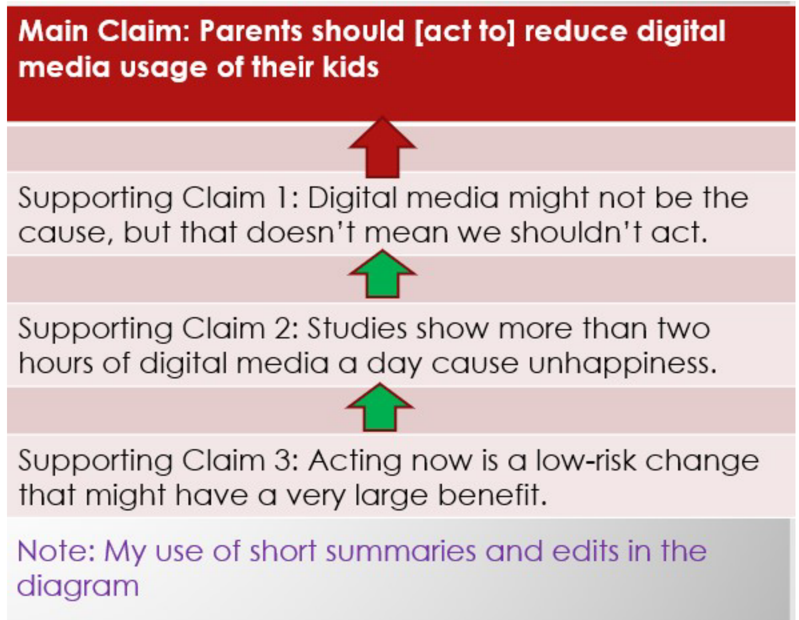
Supporting Claim 3: Acting now is a low-risk change that might have a very large benefit. Cites history Cigarette = lung cancer.

4. **Apply the substitution test**

   Main Claim: Studies show more than two hours of digital media a day cause unhappiness.
   [Problem: This is a reason, not a conclusion]
   Supporting Claim 1: Parents should [act to] reduce digital media usage of their kids.
   [Problem: This is not a reason but a conclusion]
   Supporting Claim 2: Digital media might not be the cause, but that does not mean we should not act.

5. **Arrange, structure, and formalize the argument**

Figure 2[ii]: Argument Map of Jean Twenge's Main Idea in "Too Much Phone Use Can Hurt. But You Can Protect Your Teen"



Here is how a mapped-out summary capturing Twenge's main point might look like. While Twenge theorizes that she suspects cellphones or other digital devices may well be responsible for the decline in mental health and happiness among teens, she is careful not to draw that conclusion as an established fact. Rather, she points out that the data is inconclusive. So, she opts for another strategy: the adoption of a proposal argument to make her case.

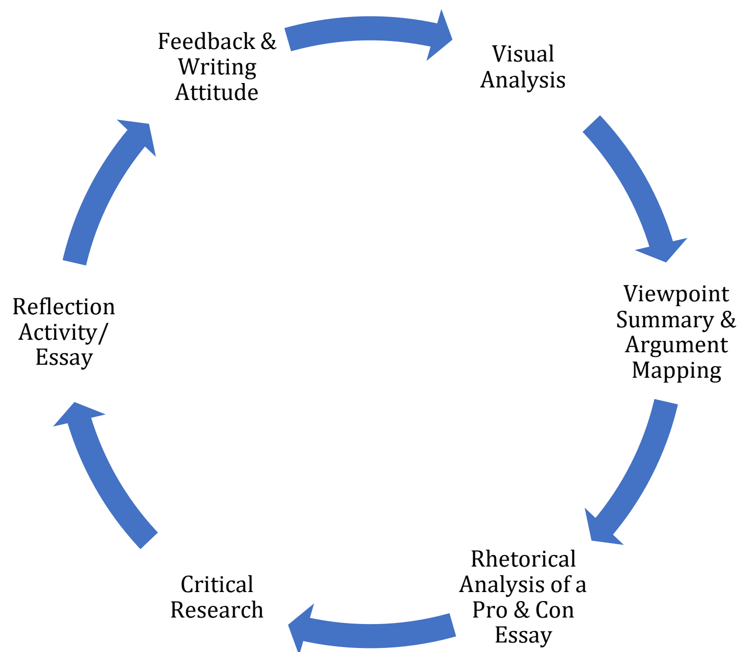
Room for Debate, Capstone Assignment, and Reflection Essay
In the second assignment "Room for Debate," my goal was to expose students to ideological clashes between scholars who are equally using the tools of logic, reasoning, and evidence to debate social issues, academic issues, or policy issues or topic, or practice featuring the pros and the con for the issue. I called this next assignment Room for Debate. Asking students to summarize and analyze an essay, depending on the instructions given to them and how students respond to them, may reveal what students know about arguments and their willingness to put themselves in another writer's shoes and reason with him or her. This was what the Room for Debate assignment called for. So, I had students participate in rhetorical analysis group activities. Here is Caitlyn's remark on her group work with another student:

> For this activity I was actually pretty confident working on, and I felt like I understood what was being asked of me. Knowing that this assignment was more

questioned based after reading two authors opposing views gave me confidence as I feel that is where I am a bit stronger when it came to critical thinking and writing. Although I did have peer help, I feel that aided me and actually benefited both of us to have a peer to critically think with. In this assignment something we were asked was to find the author's thesis and find the clues that lead to the thesis. We also had to identify their claims that supported their thesis.

The capstone project for the course is introduced after the Room for Debate assignment. Students select a refined argumentative topic, they are then orientated to the process of academic college research, and work on a two-week process of editing and revising before polishing and submitting their final draft. The course is ended with a reflection essay in which students reflect on their high and low points in the class and some takeaways as they move on.

***Figure 3*: A diagram summarizing my approach to teaching CT, Rhetoric, and Arguments**



Concluding Remarks

CT is "…the ability to engage in purposeful, self-regulatory judgement" (Abrami et al 2008, p.1122). In an asynchronous class, where students have the time to think and plan their responses, teaching CT to students should begin and end with a reflective activity. Students may begin their first writing activity by reflecting on their attitude towards writing, specifically, their process of receiving feedback and their general thoughts about CT (see figure 3). Because many students taking first-year writing courses today are coming from a world saturated with visuals and other multimodal contents, student will reflect and critical analyze selected images that are appropriate for an institution's standards and echoed in clearly stated course objectives. To encourage students to give the

writer/messenger the benefit of the doubt before they move on to critique or accept the writer's message or argument, they write a summary of a viewpoint essay and map out the argument the author(s) is trying to make. As most academic writers and non-academic writers have different styles of writing and responding to an issue or problem, students undertake a rhetorical analysis of a pro and con argumentative essay. In the capstone assignment of the course, students complete a research project based on an argumentative topic of their choice, where they combine the CT skills they have been learning and cultivating throughout the semester in the final deliverable. The final activity of the course is capped by having students complete a reflection essay, which asks them to reflect on the work done in the class, especially their high and low points in completing tasks and assignments during a pandemic semester. If we encourage students to a take a metacognitive approach to their learning of CT, the growth or hurdles they are experiencing in their journey, and if we ask them to reflect on their response to instructions, feedback they have received on CT, and write down their thoughts and their takeaways from learning CT, won't they become more conscious, better learners and professionals? Reflection yields more critical thinking dividends for those who engage in it.

Note:
Permission was obtained from students for all quotes.

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[i] To be fair to Kathleen Blake Yancey, she has written in depth about the role of reflection in teaching for transfer and writing. For more information, see: Taczak, K., & Robertson, L. (in press). Reiterative reflection in the 21st century writing classroom: An integrated approach to teaching for transfer. In K. B. Yancey (Ed.), *A rhetoric of reflection*. Logan: Utah State University Press

[ii] Note that my use of arrows pointing upwards in this argument map is not to indicate a logical sequence of connections among supporting claims but rather individual logical supports for the main claims as offered by the arguer/writer/messenger. There are many software and tools for argument mapping available online. For more example, see https://www.rationaleonline.com/