

Argumentation in second-language academic writing: teacher and learner perspectives

This paper is the result of collaboration between academics working in the same field but in different countries and contexts. It attempts to apply theories of argumentation and criticality formulated with reference to a first-language academic environment to the teaching of second-language writing. In particular, it will investigate teacher and learner perspectives on argument in undergraduate essays written as part of a BA in modern languages at an Italian university.

The students in question were taking a semester-long course in the third and final year of their studies. As part of the course, they were required to submit three essays and two pieces of reflective writing regarding their writing skills, one at the beginning and one at the end of the course. The course also involved an online component: the assignments were submitted by means of a computer conferencing system and involved a process of peer review of first drafts before the submission of the final version of the essay.

The paper will first look at how the essays were assessed by a group of language experts, in order to understand how valuable they consider the ability to argue and to display critical thinking. As Andrews (2007: 3) affirms: "Argumentative capacity is the hidden criterion in the assessment of student essays, research papers, critiques and syntheses from about the age of 16 upwards." The teacher assessments will then be compared with the perceptions of the students themselves, collected by means of their peer-review comments and their reflections on their own writing. In light of the findings, the paper will provide some suggestions as to how argumentative capacity may be fostered in a second-language environment.

Andrews, R. (2007). "Argumentation, critical thinking and the postgraduate dissertation", *Educational Review*, 59(1), 1–18.

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