

# IMPROVING CRITICAL THINKING AND MEDIA AWARENESS THROUGH CLIL

Curtis REVIS and Kazuhito AMANAI

*National Institute of Technology, Tokuyama, Liberal Arts Division*

# IMPROVING CRITICAL THINKING AND MEDIA AWARENESS THROUGH CLIL

**CLIL:** “Why do we use this language?”

**MEDIA AWARENESS:** “Why do they say it that way?”

**CRITICAL THINKING:** “Why do I think this way?”

**By studying Media Awareness through CLIL,  
we switch from passive linguistic engagement  
to intensive engagement with language and  
deliberative processes.**



Why do we use this  
language?

“We use English in this class because we will judge the trustworthiness of English-language news sources, and because communicating in a foreign language forces us to think about our thinking.”

Because **CLIL** makes foreign language the means by which students learn a subject, it prompts intensive interaction with language.

**“Trump to Dismantle Healthcare”**

**“Trump to Change Healthcare”**

**Two headlines, same subject.  
Which do you trust more? Your answer will  
depend on how, and how well, you engage  
with the difference between just 2 words.**



Why say it this way?

**Media awareness** is important for judging the trustworthiness of information sources. This is **essential** in a time of increased globalization and media saturation. Practicing media awareness in a CLIL class can improve our students critical thinking skills.

# Suggested General Lesson Framework

- I. Students read teacher-assigned English-language news articles at home, to be discussed during the next lesson. These should be the headline and perhaps first part of the articles, but not the complete articles.
- II. In class, students identify differences between two or three articles (preferably short).
- III. Teacher models useful, critical questions throughout the lesson: “Who/What is the source of the information? Does the source have training in that area? Who owns this news source?” etc.



# Sample At-Home Reading

Headline 1:

**“Trump Seeks to Dismantle Healthcare”**

Headline 2:

**“Trump Wants to Change Healthcare”**

**Write answers to these questions before coming to class:**

**What is different about these two headlines?**

**Which headline sounds more trustworthy? Why?**

# Opening Questions

- What is the difference between “change” and “dismantle”? Which headline do you trust? Why? Talk together for 5 minutes.
- You may use dictionaries and smartphones.

- The opening questions introduce the day's topic and provides students a chance to warm-up.
- This also provides the teacher a chance to identify students' strengths and weaknesses and to tailor subsequent lesson steps accordingly. Adaptive teaching is essential in CLIL.

# Lesson Steps

1. Pairs share their answers from discussing their homework with the class.
2. Reading(s): students read continuing successive, small parts of the articles.
3. Pairs or groups identify further differences between the articles.
4. As a class, students discuss the effect of these differences—teacher providing guidance/structure as necessary.
5. Repeat steps 2, 3, and 4, until articles are finished, and then rank sources in order of trustworthiness.

# Further Suggestions

Ranking is not the only final production. Role-plays, debates, and other methods could be used to engage students. For example:

- Teacher gives an event. Each group of students write a report of the event. Groups then share their article with other groups, with the purpose of identifying and defending differences in reporting.
- Assign students to defend as most trustworthy an article they judged less trustworthy.

These activities should focus on having students try to see the article from different points of view.

# Options to Challenge the Students

- **Investigate the source:** Teachers could direct students to use smartphones or computers to investigate the reliability of the news source, and to present their findings in English to the class.
- **Count the sources:** Have students count the number of sources for any evidence given. How many sources are given in the article? Ask the students if a higher number of sources or evidence makes the article more reliable, and why do they think so?

# Engaging the Quiet Students

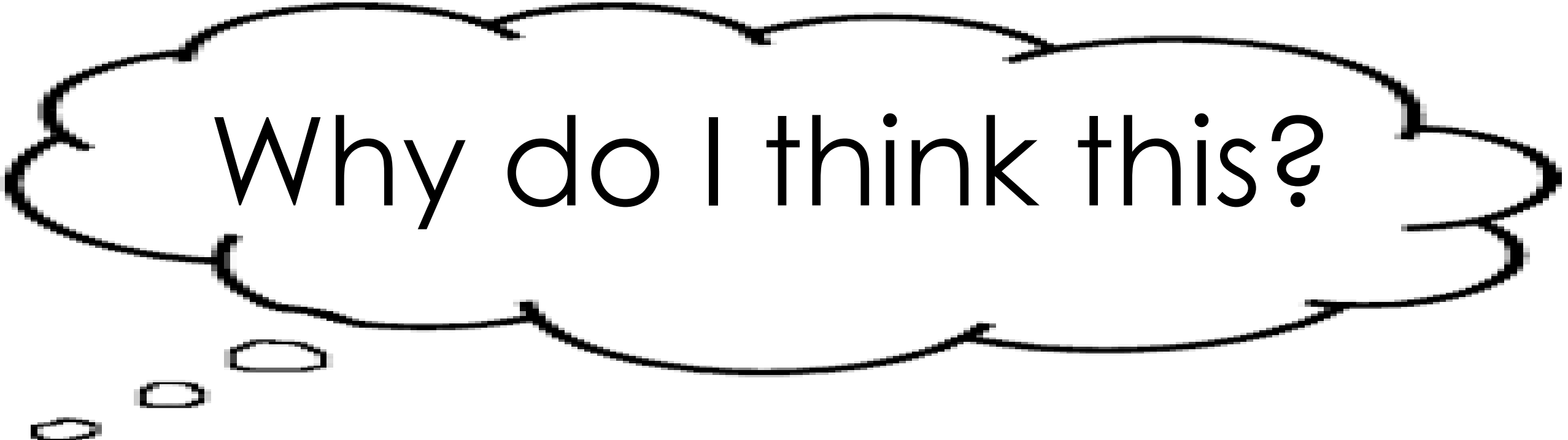
- **Snowball fight:** have students write answers to a question/prompt on a piece of paper, which they then crumple up. All students throw their “snowball” up into the air, and then pick up one close to them and read it aloud.
- Always have students discuss in pairs or groups before eliciting responses or answers from the students. Use a random name or number generator to call on students.
- Online survey of answers: Kahoot! is a great way for students to contribute answers in class without actually have to speak. It does foster participation and can increase student confidence.

# Lesson Goals

- Students explore the topic in a second language.
- Students see the articles from different points of view.
- Students question their own assumptions.

Mastering English or fully comprehending the articles are NOT lesson goals.





# Why do I think this?

Guiding students into critical thinking.

## **“Trump Seeks to Dismantle Healthcare”**

This sounds like a problem. —Why?

Dismantle is bad. —Why do you think so?

It means “to take apart”. —Can we take things apart to fix them?

Maybe yes. —For example?

**Common sense** says **critical thinking** is argumentation.

**Common sense** is (often) wrong.

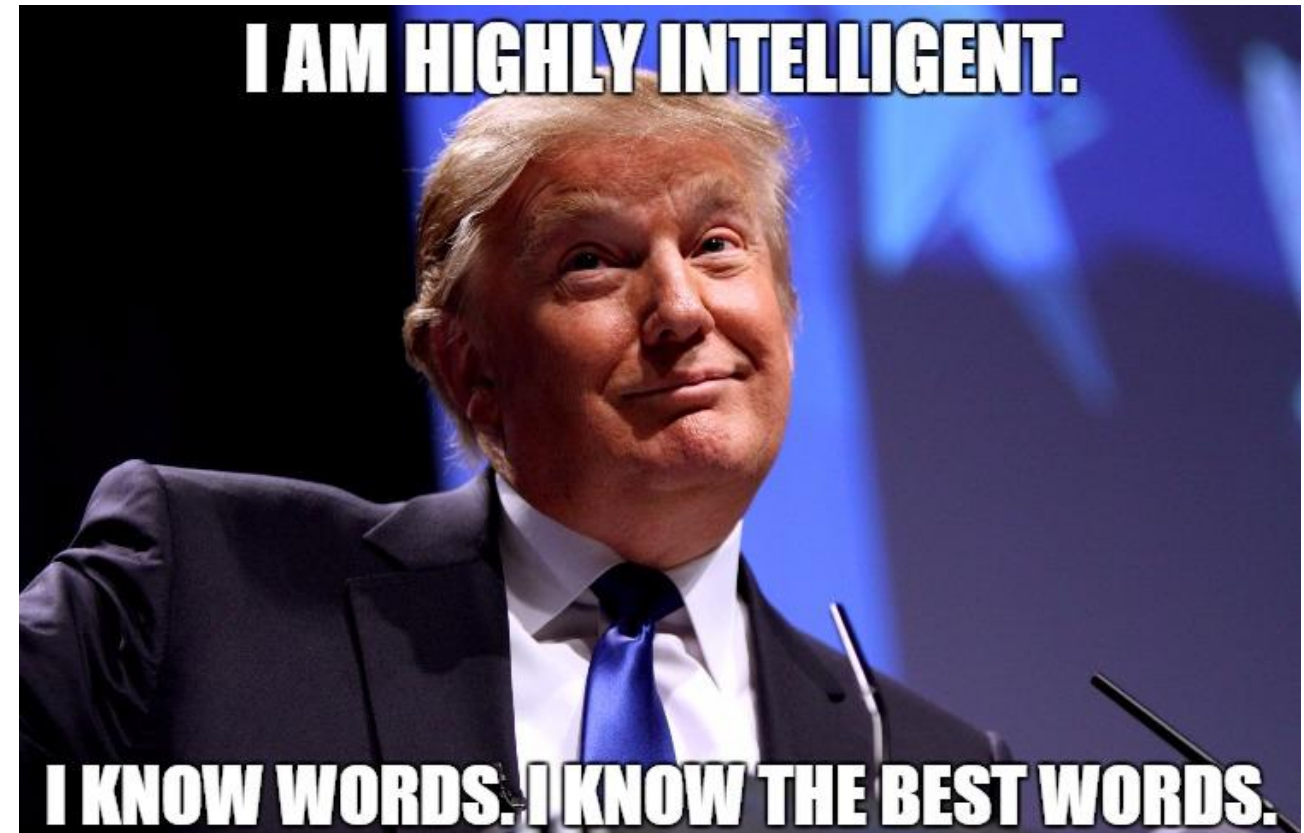
**Critical thinking** is thinking about our thinking.

**Critical thinking** is the active questioning of our assumptions.

**“Critical thinking entails...a  
commitment to overcome our  
native egocentrism and  
sociocentrism.”**

*—The Foundation for Critical Thinking, 2015*

Egocentrism: an inability to consider the opinions of others.



Sociocentrism: the assumption that one's own social group is always correct.

# Teachers Must Teach Critical Thinking

- It does not come naturally.
- It is a skill, and, like all skills, it requires practice to improve.
- It assists students to develop independent opinions.
- It fosters awareness of other peoples' points of view, improving communication.

While increased globalization leads to increased opportunities for growth,

it also leads to increased exposure to new and troubling points of view.







An increasing number of media sources leads to an increasing amount of both information and misinformation.



Poor critical thinking skills leads to **increased susceptibility to false or misleading news.**

Faced with a bewildering array of news and opinions, **people tend to narrow their information sources to those that confirm their assumptions.**

As these trends progress, they lead to greater sociocentrism. This causes people to be exposed to alternative points of view less and less, leading to greater egocentrism.



Teaching critical thinking and media awareness in CLIL are effective ways of combating egocentrism and sociocentrism.

Also, as suggested by Costa, et al, in 2014's "Your Morals Depend on Language," engaging complex issues "in a foreign language may prompt deliberative processes and reduce emotionally-driven responses."

Essentially, having students make and defend choices in a foreign language helps them become more careful and deliberative thinkers.



Is this really necessary?

“Interior to Replace Obama-era Rule on Methane Emissions”

*Fox News, 12 September 2018*

“EPA May Slash Obama-era Methane Restrictions”

*Huffington Post, 11 September 2018*