



FLEXIBLE TRAINING MODELS: A RESPONSE TO THE CURRENT NEEDS

DIVERSITY AND SINERGY WHEN WRITING RESEARCH IN ENGLISH STUDIES

**A confluence of teachers, subjects and competences to guide the student towards
textual analysis and a more critical sense: the natural way.**

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1. **ABSTRACT:** In relation to and as a follow-up of the Didactic Innovation Project granted last June by URV (2013-2014) and titled “*Confluència de docents per la definició i desenvolupament de la competència textual del grau d’anglès. Anàlisi multinivel del text des de les diferents especialitats i assignatures.*”, I now intend to link that idea of “confluence “ and collaboration to a method of textual analysis based on process and the intertwining of intuition and cognition on the part of the students. Both the supporting confluence and the ensuing method would foster critical discourse analysis in them.
2. **RESUMEN:** El proyecto de Innovación Docente “*Confluència de docents per la definició i desenvolupament de la competència textual del grau d’anglès. Anàlisi multinivel del text des de les diferents especialitats i assignatures.*” (2013-2014) basado en la idea de « confluencia » de especialistas y especialidades, se relaciona ahora con un método de análisis textual basado en la idea de proceso y en la interacción entre intuición y cognición por parte del estudiante. Tanto esa confluencia previa como el método que ahora propongo contribuiría a fomentar la facultad de analizar críticamente el discurso en el alumno.



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3. KEYWORDS: diversity, collaboration, synergy, process learning, progressiveness, autonomy / **PALABRAS CLAVE:** diversitat, col·laboració, sinergia, aprenentatge centrat en el procés, progressivitat, autonomia.

4. DEVELOPMENT:

a) Objectives

The objective of the method is to foster critical discourse analysis among students.¹ It is through developing the student's critical eye and sense that discourse analysis becomes possible in students. In turn, critical discourse analysis is built on critical linguistics (as based on text analysis at different levels of study).

The main levels of analysis often named in critical linguistics (also in "stylistics")² are the following: phonetics and phonology (sound), semiotics (graphology, symbols, outlay and shape), morphology, syntax, semantics (word and sentence level) and finally pragmatics and discourse analysis. At any of the mentioned levels and further subdivisions, there is language choice: the writer chooses to write the text in a certain way. For the student, relying on the language choice of the text seems to be a prior step to any further, more sophisticated task involving a richer context. The confluence of teachers would actually provide different, complementary or opposing models for students to get pervaded by.

Thus, we have two purposes:

¹ Critical thinking is a high priority outcome of higher education – critical thinking skills are crucial for independent thinking and problem solving in both our students' professional and personal lives. But, what does it mean to be a critical thinker and how do we promote and assess it in our students? Critical thinking can be defined as being able to examine an issue by breaking it down, and evaluating it in a conscious manner, while providing arguments/evidence to support the evaluation. Below are some suggestions for promoting and assessing critical thinking in our students. <https://uwaterloo.ca/centre-for-teaching-excellence/teaching-resources/teaching-tips/developing-assignments/cross-discipline-skills/promoting-assessing-critical-thinking>.

² Short (2005).



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A long term purpose: a more critical attitude to the text in the different subjects focusing on texts (literature, text analysis, translation subjects ...).

Also, a prior purpose concerns a more linguistic process of analysis that relies on critical linguistics and, more particularly, on the multilevel analysis mentioned.

The method of textual analysis in that context could benefit studies like English, Communication and Translation Studies, where the teacher and her/his subject focuses on texts and requires from students textual skills, such as text analysis, writing, speaking, literature criticism, translation, etc. Such skills could be related to the concept of “textual competence”.

And the objectives as benefited from the teachers' process of analysis as a model and inspiration for the student

b) Description of my work

There are three states in the work carried out:

- i. The innovation project: the confluence of teachers to find similarities and differences in their perspectives of analysis
- ii. The method: designing a method for the student in the subject "advanced writing", devoted to academic writing.
- iii. The method as applied to a case study, a poem by Dylan Thomas and later to the Degree's Final Dissertation: Treball de Fi de Grau.

i. The confluence of teachers: a prior background for the method.

Before designing the method, the goal of this paper, there was a confluence and meeting of teachers of different specialties within the Innovation Project (ICE) titled: “*Confluència de docents per la definició i desenvolupament de la competència textual del grau d’anglès. Anàlisi multinivel del text des de les diferents especialitats i assignatures.*” (2013-2014)



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Such a confluence of teachers brought about the commentary under four different perspectives (from four teachers) of four texts chosen by them. Such commentaries show a variety of perspectives and may serve now as models for the students to help and induce them to find their own way of discovery in the method. Thus, we can now link the prior “confluence” of teachers to the method.

The individual perspective adopted by both teachers (and students) involves a certain amount of freedom, after having read samples from other teachers or other students to bring about synergies.

So, there is a task on the part of the different teachers (as associated with subjects and competences) (the goal of the confluence project), and another task on the part of the different students (the goal of this paper) who should apply the method we describe in ii).

Both teachers and students show diversity and synergy in a natural context and issue an analysis and interpretation of the text through an expository text (the “target text”), which may adopt the form the interpreter considers appropriate.³

Hence, the project promoted the analysis of different texts from different perspectives by teachers (as associated with their subjects). The method for the student can now benefit from such a range of perspectives which can serve to show him how the point of view may be at the same time personal and subjective, on the one hand, and objective, on the other hand, (as probably recognized by the field of knowledge as legitimate and linked to the subject in question). In other words, the student receives the different interpretations from the different perspectives as put forward by the teachers to show a range and diversity. It is made clear to the student that those are just possible ways or perspectives of analysis taken by the different teachers of the different subjects. Cultural studies, textual linguistics, syntax, ethnography and communication studies can clearly benefit from a confluence of perspectives (and from the method-guidance for the student described in ii) in the future, if

³ It is not relevant now to list the different genres regarding research (dissertation, essay, paper, academic article, etc.)



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we foster such a confluence. However, I would say that textual analysis and interpretation is inherent to any field of knowledge: to social science, to natural science, as interpreting the texts written by others in those fields is part of basic communication among researchers in any field of knowledge.

Thanks to the confluence, the student may see in the essays produced models of conduct and practice which he may become aware of (awareness) for later imitation or, ideally, for a natural development in him of similar or new, personal attitudes when approaching the text: both as a reader/writer and as a potential or actual researcher (creativity).

The confluence and then the method is meant to foster freedom of expression and research in teachers (the project) and later in students (the method). The experience of the confluence of teachers has led so far to more awareness of our personal and field perspectives and that of other teachers: showing similarities and diversities.

ii. The method/frame for the student used in the subject "Academic writing"

Both teachers and students show diversity and synergy in a natural context and issue an analysis and interpretation of the text through an expository text (the "target text"), which may adopt the form the interpreter considers appropriate.⁴

However, we now put forward a frame or method. Inspired by the voice of researchers and academic writing experts, the method involves a process in stages for the interpretation of the text, not as a "must", but rather as a very general frame. Thus, any interpreter can deviate from the path below to put forward his own approach and method in a free way. Diversity is now fostered or allowed on the same lines of the project.

However, the itinerary below may serve some interpreters if they do not have a clear path as to how to proceed.

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- 1) The idea of emotional reaction to the text (free writing)
- 2) The idea of intuition⁵ to produce a first interpretation: metaphors about the text and the interpretation process may arise.
- 3) Intuition and analysis hand in hand: from free writing to a more conscious writing (as awareness of the text analyzed grows). The outcome is then a preliminary/provisional frame where the teacher-student discovers the direction of his interest and regard on the text (as he produces his provisional analysis and the target text takes some pragmatic direction/intention/purpose-point of view). P-P. the perspective then becomes the purpose.
- 4) A still more rational approach: looking for evidence in the text (language choice, mainly) to back up the provisional conclusions: argumentation.
- 5) Some thought on the theoretical framework adopted.
- 6) Teachers/students compare other theoretical frameworks of analysis (as he has many examples from other teachers): each teacher/student adopts a new and final perspective and he sets his objectives or focus.
- 7) Further analysis as provoked by the new theoretical framework adopted which confirms or amplifies the spontaneous frame followed for 1 and 2.

To sum up: The itinerary or process modeled for text analysis is broad and open, rather a frame, and it is based on the following stages: Any task involving a first approach to the text, (for example a mere reaction to the text); then, a more careful reading where intuition¹

⁵ According to Albert Dou, the mathematician, intuitionism is never arbitrary, as “it is looking for whatever there is and discovers whatever there is in its constructive activity, always sticking to the reality that is within conscience itself”. On its part, “formalism benefits from permission for the utmost arbitrariness”, as it presupposes “with almost absolute freedom, the existence of its objects and the relationships among them.” (Translated by E.Ferran)



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helps the reader to draw some essential but provisional conclusion; thirdly, as intuition normally leads on to the need to seek reasons and evidence supporting or destroying such provisional conclusion, a more reasoned part; fourthly, the argumentation proper, and ultimately, the final conclusions.

And that in the context of collaboration, communication and confluence among students.

This very personal and autonomous work, which is carried out in the presence and company of others and their views, help the interpreter to sustain such a long process. He is also able to correct his own initial perspective as the group fosters this natural fitting.⁶

Thanks to this autonomy and freedom, and also to the presence and respect of others, the interpreter can correct and refine his own initial perspective (or else his hypothesis) if he needs to do so. This progressive refining in the interpreter of the initial ideas may come from mere motivation and interest; from the interest of research; from an interest in innovation, from the interest of students and for their benefit, etc.

Besides, the idea of process was basic to set out the method. And within the process, we find the idea of analysis and then, synthesis, as alternating. From the dissection of the text (analysis), the discovery of linguistic patterns ensue (first synthesis). The pieces (words, phrases, clauses, sentences) show those linguistic patterns that, in turn, evoke social and cultural contexts and practices. We enter the field of discourse analysis where the student becomes critical, as he starts resorting to his critical sense, the final purpose of the confluence and the ensuing method.

iii. Advanced writing: intuition and reason collaborating in textual analysis

Some of the text analyses from the teachers from the prior Confluence were used in class by the students, as they are ultimately the beneficiaries. In particular, I used the models of

⁶ The interpretation and analysis of others was meant not to influence a teacher's personal interpretation of the text, but we changed the criterion during the process, as it was a pity to lose the natural synergies that stem from the presence of other discourses.



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analysis in relation to a poem by Silverstein and a love letter by Dylan Thomas in in the subject “Academic Writing” (4th year students) preparing for their Degree's final dissertation. The teacher's commentaries served to introduce further work under the method.

Then, I showed the method through an example which showed all the stages (see ii))

Having followed the process of analysis myself beforehand, I was able to show the process in stages to students. I showed to them my own process of discovery of Dylan's love letter to start with (by showing my research journal). This way they could see that my discovery was based on prior sensory and intuitive decisions about the text (the text was more or less *fluid* or *jolty* depending on the lexis and syntax chosen). The image of *fluidity* used was then rationalized and defined as a complex concept to produce a more coherent and objective perspective of analysis. The example (fluidity) shows how useful the presence of metaphors and images can be as triggers prior to other cognitive responses to the text that led to conventional perspectives of analysis which may get closer to those adopted by the authors (or not).

The letter runs as follows:

O Caitlin Caitlin Caitlin my love my love, where are you & where am I and why haven't you written and I love you every second of every hour of every day & night. I love you, Caitlin. In all the hotel bedrooms I've been in in this two weeks, I've waited for you all the time. She can't be long now, I say to my damp miserable self, any minute now she'll be coming into the room: the most beautiful woman on the earth, and she is mine, & I am hers, until the end of the earth and long long after. Caitlin, I love you. Have you forgotten me? Do you hate me? Why don't you write? Two weeks may seem a small time but to me it's old as the hills & deep as my worship of you.... And in two weeks I've travelled all over the stinking place, even into the deep South: in 14 days I've given 14 readings... I'm coming back, by plane, on the 26th of May, & will tell you later just when the plane arrives. Will you meet me in London?.... I love you, I want you, it's burning hell without you. I don't want to see anybody or talk to anybody, I'm lost without you. I love your body & your soul & your eyes & your hair & your voice & the way you walk & talk. And that's all I can see now: you moving, in a light... I've been to foul Washington; I've been to Virginia & North Carolina and Pennsylvania & Syracuse....and now I'm back in New York, for two days, in the same room we had... I am profoundly in love with you, the only profundity I know....



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Then, it was their turn: the goal was an essay. The students were asked to follow a process based on the ideas put forward before and the itinerary explained. Each student focused on a different topic of analysis, freely, although some students felt like dealing with several issues at a time, in a more or less connected way. One student was interested in love in youth as more selfish by a selfish poet, according to her. Another one was interested in alliteration, another one on deviation, and so on. Accepting their individual interest and their **diverse subjectivity** allowed and helped them to choose the perspective and the main topic of analysis.

Then, they were able to draw from the knowledge acquired in the different subjects of the degree which cover different levels of study (phonetics, phonology, semantics, and pragmatics) to finally provide a more objective proposal to relate their main interest (fluidity, for example) with those aspects. So syntax becomes more fluid through parallel structures or transitions. Lexis becomes more fluid by using a certain register and using certain semantic fields, etc.

Throughout the whole process (in the intuitive or rational part) the student was helped to feel his own real interest in research, his own regard and perspective and asked to be authentic and true to himself when choosing the approach, the issue, and even the style in academic writing, which should in any case not be artificial.

Thus, the tools to achieve such a purpose in the student are the following:

PREPARATION: finding the main image or idea (a more intuitive part)

- Models of introspection and discovery put forward by different teachers
- Brainstorming while reading the text
- Looping
- Automatic writing



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- Free writing
- Any cognitive-emotional task in general to see the direction of interest, motivation and discourse in the student writer.

INTUITIVE HYPOTHESIS

- Self-discovery; self-awareness to produce a prior intuitive-analytical approach
- Free writing can develop into a researcher's log, where all the evidence is collected (the more rational part has started).

ORGANIZATION of the argumentation

- Clustering and branching
- Outlining
- Summarizing, paraphrasing

THE FINAL STAGE

- Writing in several drafts
- Editing

And the "essay" or dissertation came out in the context of the End of Degree Dissertation in English Studies.

The students were even freer (autonomous) as they did the following:

They chose the text or texts subject of analysis according to their taste and curiosity (also as relevant for the purpose).

During the ground work (reaction and then observation of the text at different levels or perspectives of analysis), they decided on the perspective and topic, also. They focused more on an aspect or on two as combining, or on the biography of the writer or the cultural context, etc. They felt free to choose their individual perspective.



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The time came of using their research log both for self discovery and awareness (to find their interest and perspective) and to order their argumentation and evidence while helping them to find their own voice. Hence, they reinforced their personal way of writing academically.

We held collective meetings. So, they all observed the other's process, as I solved problems and accompanied their work. This way, collaboration and synergy was guaranteed and I was surprised to see how they kept on sharing their work and helping one another in between meetings.

c) Results and/or conclusions

The method for text analysis devised managed to combine individual work with collaboration and synergy as an spontaneous outcome.

Such space for freedom and naturalness (as well as the idea of process and progression) allowed for discovery both of the perspective itself and of the text in question.⁷

However, it was difficult to induce free writing as used to explore the students' intuitions about the text as such, and its different aspects.

We still have to do research on the right stimuli to develop a more open attitude that relies on his own discovery and intuition as expressed in images and feelings.

That is why, after defining the model of analysis in this paper, it seems convenient to put into practice among any students interested in developing the relevant strategies mentioned (free writing, research journal writing, more analytical writing, etc.).

⁷ The approximate conclusion, non-rigorous and quick, leads on to further verification and a new more subtle conclusion in a progression that grows and grows until the researcher feels satisfied with the outcome. However, more refining is necessary to show, not only "false" interpretations, or rather, "too simple an interpretation". But, if it were not for the wrong, spontaneous, more intuitive part, there would be no verifying, no advance in science. So, everything is valid if it lies in our own perception, no matter whether a given paradigm, or whether the given paradigm then adopted (as our motivation seems to go that way) may decide that this piece of language, information, social practice is irrelevant in this context.



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