

# Enhancing Critical Thinking Skills Through Collaborative Tasks in An English Reading Class

-協同学習の概念に基づいた時事リーディング活動でクリティカルシンキングスキルを養う-

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## EAP Program

The title of the EAP program is “Current English 3 – Reading”. It is an elective course in the Rikkyo university curriculum for students who have a score of at least 700 in TOEIC Listening & Reading test. The main goal of this course is to help students acquire communicative skills necessary to study at universities in English-speaking countries. The class meets once a week for 15 weeks for 90 minutes each class meeting.

### [Part 1]

In the first 8 weeks, students are assigned a chapter in the textbook each week. They are required to study it in depth at home and prepare a discussion sheet on which they will lead group discussions in class. The sheet is comprised of vocabulary and comprehension questions on the reading, the summary of the text, a personal opinion and some discussion questions.

### [Part 2]

In the second half of the program, students work on a project in groups of 3 or 4. They work in collaboration to research on a topic of their interest, identify some controversies regarding the topic and suggest some solutions to them. Each group presents on their research to the class in the final week.

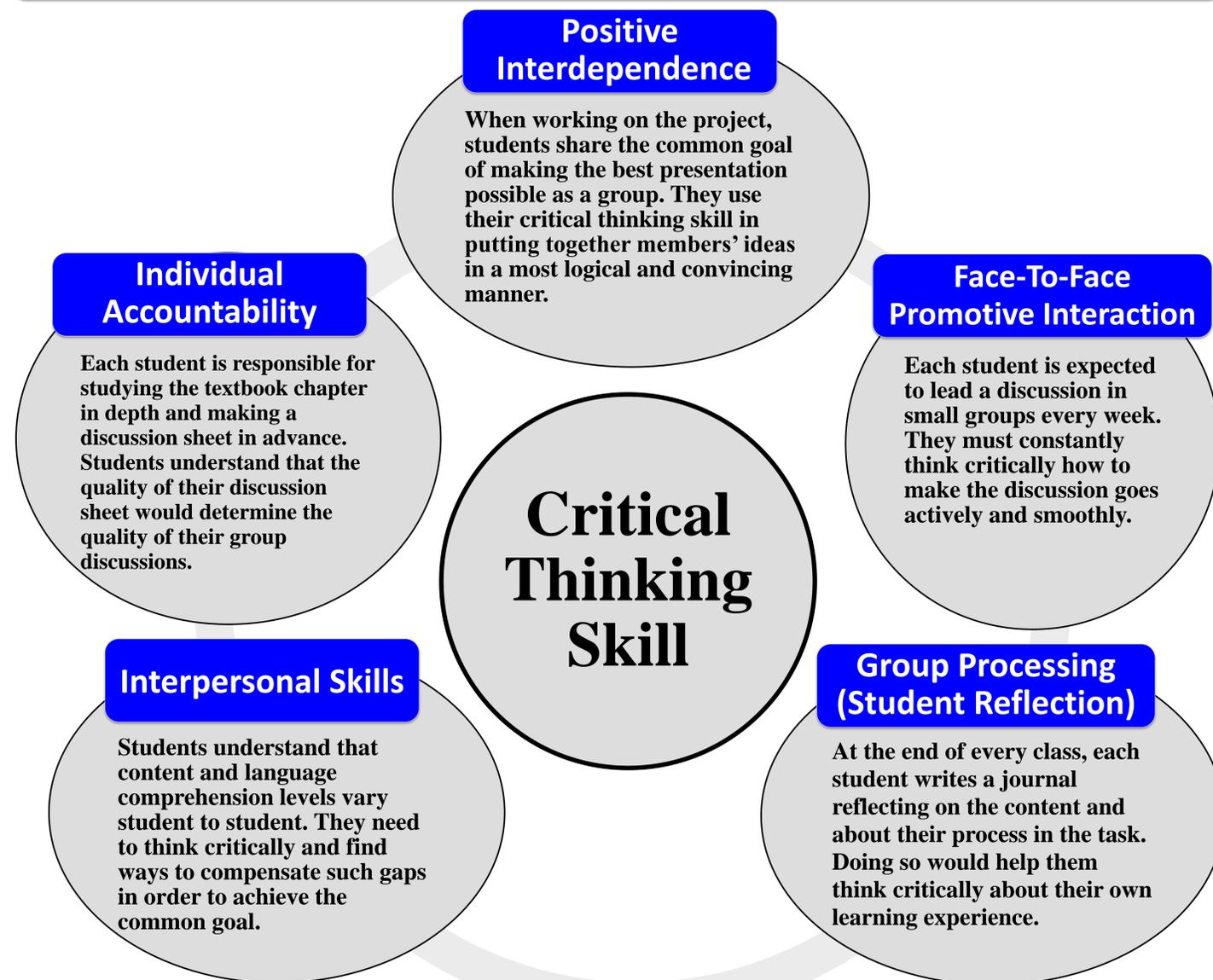
## Students

Ten students, 3 males and 7 females are registered. One female is a student from China and the rest is Japanese. Nine out of 10 have a study abroad experience. While all students clear the requirement of 700 in the TOEIC test, there is a considerable English proficiency gap between the most proficient and the least proficient students.

## Teacher's Role

The teacher's role in this EAP program is more of a facilitator rather than a lecturer. As enhancing students' critical thinking skill in English was at the top of my goals, I provided plenty of opportunities for students to explore firsthand the process of Bloom's Taxonomy of cognitive thinking of knowledge, comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis and evaluation through collaborative tasks. The big challenge for me was to provide necessary assistance to each student without compromising their autonomy in such a process. I made the round during the group discussions and intervened when the discussions were bogged down for whatever reasons. Also, I thoroughly read each student's discussion journal every week, wrote comments on them and returned to students at the beginning of the next class meeting.

## Critical Thinking Skills In Reference To Five Essential Components Of Cooperative Learning (Johnson, Johnson, & Holubec 1994)



## Students' voice

### Question:

Which skill(s) do you think this class helped you improve? (Select all that apply)

### Answer:

- reading (6)
- listening (2)
- speaking (7)
- writing (6)
- vocabulary knowledge (2)
- grammatical accuracy (0)
- critical thinking (8)
- interpersonal communication (1)
- other (Specify) (1)
- none (0)

\*A student who selected “other” specified her answer as “organizing ideas”.

### Comments:

#### [Students who selected “Reading”]

- We had to read a lot every week to write the discussion sheet.
- I learned useful expressions through reading the textbook and the articles for presentation research.

#### [Students who selected “Speaking”]

- I was constantly pushed to explain about my understanding of the materials and about my opinion regarding the topics.

#### [Students who selected “Critical thinking”]

- It was not enough to talk about my opinion. I had to use data and evidence in order to convince others.
- When you discuss with people who have different thoughts, you have to be critical.
- To complete a group presentation, this skill was necessary.

## Literature Cited

- Bloom, B.S. (Ed.). (1956). *Taxonomy of educational objectives, Book 1: Cognitive domain*. London: Longman.
- Johnson, D. W. and Johnson, R. T., Holubec, E. J. (1994) *The new circles of learning: Cooperation in the classroom and school*. (New ed.). Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision & Curriculum Development.