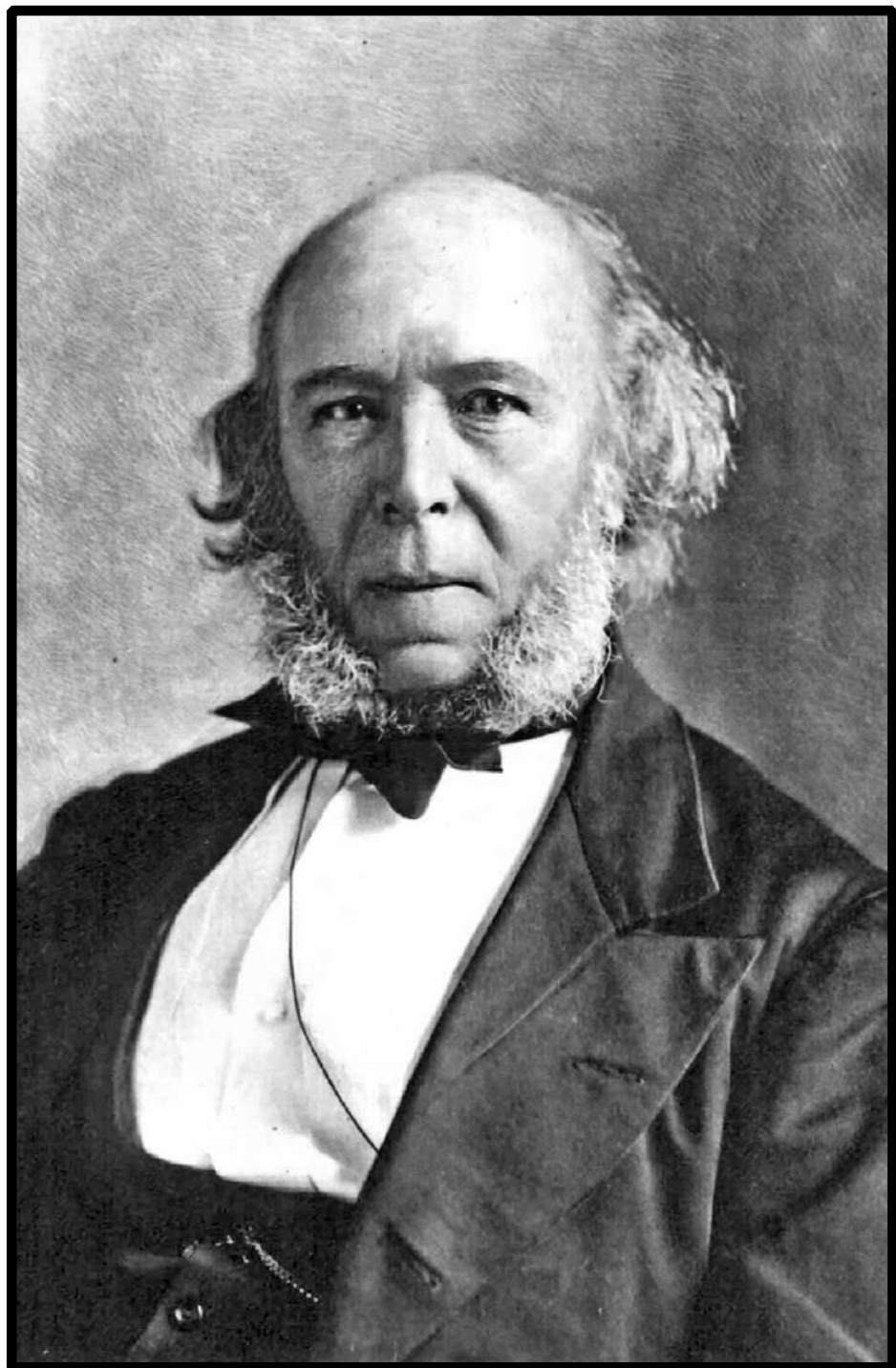


ARGUMENTATION IN



**HOMENAJE AL
DOCENTE**

**Herbert Spencer. Gran
Bretaña, abril de 1820,
diciembre de 1903**

TEACHER EDUCATION

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RESUMEN

Este artículo es la continuación de otro en el que se enfatizaba la importancia del análisis del discurso, el plan argumentativo, la coherencia, la cohesión y el uso de los códigos elaborados en el desarrollo de las competencias comunicativa y argumentativa. En esta ocasión el centro de la discusión está en las competencias que necesitan los profesores en ejercicio y en formación para tomar decisiones responsables y documentadas frente a los temas y enfoques que seleccionan para sus clases. Se sugiere fortalecer el componente crítico y argumentativo en los programas de licenciatura en lenguas extranjeras mediante el uso de técnicas argumentativas que busquen las habilidades de convicción y principalmente de persuasión de la población involucrada.

Palabras clave: argumentación, pensamiento crítico, competencia argumentativa, formación de maestros.

ABSTRACT

This article is the follow-up of another in which it was stated the importance of discourse analysis, argumentative plan, coherence, cohesion and use of elaborated codes in the development of the communicative and argumentative competence. This time, the focus is on the discussion of the competences needed by in-service and pre-service teachers when they have to make responsible and documented decisions about the topics and approaches selected in their classes. It is suggested that undergraduate language programs have to strengthen the critical and argumentative component by means of the use or argumentative techniques that foster conviction and mainly persuasion skills in the involved population.

Key words: argumentation, critical thinking, argumentative competence, teachers' education.

In today's world the challenges for language educators go beyond teaching the four communicative skills. It is necessary to have cultural knowledge and critical thinking in order to play different roles in society and when doing that, teachers have to argue for or against the possible alternatives. Therefore, they need to evaluate arguments, to discern the correct from the incorrect, the good from the bad and to have a personal position or point of view. In teacher education, that is, in Undergraduate Foreign Language Programs, there must be a component to prepare pre-service teachers to fulfill that duty. It is important to mention that in our educational system there is little space to use or develop techniques that allow learners to put into practice the knowledge they have constructed so far. The purpose of this article is to draw attention to the argumentative competencies, given the fact that critical and rhetoric skills are controversial problems with a great relevance for teacher's qualification.

These skills have to do with the interpretation of the real sense of the meanings and with the creation of a way of thinking with responsibility. The development of argumentation processes in initial teacher education would improve the communicative competence of future teachers, given that they would be able to interact in the classroom as well as in academic events in a more consistent way.

THE COMPETENCIES NEEDED BY TEACHERS

Argumentation has a large importance in teacher education since teachers need to make decisions permanently and those decisions affect large groups of people, so that they need to support their decisions with clear arguments. It is necessary that students and teachers have a clear understanding of the assumptions underlying the design of tasks in order that they can critically analyze and evaluate the great variety of activities to which they will be exposed. In addition, teachers must work in agreement with the goals set out

by the program, the teachers' objectives and the content they have to work out.

Teachers need to be able to reflect on the information and knowledge they receive, since there are different approaches, perspectives in didactics and pedagogy and the fast development of technology and mass media give multiple sources to be selective and critical in order to classify and process the best of them. The way in which teachers see and understand the language has effects on what they actually do in the classroom. A critical analysis of how this content is presented in different existing syllabi is another duty of teachers and they must have the capacity to evaluate in order to translate them into practice or to contribute to their modification.

CRITICAL THINKING

Considering the characteristics of the teachers, it can be said that they should be reflective, participatory, autonomous, proficient and innovative subjects. In order to contribute to make these things happen, educators have to be prepared to evaluate their beliefs with respect to available evidence and arguments in a very honest manner (Cassany, 1994). To this end, they must be taught to identify and evaluate arguments. This entails that some instruction in argumentation processes is necessary because pre-service teachers will not be able to evaluate evidence and arguments unless they understand what makes an argument good, and conversely, what makes an argument bad. An understanding of deduction and induction supplies the general standards of criticism for most arguments; for instance, bad arguments are usually either invalid or the premises are unacceptable.

In addition, teachers must include values and methods of critical thinking in order to avoid students think in a dogmatic authoritarian manner and assume as valid or true what the teachers, mass media or whoever say. Teaching critical thinking itself should be done critically, with every value (including reasoning), ev-

ery logical skill, and every disposition supported by argument, and the arguments carefully criticized for their weaknesses.

To evaluate an argument is to ask the basic questions of logic: Are the claims made in the premises and conclusion clearly understood? Do the premises support the conclusion? Are the premises themselves true or acceptable? What evidence do we have for believing them? Are there counterexamples to the claims made in the premises? Are any common fallacies committed? Are there alternative accounts that need to be considered? When we have asked such questions, we

have honestly evaluated a position, so that we have elements to adhere or criticize any assertion.

The way how people form their beliefs consciously or unconsciously has ethical significance, and teachers have a duty to help students, and especially pre-service teachers, to develop their critical thinking skills and dispositions. Teaching critical thinking empowers students to fulfill their epistemic obligations as rational human beings. In-

HOMENAJE AL DOCENTE

Carlos Pinilla.



struction in critical thinking is not then something teachers might do on top of other teaching duties. On the contrary, it is an essential element in our teaching practices, if students are to fulfill their own ethical obligations. Teachers, then, have a moral obligation to teach critical thinking.

ARGUMENTATION AND ARGUMENTATIVE TECHNIQUES

Perelman (1977) proposes a theory of argumentation, useful to convince and persuade an audience through the study of different discursive means. He differentiates persuasion from conviction. For him, persuasion has to do with the search of action, while conviction is related to the search of truth, of the absolute. If we are worried about results we try to persuade rather than convince, because conviction is just the first stage of persuasion. If we are concerned with a real adhesion of an audience because of rational reasons, conviction is more than persuasion. You can convince a person about something without having persuaded him to do it. Perelman (1977) considers conviction as something internal to the individual, we can only be convinced by ourselves, by our ideas. He sees persuasion as external; that is, others always persuade us.

The most important aim of argumentation is to provoke or increase the agreement to the thesis presented. An efficient argument increases the intensity of the agreement, so that it generates the premeditated action from the hearers or at least it creates in the audience a predisposition to do something, or to behave in a certain way that will be manifested in the right moment.

Perelman (1977) defines argumentation as the production or increasing of adhesion from an audience to the

thesis presented with security. Argumentation contradicts the propagation of truth just by giving opinions or showing evidences and claims for persuasion or conviction with arguments. However, presenting evidences is not enough. Any speaker or writer must have the willingness of the audience, because it must be favorably disposed to accept the argument. For example a believer in God approaches a passage of the Bible with the belief that the text is coherent and true. He adheres previously to the truths presented in it.

The speaker needs to consider the type of audience he faces to determine how to direct the speech, which words are appropriate to use in the right moment and with the right manner. The type of audience also depends on the discipline, or area of knowledge people belong to. Taking into account these aspects the speaker can increase adhesion of an audience to his/her thesis. Argumentation proposes to influence an audience, modify its convictions or beliefs through language; the reasoning choice depends on the audience beliefs and the speaker selects premises accepted by the audience.

A good speaker tries to find out the common places that are general assertions about logical things in which the audience agrees because they cannot be questioned. It is also important to have in mind specific things and preferred things of the audience in particular domains.

Finally, the development of the argumentative competence has been found to be the weakest competence in schools and to have access to it students must put into practice pragmatic elements dealing with coherence, cohesion, intentionality, holding of position and intertextuality. All these elements are related to

TEACHING CRITICAL THINKING AND DEVELOPING
ARGUMENTATIVE COMPETENCE SHOULD BE A MUST FOR
LANGUAGE TEACHER EDUCATORS.

argumentation processes. Taking into account these assertions, it is important for the area of language teaching education to raise awareness about the relevance of fostering argumentation processes in the English classroom.

This area has pedagogical implications in the other school subjects that involve critical thinking, because argumentation is present in all the areas of knowledge. Students need to argue consistently in all their academic life including their pre-service and their in-service experience as language teachers. As we know the teacher's profile demands teachers who participate actively in written and oral debates and need to present support to each one of their assertions.

To conclude, teaching critical thinking and developing argumentative competence should be a must for language teacher educators. If these aspects are not stressed in college programs, future teachers may think in a dogmatic and authoritarian manner and will assume uncritically what mass media or whoever say as valid or true. In view of the commitments of these teachers in educating new generations of children and teenagers, the educational system has a responsibility regarding the division of teaching practices in terms of the implementation of approaches tending to the development of critical thinking and argumentative competence.

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