

Integrating a Six Thinking Hats Approach Into the Prewriting Stage of Argumentative Writing In English as a Foreign Language: A Chinese Case Study of Generating Ideas in Action

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Abstract : Argumentative writing is the most prevalent genre in diverse writing tests. How to construct academic arguments is often regarded as a difficult task by most English as a foreign language (EFL) learners. A failure to generate enough ideas and organise them coherently and logically as well as a lack of competence in supporting their arguments with relevant evidence are frequent problems faced by EFL learners when approaching an English argumentative writing task. Overall, these problems are closely related to planning, and planning an argumentative writing at pre-writing stage plays a vital role in a good academic essay. However, how teachers can effectively guide students to generate ideas is rarely discussed in planning English argumentative writing, apart from brainstorming. Brainstorming has been a common practice used by teachers to help students generate ideas. However, some limitations of brainstorming suggest that it can help students generate many ideas, but ideas might not necessarily be coherent and logic, and could sometimes impede production. It calls for a need to explore effective instructional strategies at pre-writing stage of English argumentative writing. This paper will first examine how a Six Thinking Hats approach can be used to provide a dialogic space for EFL learners to experience and collaboratively generate ideas from multiple perspectives at pre-writing stage. Part of the findings of the impact of a twelve-week intervention (from March to July 2021) on students learning to generate ideas through engaging in group discussions of using Six Thinking Hats will then be reported. The research design is based on the sociocultural theory. The findings present evidence from a mixed-methods approach and fifty-nine participants from two first-year undergraduate natural classes in a Chinese university. Analysis of pre- and post- questionnaires suggests that participants had a positive attitude toward the Six Thinking Hats approach. It fosters their understanding of prewriting and argumentative writing, helps them to generate more ideas not only from multiple perspectives but also in a systematic way. A comparison of participants writing plans confirms an improvement in generating counterarguments and rebuttals to support their arguments. Above all, visual and transcripts data of group discussion collected from different weeks throughout the intervention enable teachers and researchers to 'see' the hidden process of learning to generate ideas in action.

Keywords : argumentative writing, innovative pedagogy, six thinking hats, dialogic space, prewriting, higher education

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