**Transcript of group interview with Agnes, Cyan, Joy and Jean, 31st May 2019** *(these are all pseudonyms)*

The researcher’s speeches, actions and summaries are in roman text, the interviewees’ speeches are in italics.

I show the students what they said in the Pre-Course task about what critical thinking is. (I abbreviated these for the powerpoint as below, and did not reveal the names on the slide or orally).

“Thinking about both positive and negative aspects”. (Joy)

“Critical thinking is an ability to identify and solve problems independently based on what you have heard and seen.” (Cyan)

“Critical thinking is the skill to think different aspect of the issue and create a judgement”. (Jean)

“Critical thinking … means when we think about an issue or idea, we need to think from different sides, for example, the positive side and the negative side. And when we read an article, we should analyse it critically instead of just accepting the author's idea automatically. Also, when we using critical thinking to write, we need to provide evidence to support our opinions and make an academic argument”. (Agnes)

Then I showed a slide which said:

Has your opinion about what critical thinking is changed? How?

Joy: *Yeah, definitely. ‘Cos, before this course, my mind is really simple, just about both negative and positive side. But actually not that simple. Like we should think something independently, try to criticise something, especially try to criticise ourselves, our own mind, and like try to avoid some bias … yeah*. (To Agnes) *What about you?*

Agnes: *I also think we need to think about negative side and positive**, but now I realise sometimes our thoughts are based on what we are believing in the past but we need find more evidence about other people’s opinions, and I think cherry-picking, it happens all the time, but we didn’t realise. So even if we are writing essay, we tend to believe what we are believing and tend to choose the resources that we like, and we didn’t realise that, so it’s what I learned in this time.*

Jean: *I mean, I have also same for you, just I think critical thinking is you find a difficult thing and you find a judgement****.*** *But after having this course, I think critical thinking is a very broad [unclear], including lots of factors inside the critical thinking, just like you say the bias, the cherry-picking, yes, I mean I think there are lots of things influence our mind, yes. So after having this course I think* *when we think about something we should care about lots of different factors. [To Cyan]. Your turn.* [All laugh].

Cyan: *I think a little bit – change a little bit. Before and after attend this class, I don’t think [unclear I couldn’t think it is?] ability. But [unclear currently? consequently?] I can respect every existing things equally, because previously I think something is bad, I don’t recognise, I don’t accept it, but currently, now, I think everything existed, existing, have, has their reason to live in the world [all laugh], yeah, equal [laughs].*

Agnes: [*unclear*] *evidence is important.*

Cyan: *Yeah.*

Joy*: But do you think it can really be equal case? Sometimes people can have discrimination, or biases, but they really didn’t notice that., you know, ‘cos –*

Jean: *That’s why we’re human beings, you know –*

Joy: *Yeah, yeah, we are like from different context, culture, it’s really – it already shape us, you know, our personality, the whole person, are formed by our culture, or the past experience.*

The students run out of steam, so I show them the next slide:

Has your own thinking changed as a result of this course?

If so, how?

Agnes asks what I mean by this. I try to distinguish between the previous questions, which were about their concept of what CT is in the abstract, as it were, and this one, which is about changes in their own thinking. But I think Joy at least though I was asking if they knew what the course was going to be like.

Joy: *Before attending this course, I didn’t think too much about what will it contain, you know. [pauses, looks puzzled] I mean, I thought there may be some methods, try to teach us how to avoid some problem on critical thinking and try to introduce about how be critical, but it’s more than what I thought. Because, from this course I learned more about these theories, sometimes we didn’t notice this, like, um, the something we didn’t notice, but it really influence us, you know, and [pause]*

Agnes: *You realise something exist, but you didn’t pay attention to them before. After you attending this class you can - they all can be critical thinking and [Joy: yeah] and you all need to pay attention to –*

Joy: ‘*Cos sometimes, you know, we may already know confirmation bias, but we didn’t think there is a relationship between it and critical thinking, you know. ‘Cos, our definition of critical thinking is just about thinking about both positive and negative sides but we didn’t notice it’s really a broader thing.*

Agnes: *Yeah*

Jean: *I think critical thinking, you need to keep training you know. I mean, just like – I mean, although after having this course we know there are lots of things to influence our thinking, we need to keep training our mind to think more objective.* *‘Cos, just like you say, before you have any class you know that you always influenced by – you didn’t think a lot, yes, but [loses thread slightly] what I* *am saying – if we, after we having this class, maybe we have a little bit changed our thinking?* *Maybe we may not be more subjective, we think more objective.*

Joy: *Yeah.*

[Jean points at Cyan] *Hi, you. You have any change in your thinking?*

Cyan: *Yes, definitely it’s changed. The same as you [looking at Joy] said. I didn’t consider anything about critical thinking, I didn’t know what is critical thinking, before I came to the UK. And I can find something, I mean, the thought [indicating “thinking” by rotating a finger by his head], sometime it become weird, but I don’t know why, and based on these workshops, I think I find some principles or [says a word in Chinese, which Jean translates] theory, this looks like, ah, guidance, for me****.***

Agnes: *For me, before I attended this course, I thought critical thinking is very boring and difficult [all laugh, Joy and Jean say “yeah”] because every essay ask us to use critical thinking, sometimes I’m confused, how can I show my critical thinking, I worried, if I can’t show it, I can’t get a high mark, but now I think it happened every day in our life and even some theories has been concluded and it’s a nature of our human beings, so I think it’s not so difficult than before and it’s interesting because we can find some interesting experiments here and – yeah, people show their* *ideas about critical thinking in different views. I think it’s an interesting experience for me.*

Joy: *Yes, ‘cos I found that we are difficult to use reference and evidence to support our point, because it’s not as important as we are, I mean [uses gestures to show contrast] here, in China [all laugh] we are not thinking it is so important to use the reference.*

Agnes: *Use reference to support our ideas is also a kind of critical thinking –*

Joy: *Yeah*

Jean: *Just like we want to find some reference to support us, but we don’t want to find any reference that can, um, take the opposite, I mean* [Cyan: *against] like judge our idea*.

Joy: *Yeah, but you know it’s still a problem ‘cos if we don’t have our own opinion, how can we structure our essay, you know – it’s a problem.*

Jean: *I think having your own idea is very difficult, it’s really difficult, yeah. Sometimes you know you just follow what people thinking, but you don’t have your own mind, own idea. Yeah.*

Students have run out of things to say and look at me. I realise there is one more question on this slide that I haven’t shown them:

What caused this change, do you think?

So I invite them to say what workshop/s caused any change, if they can. The students mull this over. Jean reminds the others what was in the various workshops.

Agnes: *The experiments, some social experiments, given by teacher is very vivid for me, because before I attended this class I also attended the summer school, the language class in ELTC, but I learned critical thinking through some articles, and to learn how this person organise this* [makes a gesture like she’s looking through a text]

Joy: *Yeah, it’s boring*

Jean: *Yeah, the literature review*

[all laugh, except Cyan]

Agnes: *Yeah, I found it’s more vivid to accept some theories or interesting –*

Joy: *Yeah, because academic literature, they are too – they are more about theories, it’s not – if we use some example to explain those things it will be more easy to understand, but when we only listen to the theories it’s really difficult for us to understand.*

[General pause. Jean suggests going to the next question. I show the students what they wrote about climate change in the pre-course task, again with names removed and slightly shortened].

“Climate change is a very important social issue, which is worthy everyone's attention, however personally, just try to do something mitigate the climate change as much as possible.” (Cyan)

“Climate change is mainly due to human activities and it is a global problem”. (Agnes)

“Climate change affect the environment seriously. In my home city, … I feel there are no more spring and autumn, and temperature in summer increase every year. Therefore, if people still do not have the awareness, the world will destroy one day”. (Jean)

“If data is used for reference, climate change is very significant, but people usually don’t feel it in their daily life. Without news and research articles, the severity of climate change is hard to get attention. Personally, I think both natural and human factors have an impact on climate change. Controlling climate change can be very difficult, and climate change has no significant impact on my life. Therefore, I usually do not pay much attention to climate change”. (Joy)

Jean [to the group]: *Do you have any changes? About climate change?* [Students mull this over].

Agnes: *In the past I think climate change is a very frequent topic in life because the media, the government, always talk about it, but after I attended this class I found some resources about some party or some government, they don’t want to admit climate change due to their perspective, or their, I don’t know how to describe it, just like I remember the party called orange party, they never accept climate change, so I only think it is a serious problem before but I don’t know people have different ideas about it and yeah,* *and I didn’t realise the gap between what the researchers, the government said and what people do, so I learned something about that this time.*

Jean: *In fact I don’t have any changes about climate change, but just like discuss, today this [unclear],* *when people mentions climate change we think it is a serious problem, but in fact in our daily life, we still don’t mention it, yeah, so I think maybe it’s not a serious problem?* *But just like, this course always mention climate change, so I will think more seriously what climate change is, but in fact I don’t have any awareness in my daily life.*

Agnes: *Yeah, because I think our course didn’t talk too much about climate change, I mean, like some evidence, or effects – events, we talked more about how we think about climate change and is there any bias on our mind on climate change, but we don’t talk too much about climate change itself, so* *my mind is still the same as the past .*

Cyan*: I do, I feel the same. In the past I think climate change is a social issue, and now, I still think it’s a social issue. Because, this is a social issue,* *to solve this issue I think includes everyone, every party, every group, every social class to solve this together, not only social scientists, not only individuals, or one of these* [struggles to express himself further].

Joy: *You just said it’s a frequent topic. Is it? ‘Cos, did you hear about that joke, there is one person ask, why people don’t care about climate change any more, and the other one answered, you don’t read English articles any more.*

Agnes: You mean this is a frequent topic in English world, rather than in China?

Joy:*No, it’s more frequently in IELTS or TOEIC, I mean like these English tests, articles, rather than newspapers.*

Agnes: *I think it’s a frequent topic because it occur in the media, and some articles, for example there is a conference every year, and which country agree with some*

Jean: *Agreement*

Agnes: *Agreement, yeah.* *Others, maybe the Western world think they are already developed country, so they don’t need to take so much responsibility for the developing country, maybe yeah, just some bias about some debate about this topic.* *And I also noticed, in the library for our school, when you get into [unclear] you can see some advertising made by students [Jean: yeah, yeah] they all fight for the climate change, they think it’s a common problem, so I think it’s a frequent topic maybe among some special group,* maybe among some developing countries, but I don’t think some wealthy people or some –

Joy: [Laughing] *You don’t think they will care about it*

Agnes: *Yeah, only students or only scholars care about it, but for ordinary people, they always think, they always drive a car*

Joy: *We should say, students and like researchers care more about it*

Agnes: *Yeah, they just care but they don’t have so many actions, I don’t know [all laugh] it’s very controversi*al

[They all look expectantly at me. I ask if there’s anything else they want to say about the workshops].

Jean says that although they were good, six workshops on theory is not enough; for a difficult thing like critical thinking, they need more practical training. *We know about theory, but we just can’t put it in practice.*

Agnes agrees they need long-term training. She says they notice they have bias, but they just can’t control it. Jean says when they go back to their countries, they might forget about critical thinking.

I asked Joy if she had known about biases before the workshops, and she said she knew a little about them from studying psychology. I ask if anyone thinks that looking at biases in the 6 the workshops will make a difference to their thinking in future.

Joy: *Yeah, ‘cos, you know, before this course, I knew about bias, but I didn’t, I don’t think there is a relationship between it and critical thinking, because, for me, critical thinking is just about [Jean: Your mind] try to think about different aspects, try to think something is not similar to your previous mind, but actually it’s not, ‘cos, I mean from this course I knew, actually, there’s bias, the* *discrimination and other thing from our culture, our experience, it’s all have the influence on critical thinking****.***

I confirm that they have made that connection. I ask if there’s anything else they want to say about the course before I ask 3 more pre-prepared questions about it.

Agnes: *Yes, I think this workshop give us the reason and the causes of why we need critical thinking, rather than other courses just tell us you need to, how to do critical thinking [Joy and Jean nod agreement and say “yeah]. I think it’s really important because it make us understand the reason and just like the bias, why we have confirmation bias and why it cause, um* [general nodding and agreement].

I say that was my aim, to show that critical thinking is difficult for all humans. I explain the time restrictions that meant I couldn’t do more than six workshops. Jean asks if critical thinking is taught from primary school in Western countries. I say only implicitly through subjects such as mathematics and literature; it’s only at HE level that it’s explicitly called critical thinking.

Joy: *But you know in China, Chinese education is not, um, care too much about criticise something, yeah, we learn more about some skills, and like how to gain the skills, how to train ourselves but we don’t care about too much to be critical, to try to criticise the opinions, the others and ourselves, it’s not so important.*

Kathy: So, is it quite a big jump for you?

[Cyan nods vigorously]

Jean: *Because needing to have your own o – sometimes when you study in here, sometimes professors will ask you, do you have any opinion, or you may have lots of discussions, so sometimes for me, when we have discussions, I don’t have any thought. That’s why I think it’s very difficult.*

Joy: *Yeah, and I mean, in China, we don’t criticise our teacher very often, you know*

Jean*: We seldom have the chance to have a discussion. We just absorb what teacher say, we don’t have any critical thinking, just like, we don’t have any opposite idea.*

Kathy: What do you prefer?

Jean: *Of course, critical thinking! [General enthusiastic agreement]. Because a lot of discussion in here, anyone can express his opinion, idea, but I think even in Macao we don’t have [unclear] at University, we don’t have any discussion, we just keep listening the class three hours, just keep listening [mimes taking in information], and then finish class and then forget anything, yes.*

I say it sounds very boring. I show the rest of the question. We discuss the length of the sessions, and why no-one used the online discussion boards (among other reasons, they do not give an immediate response - live chat would be better, apparently, must investigate that). The students ask again about practice, so I run through the slides again and suggest things they could do on their own, such as just being aware of the factors that affect critical thinking. I also draw their attention to the references on the slides (esp. Kahneman (2011) and the take-home messages. Anything else?

Joy: *Do you think we can really escape from this, like, influence from the culture, the government, the media and our family, ‘cos you know all of those things are normalising people, and I mean, the personality the one ourself is developed from these contexts, yeah, and the whole person is built on that kind of things.*

I say it’s a good question! We probably cannot ever really be free of influences (and this not necessarily a bad thing), but the important thing is to be aware of it. I explain how the School of Education insist on students declaring their positionality.

Jean: *I think critical thinking is very difficult right now, because lots of people was affected by the social media, or something, yeah, it’s really difficult for them to critical thinking, they just trust what media say, that’s why when we study librarJean, we have the information literacy class, we study the fake news, how to teach people what is fake news, how to let them know, to* *[unclear distinguish?] what is the difference between these two news, how to find the resources, yeah, but I think it’s very different to teach people.*

I talk about how in the first cycle of the workshops in February I used a clip about fake news (which was dropped for the May course due to time, but Cyan saw it because he came to some of those workshops. I explain about the echo chamber and confirmation bias. Jean says that people don’t like to be judged. I remind them about understanding where people are coming from.