**Transcript of group interview with Robin, Mary and Helen, 7th June 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 ppt as below, and did not reveal the names on the slide or orally).

“Thinking objectively and fairly with no bias”. [Mary]

“… critical thinking encourages us to challenge the perspective of mainstream while we should keep suspicious of everything … Sometimes, most of the population agree some rules are wrong, it's not absolutely wrong in every circumstances…” [Helen]

“[I] think critical thinking is the most important part of academic writing, the teacher wants to see more individual opinion from your essay. what is more, it is the benefit to encourage the student to have own thought”. [Robin]

Then I show the question:

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

Mary: *Before the class, I think the critical thinking is think the both sides of one thing and not focus on one point* [the others murmur agreement].

Helen: *Did this change, after taking these courses?*

Mary: *Yes, I think after this course I know a lot of other things, such as confirming bias, and the risks*

Robin: *Something else*

Helen: *I think according to my experience I think my opinion about what critical thinking is has not changed. I think the same as what I thought before.*

Robin: *So can you talk about your – the beginning opinion about the -*

Helen: *Yes, I think the beginning – before the course?* [others say “yeah*”] I think critical thinking is, we can challenge the mainstream point of view, and sometimes one thing happen, and everybody thinks its wrong, but not wrong in every circumstances, yeah it’s – before the course, yeah*

Robin: *From my perspective, I think critical thinking is a process for me. To begin with, I think critical thinking may be just a simple thinking about your [unclear exam picture review?], or got some opinion from your teacher, but after that, after the semester or study the critical thinking course I think critical thinking is complex, you need to experience it further and further and at this process you will find some opinion from yourself, and you think something happen, and you think, oh, it’s great, and you know, you can actually feel the critical thinking is, you can control it, and you know it, what is critical thinking,* *and you can use it when you writing an essay, and you can also talk with your friend to talk about critical thinking, and get some information from your classmate or teacher, and make me* *feel critical thinking is long away, but I’m on the way!*

Helen: *But I think I slightly change my answer, because some memory recalled already, because I just forget, yeah. The most - the remarkable point that Kathy said I think is that we believe one belief, then we need to find everything against it [others say “yeah”], and if everything wrong, then you are probably right**.* *So I think, in the past, I think my critical thinking in the very superficial stage, in the very beginning, ‘cos I criticise everything, just I “It’s wrong, it’s wrong”, and I will doubt of anything, but* *we need to criticise based on evidence, so it’s very important.*

Robin: *Yeah, absolutely, you need to find some [unclear] to support your point and you also can from this learn some new thing, and you can write it in your essay like this.*

Helen [to Mary]: *How about you?*

Mary: *Before the course, I think that critical thinking is - I only know the word, critical thinking. I know when I write my dissertation I need to think more and have some critical thinking, but I don’t know how to exactly do it. After the course, I think I know something about it.*

Overlapping {Robin: *A little bit confused*

{Helen: *In practical, in practical*

Helen: *So you know how to do that in practical, uh, writing?*

Mary: *Yeah, maybe we need to find more literature to your, uh, your*

Helen: *Decision*

Mary: *Yeah*

Robin: *So, I just wondering, if you write an essay before, in the past, your teacher want you to do some critical thinking, how do you, how did you do that?*

Mary: *Before the course, I only picks up on others’ opinion and paraphrase in my words and add some my own thinking, my own judgment.*

Robin: *Yes, it’s just from the beginning, I told, I mean you can make it more [says a word in Chinese, which Helen translates] familiar, and you after that maybe you can control a little bit critical thinking* *[unclear] you can feel, “Oh, this is critical thinking”, that “It’s my critical thinking”, and I can write it, it’s my point, and I also can provide some evidence to support my view point. That’s it.*

Helen: But what’s familiar?

Robin: *I think, because the critical thinking is, everybody has critical thinking, and some view point, you will say, because some thing is the same, you will feel, oh, her opinion is right and his opinion is right, and me, my opinion is same with them, oh it’s a familiar – some of –*

Helen: *But I think, I agree that everybody has different points of view, but I don’t think every opinions, but I don’t think every opinions is belonging to critical. Just like the three of us, we have three different opinions. But it doesn’t mean my opinion is really critical, just because I’m different from yours.* *But probably my opinions doesn’t based on the evidence, so my opinions not critical. So I don’t think everybody has critical thinking.*

Robin: *But actually, everybody has one [own?] opinions and they will be, they has different thinking, thinking [unclear viewpoint?] they have the different critical thinking, that’s, I – because I think the critical thinking is complex things, and you can’t do yours [unclear general frame?] to describe it, everybody has the same one point, and they can use their point to find some support, just like the dissertation, everybody has the different topic. But - at last everybody can use other opinion to support their viewpoint in the dissertation and finish it. It’s different way.*

Helen: *If I think everybody has their topic right, and everybody has their different opinions, but if they only collect the literature review supporting to their belief, then it’s still confirmation bias. Do you know what?*

Mary: *Yes, I agree*

Helen: *Just like if I have – there are 20 people in our class and everybody has their own topic, but it doesn’t mean they critical thinking if they only read the literature relating to their point**, but until, unless they can find some point of view against of them, and they can do the objection then like just like doing some argument, then they have critical thinking, I think, is my opinion. How do you think?*

Mary: *Yes, I think so. Because before the course, I write essay, first I write my own view and find some literature to support my own view, but I think* it’s not right. Maybe we need to find different views about those things and compare them.

Helen: [Pointing at Robin] *Because what you mention is everyone has their own belief, and you know, everyone has their frame, yes –*

Robin: *Because I think the critical thinking is different because everybody, you can ask so many people about, what do you think the critical thinking [is], and the different people will give you a different answer. I did this, I asked my teacher, one teacher, two teacher, three teacher and my best friend [unclear: at school?], but everybody, they just told me critical thinking is important. I know it, but generally, they can’t give the specific definition about critical thinking, they just use what they think is the best way to do this critical thinking. So I think it’s different. And as for me from – I listen all their opinion and construct my opinion about critical thinking**. I think critical thinking is good. At first you need to read a lot of the [unclear literature review?] you are about, you want to write the topic. And after that you will feel, oh, I know some debate in this topic, or in the field, and you know some – you can actually feel some point is not right, it’s not objective, you can feel it, and* *you can use some other scholar’s opinion to debate, to argue [with] that. And some scholars also has the right opinion, and you know, oh, it’s great. Because before that, you has got some information, and you know* *something about your topic, and after that, you know that, and you will find some, this main topic, you will find some weakness and strengths, and the strengths – the weakness, you can use you or other good strengths to support that, and strengths you can study from that. Just grab the useful information, and to input the weakness from that. That’s your critical thinking*

Helen: *Yes, I totally agree. I just don’t agree - not everyone, if they want to do the dissertation research, then they are aware of the critical thinking. Just because they collect lots of information, it doesn’t mean they have critical thinking.*

Robin: *Yes, probably maybe they are beginners, they just have simple [Mary: Select the-] simple critical thinking. They just has, maybe just, uh –*

Helen: *Simple?*

Robin: *No, just have the first step, they just stay the first step, just know some information about critical thinking, they can’t do that further critical thinking and, or do something*.

Helen: *But I think it’s not a causal relationship [Robin: Yeah]. I mean if they have the first step, it doesn’t mean they will have the second or third. If nobody [Robin: It depends] yeah, if nobody inspire them – just like,* *on the first day, if they collect a lot of information, and they just reinforce their belief, very, very enforce [Robin and Mary: Yeah] and they collect more and more research and journals, essays, and they say, my view is absolutely right, my view is the most correct thing in the world, like this. So, it’s not necessarily a process, that OK the first step and the second step until their professor remind them, like you are lacking in some point of view, like you need to go back and read some areas, I think. Or, they can inspire themselves, probably.*

Robin: *Yes, it depends, somebody want to go the further critical thinking. Maybe they want to know what is critical thinking, and how I can do the critical thinking, and how I can control it. Some people, when they do the assignment or they write the essay, they will have some question which rise in your mind. And if you want to do that, you can ask the teacher –*

Helen: *Or come to the critical thinking workshop!* [All laugh]

Robin: *Yes. That is why I joined this critical thinking course. Because I want to know other people’s and other teachers about how do they think the critical thinking, and my friend or classmate, how do they think, and I want to share all of these opinion and debate it, and all maybe this argue, and from this process we can get some useful information.*

Helen [to Mary]: *You want to say something?*

Mary: *Yeah, I attend the course because I think critical thinking is very necessary for our dissertation.*

Robin: *Yeah, absolutely. And I think it’s different from my country and the Western country. Most in our country we just listen, we just get the information from our teacher, teacher says, is right. And in the Western country, they need to independent thinking [others say Yeah], and it’s up to you, you can write essay and critical thinking for yourself, nobody can help you, they just can give you some suggestions, so critical thinking is important in our study life, and we also need to do this critical thinking.*

Helen: *Yes, I come because I know everybody said critical thinking is important, right, but I want to learn how to implement it, because sometimes we know but we don’t know how to do [all agree], so if somebody can break down the concept, because the concept is too abstract* [Robin and Mary: *Yeah*], *so I need a concrete steps, like how to – because our brain, need to train our brain. I think for me* it’s *a difficulty, for me**, I grown up in Taiwan, right [Robin and Mary: Yeah], yeah, more liberal but not - still, the teacher always say something, then the students tend to say, the teachers says are all correct, and we cannot argue with teachers [all agree], we have to obey –*

Robin: *We just can listen*

Helen: *So when I just come here, I feel very struggling, because different ways of learning, I feel getting lost.*

[Robin and Helen encourage Mary to speak]: *In our country, maybe the textbook is always right [all laugh]*

Helen: *Yeah, you cannot criticise, “Oh, why is Tiananmen Square – it’s not here?”* [mimes pointing at a book]

Mary: *Yes, and in the UK, we can, we can* [Robin: *judge*] *we can judge it, and can write a different opinion, we can against them.*

I say will move onto the next question on the slide. They may already have covered it, but they say more about it if they wish.

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

If so, how?

What caused this change, do you think?

I do my best to distinguish between this and the previous question about what critical thinking means as a concept (as opposed to what your own thinking is like). Helen says for her they are the same, Robin helps out and I try again.

Mary: *Before the course, I don’t think I am a good critical thinking person. Because I only find the literature to support my own views.*

Helen: *How about now?*

Mary: *I think sometimes I have some bias. I think women is bad driver.* [All laugh. Robin: *me too*]

Helen: *You believe this? Even [though] you are a woman, yourself?*

Mary: *I’m not totally agree [Robin: objective] but I think sometimes it is* [Robin: Generally speaking. All laugh]

Helen: *Yeah, but – for me, before I just think critical thinking is challenging the existing theory, and just like you become very picky and [unclear] and just find the loopholes and the disadvantage and [unclear].* *But now I know that I have another way just like find, if I support something, some perspective, I need to find other perspective against it, then if I can argue, and make them feel not persuasive, then I think my perspective probably right. But if some of them against one, um, make* *sense, then I will admit, yes, probably can choose another perspective. But before, I don’t want to accept choosing another perspective.*

Robin: *Yes, before I joined the class, I think critical thinking is important things, I know it, everybody know it, but it hard to describe what exactly is the critical thinking, and how should I do that.*

Helen: *So now, can you describe how do you do it?* [Helen and Mary laugh] *After the workshops, yes.*

Robin: *Yes, but I think even at present, I can’t describe it in specific definition, but I can get my, I input some knowledge about critical thinking, and I know further information than the other people. So I think maybe this is cost lots of time to do that. I think critical thinking is maybe accompany me for a long time in my study life Helen: Yes, I think so] and I will improve it again and again. And maybe one day in the future I will know the critical, what is critical thinking, and I can control it, and I can talk my friend or my teacher*

Helen: *You mean teach them, teacher. You want to teach them.*

Robin: *Probably if you meet some young person, you just like use show of the teacher -*

Helen *Show off!*

Robin: *No, not show off, just share* [Others: *share, share*] *share your opinion and share your experience, and make them to the direct way.* *Even at present I think critical thinking is a hard thing.*

Helen: *Yeah, me too, so I think I just start learning, and I think we need to practise in everyday life. So just our study life, not only in this year, postgraduate year, but also in our working area, when we are in our working location, we use critical thinking in our occupation, then it might be very useful, I think. [General agreement]*

Mary: *Yes, I think we need to put the theory to the practice. Because we already know some theory about the critical thinking, yeah.* [Robin: *Yeah*] *We need to accept the different opinions*.

Helen: *However, I think the Chinese boss, the Chinese, uh, enterprise, not enterprise – the, uh, employer, they don’t like critical thinking employees, because they think, oh you are very difficult to control. Right?*

Robin: *Yes, but critical thinking is one thing you need to study in the Western country and when you come back, you have [Pointing at chest one? own?] opinion, and you can hide it [Helen, laughing: Why do you hide it?] You can hide it before the leader told you something, but when you become the leader, you can use critical thinking to do that. I think it’s why - potential, potential powers*

Helen: *Great. Because I – in my opinion, my own perspective, I think critical thinking can make a nation become more stronger.* [Robin: *Yeah*] *Because you can fix some loopholes [unclear], you can fix some gap.* [Both agree]. *And fix the bad regulations, or the laws, like the laws is very bad for somebody, then we help them to fix – amend the law.*

Students run out of steam. Mary has to leave to catch a train. The three students, speaking Chinese, exchange contact details and tell me in English that they are making new “critical thinking friends”

Then I show Helen and Robin what they said in the pre-course task about climate change, with edits and names concealed as before.

“I think it exists. It does make a difference to the environment”. [Mary]

“[T]he First world has exploited the Third world. [At] the conference held in Paris, most of the states … signed the climate treaty, [but] there were two countries didn’t … It's unfair and absurd because … those 2 are the largest CO2 emission countries in the world… Instead, the other weaker economic states signed it...” [Helen]

“[C]limate change is big challenge that we faced, and there are also … a debate between sceptic and protector. I want to explore … why do they have different opinions and try to listen to different people's thoughts about climate change”. [Robin]

Then I ask them if they feel the same now.

Robin: *It depends. I think the climate change is really happened in our life, because I can feel it. These days the temperature is increased, and the ice is melting, like this, so I think it’s one point - some things of the climate change we can feel, actually feel it.* *But I just wondering something about the climate change debate, some people think the climate change just a political [unclear: complication?], like Trump [unclear],* *but actually, most of the country think the climate change is happened, but they didn’t do actual action to [unclear: prevent?] it. They know it, but they didn’t do some action about that. I just wondering why. I just want to explore more information about that.*

Helen: *Do you mean, you know, a lot of countries know it, but they don’t rescue the environment.*

Robin: *No, I think they will be do it but according the countries’ policy they encourage people, the person to protect the environment but* [Helen*: What?*] *They encourage people to protect the environment and do something green ma*ke [Helen: clean energy?] yes, like this, but the people know it but they didn’t do that.

Helen: *Yeah, yeah, I think so. I also, before the course, I also believe that the climate change does exist, but* *after the course, I think I remain some doubts about the cause, just like, is it really the pollution cause the climate change, or it was a normal process of the earth growing, you know what I mean, just like 4.6 billion [years] ago, when the earth was born, right, and you can see the scientists statistics, the temperature of the earth goes high, sometimes goes low, goes down, so it’s like naturally. So I just feel doubts that is that really the C02 caused the climate change? I still cannot make the conclusion. So I think after the course I think I – because before, I just think, yes, it’s the very evil corporations and bad company, they don’t protect the environment, so they are very bad, evil [laughs], and the C02, yes, they shouldn’t pollute the environment. However, if it’s a very huge trend of earth [unclear], it’s a natural process, the dying of the earth, the earth dying, just like human beings, we will become old, and earth also will become old,* *so I think we still need a lot of evidence to prove the climate change’s cause. However, I want to reply to you – not “however”, [Robin: Yes, it’s OK, go on] by the way, because I don’t opposite your opinion, I also have the same enquiries, same confusion, confused, because* *everybody knows it, the earth is very important and we only have one earth, and we always see it, OK, like the [rubbish? Carbon? Sounds like “cammerage”] increasing, and a lot of rubbish in the sea, the ocean,* *but seldom people do something, just make action, and everybody just like blind, and oh [hand in front of face] we know it and we ignore it, just like OK because we can go to drink the Starbucks coffee and OK we can go to eat Mr Donald [MacDonalds] and OK watch the Pikachu Detective, and we just ignore, a very dangerous thing.*

Robin: *Yes, I think the main reason is because climate change just a little bit, slightly rised, so it maybe take the long time, so that people don’t care it. When they actually found it happened, they think, oh, it’s late.*

Helen: *It’s too late. I think, yeah, because the temperature rising, it’s gradually, gradually rising, and in our Mandarin Chinese slang, it’s like, you cook the frog, in warm water, in a pot, because it’s not hot, it’s only warm, so nobody feels it’s urgent, but I think it’s very urgent.*

Robin: *Yes, and what is more, and when I study my major, Political [unclear], my tutor also talk about this, this crisis, and we describe this climate change crisis, and we do some research about the academic scholar,* *and I know the climate change is really happen, and is awful things, and we need to do some action to protect it, and we need to have ideology to do that, and we* *- I want to join encourage more persons to join this campaign, climate change campaign, to do that, to provide [protect?] our planet and make it better.*

Helen: *Oh, my God, you are my super idol now!* *However, when you discuss with your tutor, do you also read some literature or journal against your point of view, like some scientists say no, it’s not climate change, or it’s normal, or something.*

Robin: *I know what you mean and according some journal, like BBC, they just report a little bit climate change, I don’t know why, but some of the UK’s journal, they will always talk about the climate change, and a week, a couple news in a week, but it depends. But in the US, the New York Times or something, Washington Post, they will talk about that. But it depends.*

Helen: *Because I think the climate change and the C02, because of the C02, it’s the mainstream discourse in the world, and I think another side, opposite campaign, it’s weak, weak stream, like [Robin: non stream] non stream, but you know, according to my experience, for me I don’t think minority is always wrong [Robin: Yeah]. Just like, in the past, some people they think the homosexuals are going to die, are going to hell, and they don’t think they have rights to – they have equal rights to get married, but now it’s the trend that human rights are rising and something change. But in the past, there are only five only percentage of the population they support homosexuality, so for me, I don’t think the minority is definitely wrong, just like now, the mainstream discourse support the climate change caused by the C02 and the pollution, but another weak, very non-mainstream don’t support this, and against it.* *So I think, I also will support the campaign [gesturing towards Robin], but I think for a researcher, we have to understand why they say something about this, why they say oh, it’s not because of C02.*

Robin: *There are some reason can explain this, some of the fake news, or some of the freedom of the press, and some of the political complications, like this, you can use one of them to explain the what reason caused that. And from the any, each perspective you can use the different ways to explain it,* *so I think, in short, I think climate change is really happen, and is a crisis I think we need to protect [prevent?] it, we need to input our idea to know it and do some action about that.*

Helen:*Yes, I also agree, and I think climate change does happen, but we are not sure what’s the reason [Robin: Yeah], but even though we don’t know, we still have to save our earth, right? Because it really happen, no matter what’s the cause, like the human* being cause, or the earth itself, yes, we need to take action, right? I also agree with you.

This is a summary of a conversation I had with Helen after one of the workshops, which Helen agreed could be included in the interview data.

Helen, who is from Taiwan, said she had gone through a period of extreme confusion and paralysis when she felt she couldn’t write her assignments because she felt that everything she wrote was “fake”. Her tutor said that this was what higher education was about. Her confusion was triggered by her attempts to get to the truth about the “re-education” camps in China where Uyghurs are detained. She got some video recordings by (I think) BBC journalists of Uyghur people released from these centres who were interviewed about their experiences, and showed her friends from mainland China. But they said the videos were propaganda. Who to believe?

I said that in Workshop 1 I talked about how you assess the reliability of a source; Helen had missed this workshop but the materials are available in the Google Drive. We talked about how the Chinese press is owned by the government and about motivation – what would the BBC or Guardian gain by lying about the camps, and what would the Chinese press or government lose by telling the truth? But I sympathised with her confusion and said that I agreed with her tutor; sometimes in order for your thinking to grow, you had to be broken down first.