

# MATERIALS FOR CRITICAL THINKING AND ARGUMENTATIVE WRITING

A Contextualized Booklet to Develop Critical Thinking and Argumentative Writing

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## MATERIALS FOR CRITICAL THINKING AND ARGUMENTATIVE WRITING

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**Abstract**

This qualitative action research study reports the contribution of designing and implementing a contextualized booklet, made up of six lessons, in the development of fifth graders' critical thinking skills, when writing argumentative texts in an English as a Foreign Language (EFL henceforth) classroom at Colombo American private school. The instruments used for collecting data were students' artefacts (a contextualized booklet), teacher's field notes, and a questionnaire. The findings revealed that the contextualized booklet reached particularity, practicality, and possibility as it positively impacted students; it made them feel motivated as they considered the topics of the booklet relevant and useful. Besides, scaffolded strategy-based materials fomented learning through the conscious use of strategies to develop the activities proposed for the implementation of the pedagogical intervention building knowledge in context. Moreover, working on topics related to students' lives, facilitated the exchange of reliable ideas that fostered the development of critical thinking skills. Students' context set the grounds for the expression of reflective, organized, and consistent standpoints, providing confidence that students highly appreciated. Furthermore, through the use of the contextualized booklet, students remembered prior knowledge, understood new concepts, analyzed information, applied knowledge in context, and evaluated relevant evidences to back up their viewpoints and to create argumentative paragraphs. Finally, students gained confidence to structure and elaborate arguments attaining argumentative writing.

**Keywords:** materials development, critical thinking, argumentative writing

## MATERIALS FOR CRITICAL THINKING AND ARGUMENTATIVE WRITING

**Resumen**

El objetivo principal de esta investigación acción cualitativa fue analizar la contribución del diseño y la implementación de una cartilla contextualizada, compuesta por seis lecciones, en el desarrollo de habilidades de pensamiento crítico, en estudiantes de quinto grado de educación básica primaria, al escribir textos argumentativos en la clase de inglés como lengua extranjera, en el colegio bilingüe privado Colombo Americano. Los instrumentos empleados para recolectar la información fueron los materiales de los estudiantes (una cartilla contextualizada), las notas de campo de la profesora y un cuestionario. Los resultados sugieren que la cartilla contextualizada alcanzó particularidad, sentido práctico y posibilidad impactando positivamente a los estudiantes y motivándolos dada la relevancia y utilidad de los temas incluidos. Además, los materiales fundamentados en estrategias de aprendizaje promovieron el uso consciente de las mismas en el desarrollo de las actividades propuestas para la implementación de la intervención pedagógica en la construcción de conocimiento en contexto. Asimismo, los temas relacionados con el entorno de los estudiantes facilitaron el intercambio de ideas confiables que fomentaron el desarrollo de habilidades de pensamiento crítico. El ambiente real de los estudiantes sentó las bases para la expresión de puntos de vista organizados, reflexivos y consistentes; generando confianza apreciada y valorada por los estudiantes. Mediante el uso de la cartilla contextualizada los estudiantes recordaron conocimiento previo, comprendieron nuevos conceptos, analizaron información, aplicaron conocimiento en contexto y evaluaron evidencias relevantes para respaldar sus puntos de vista y para crear párrafos argumentativos. Finalmente, los estudiantes ganaron confianza para estructurar y elaborar argumentos alcanzando la escritura argumentativa.

***Palabras clave:*** desarrollo de materiales, pensamiento crítico, escritura argumentativa

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## Resumen Analítico en Educación – RAE

### General Information

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### Description

This action research study aimed at analyzing the contribution of a contextualized booklet in the development of children's critical thinking skills when writing argumentative paragraphs in an English as a Foreign Language classroom. In doing so, students' artefacts, teacher's field notes, and a questionnaire were selected as the instruments to collect and analyze the data. The participants of the present study were 24 fifth grade students, 14 girls and 10 boys aged 10-11 years old from a private bilingual school, as well as me, as the teacher-researcher and materials developer.

Three theoretical constructs underpinned this study which correspond to the three constructs of the research question, namely, materials development, critical thinking, and argumentative writing. Referring to materials development, I found relevant information in the theoretical contributions of several scholars, such as Canagarajah (2005), Kumaravadivelu (2016), Littlejohn (2012), Masuhara (2011), Montijano (2014), Núñez and Téllez (2004, 2009, 2015), Núñez, Téllez, and Castellanos (2012, 2013, 2017a, 2017b), Rico (2005), and Tomlinson (2011, 2012). Regarding critical thinking, Bloom (1956), Browne (2001), Gómez (2010), Graham (1940), Paul and Elder (2007), as well as Pineda and Núñez (2001), supported my study with their significant contributions to this matter. Finally, I considered Monsalve (1992), Núñez and Téllez (2012), Van Dijk (1997), Vygotsky (1978), Weston (2004), and Zubiría (2006), along with their theories, to elaborate the construct of argumentative writing.

The findings of this study suggested that the contextualized booklet reached particularity, practicality, and possibility with a positive impact on students by motivating them, as the booklet's topics reflected appropriateness and usefulness. Additionally, learning strategies fomented students' self-investment to develop the activities proposed. Likewise, these topics related to students' lives, simplified the exchange of ideas fostering the development of critical thinking skills. Students' context increased the possibilities to express reflective, organized, and consistent standpoints. Moreover, by using the contextualized booklet, students were able to remember prior knowledge, understand new concepts, analyze information, apply knowledge in context, and evaluate evidences to support their viewpoints in the creation of argumentative

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paragraphs. Lastly, students grew in confidence to elaborate arguments attaining argumentative writing.

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### Content

This research study comprises five chapters. The first chapter encompasses the research problem. The second chapter covers the literature review. The third chapter describes the methodological design. Chapter four addresses the findings and results. Finally, chapter five underscores the conclusions, pedagogical implications, limitations, and questions for further research.

### Methodology

The qualitative approach framed this study considering that it is a systematic activity to comprehend the educational phenomenon (Sandin, 2003). Besides, this study is an action research as it involves specific actions to identify and solve a problem. (Parsons & Brown, 2002). The participants were selected with the convenience sampling technique (Gravetter & Forzano, 2005). The data was analyzed using the grounded theory (Patton, 2002), the color coding technique (Bianco, Gasparini & Schettini, 2014), and two types of triangulation, the theoretical and the methodological (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). The pedagogical intervention consisted of the design and implementation of a contextualized booklet that covered six lessons to develop critical thinking skills and enhance argumentative writing. Accordingly, six Second Language Acquisition principles (Tomlinson, 1998) informed this pedagogical intervention with the corresponding instructional objectives. Particularly, this pedagogical intervention constitutes an innovation for the Colombo American School as it was the first contextualized booklet implemented in this setting (Núñez et al., 2012, 2017). Thus, it implied a change in my teaching practices and the teaching context.

The theory of the nature of language was the functional perspective and the theory of language learning was the cultural and ideology perspective (Tudor, 2001). Teaching for

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Understanding (Perkins & Blythe, 1994) was the method that underlined this pedagogical intervention which was contextualized with the philosophy of the school that states educating students as citizens of the world able and willing to transform the society with educational, cultural and social contributions (CAS philosophy). Finally, the instructional phases were applied as follows: proposal of a customized framework addressing the particularities of CAS, students' sensitization, materials' creation and piloting, informed consent letters, and materials' implementation.

### **Conclusions**

In reference to the first research category, the contextualized booklet attained particularity, practicality and possibility (Kumaravadivelu, 1999). Students were receptive to the materials, expressed motivation and confidence since the topics were appropriate and useful (Tomlinson, 2003). Moreover, scaffolded strategy-based materials eased students' learning process (Graves, 1996; Masuhara, 2011; Oxford, 1990; Mc Donough et al., 2013). Concerning the booklet's contents, by being connected to students' lives, they promoted the development of critical thinking skills supporting children in their process of thinking critically (Pineda & Núñez, 2011; Tomlinson & Masuhara, 2010). Likewise, the topics provoked reflective, organized, and consistent standpoints as students remembered previous knowledge, understood new concepts, analyzed information, applied knowledge in context, and evaluated relevant evidences to create argumentative paragraphs (Bloom, 1956). Finally, the contextualized booklet contributed to students' self-confidence in the elaboration of arguments (Woods, et al., 2004) supported with evidence (Gleason, 1999) to achieve argumentative writing.

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### **Introduction**

The present action research study analyses the contribution of a contextualized booklet in the development of fifth graders' critical thinking skills when writing argumentative texts in an English as a Foreign Language (henceforth EFL) classroom at a bilingual private school. Throughout this qualitative study, I foresaw to help my students develop their critical thinking and argumentation skills, in the production of better-structured and more meaningful English compositions.

Current textbooks and supporting materials do not consider my students' profile in terms of language learning, affective, cultural, social, and academic needs. These textbooks may approach some of my students' language learning requisites but certainly, they do not meet all their learning needs since they were not created for their specific context. In fact, Gray (2000) argued that "course books as a government-backed enterprise with an economic and ideological agenda aimed ultimately at boosting commerce" (p. 274). Indeed, in the field of EFL and particularly in this case, one size does not fit all (Allwright, 1982). Since textbooks should be "cultural artefacts which seek to make languages mean" (Gray, 2010, p. 2) they should include "a variety of adds-on to meet the demand for a local fit" (Kumaravadivelu, 2016, p. 75) and be created "by each community in relation to its history, needs, and aspirations" (Canagarajah, 2005, p. 199) and should have "an impact beyond simply the learning of the language they present" (Littlejohn, 2011, p.180). Therefore, by designing and implementing a contextualized booklet that suits my students' needs, I intended to fulfil this deficiency. In the same way, I also expected to ease my students' language learning process, especially by encouraging them to exploit their potential in the development of critical thinking skills when writing argumentative paragraphs.

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Since English is the Target Language (henceforth TL) of this study, it takes into consideration the two programs that serve as base for the bilingual program at Colombo American School (henceforth CAS) where the implementation took place. Thus, it considers the national standards for language learning contemplated in the document National English Program; Colombia Very Well 2015-2025 from the Ministry of Education (MEN hereafter for its acronym in Spanish) in regard to the use of English for communicative purposes. Besides, the Common European Framework of Reference for Language: Learning, teaching, assessment (henceforth CEFR) which states the six levels of foreign language proficiency adopted in Colombia as follows: A1, A2, B1, B2, C1, and C2. Then, I designed a booklet bearing in mind my students' context in accordance to CAS curriculum and all the aspects it contemplates in the quest for helping students become bilingual.

When reading students' compositions, some ideas do not make sense and the problem seems to be that students do not find the way to analyze information to make clear arguments. In this sense, The Foundation for Critical Thinking (1987) stated that when students develop skills to observe and analyze information, they are able to evaluate and apply what they have in mind. For this reason, fostering critical thinking in written activities becomes an essential job for us as teachers.

There is no doubt that writing is a process that becomes meaningful when the writer uses critical thinking in the compositions to present an argument. Regarding this, Vdovina and Cardozo (2013) contended that "critical thinking is associated with quality thinking and, if sufficiently developed, provides learners with a more skillful way of communicating with other people, acquiring new knowledge, and dealing with ideas, beliefs, and attitudes" (p. 56). Moreover, as Weston (2004) suggested, "Argumentation offers a set of reasons or proves to

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support a conclusion” (p. 13). In other words, writing not only to show a written task, but also to make something out of it. In addition, writing is a skill that requires practice. Harmer (2004) highlighted the fact that “the ability to write has to be consciously learned” (p. 3). Thus, effective communication in writing demands writers to use critical thinking skills to develop clear arguments to support an idea.

I have structured this paper in five chapters. The first one sets out the research problem. The second chapter corresponds to the literature review. The third chapter deals with the methodological design. Chapter four refers to the findings and results. Finally, chapter five covers the conclusions, pedagogical implications, limitations, and questions for further research.

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### Chapter I

#### Research Problem

##### Statement of the Problem

As a teacher, I have noticed that there are many problems to face when working on writing in an EFL class. To begin this study, I observed some of my classes, reflected upon them and kept a teacher's journal. In addition to this, I developed three loop-writing activities and administered a survey (See Appendix A). At the beginning of a written activity, students felt blocked. In general, they began asking questions about the type of text and the expectations of the final product. Another concern for them was how long the composition was supposed to be.

As the activity continued, they started asking questions about words they already knew but for some reason they forgot when producing a written text. Some of them even expressed that they did not know what to write and they did not manage the way to structure their ideas in a text. In fact, those problematic issues originated this study. Therefore, I wanted students in my EFL classroom to use critical thinking skills when writing argumentative texts.

Acknowledging that writing is a useful way to communicate what we feel and to express what we think; working on this ability becomes essential in an EFL classroom. Consequently, I intended to design and implement a contextualized booklet that contains six lessons to help my students develop critical thinking skills and enhance argumentative writing to communicate ideas more effectively.

##### Research Question

How do the design and implementation of a contextualized booklet develop critical thinking skills and enhance argumentative writing of fifth graders in an EFL class at a bilingual private school?



## MATERIALS FOR CRITICAL THINKING AND ARGUMENTATIVE WRITING

### **Research Objectives.**

**General objective.** To explore how the design and implementation of a contextualized booklet develop critical thinking skills and enhance argumentative writing of fifth graders in an EFL class at a bilingual private school.

**Specific objectives.** (a) To assess the appropriateness and usefulness of a contextualized booklet in developing fifth grade students' critical thinking and argumentative writing; (b) to describe the process in which students apply critical thinking skills in written compositions; and (c) to analyze students' way to structure clear written ideas supported by solid evidence.

### **Related Studies**

The following studies are relevant and go in accordance with my research study since they mention important aspects related to materials development, critical thinking, and argumentative writing, which are the three constructs that frame this study. It is pertinent to inform the reader that critical thinking and argumentative writing have not been fully explored in primary school. Most studies related to these topics, consider older participants or did not have the same approach in critical thinking and argumentative writing my research study has. I believe that despite being young, elementary students at private schools like CAS, due to their socio-economic conditions, as well as the abilities of any other student in elementary, have a good English proficiency level, which allow them to work on this type of writing; for that reason, I decided to conduct my research study on this challenging topic. Despite being carried out in different teaching settings and populations, I found significant information in the following research studies.

Referring to materials development (MD henceforth) and critical thinking, the qualitative action research carried out by Carvajal, Poveda and Rojas (2012) at an NGO with children with

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elementary English language level, investigated the development of critical thinking skills and English language improvement through the implementation of a didactic unit. Teacher researchers collected data through field notes, students' artifacts and semi-structured interviews, which allowed them to conclude that contextualized materials increase students' motivation and create more participatory learning environments. They also concluded that these types of materials develop better understanding of topics fostering students to become analytical by using critical thinking skills. The usefulness of this study lies in the positive effect that contextualized materials have on the development of students' critical thinking skills.

In the same line of thought, the qualitative action research study conducted by Bernal, Torres and Pineda (2017) at Bosanova public school, in Bogotá, described the writing teaching process of fifth graders in the EFL classroom. Researchers used field notes, students' artifacts and semi-structured interviews as data collection instruments. The findings of this study indicate that didactic materials, used as teaching alternatives in pedagogical practices, promote the comprehension of critical thinking and the production of argumentative writing. Since this study deals with the development of critical thinking skills through didactic materials, it becomes relevant for the present research study.

By the same token, at the international level, the qualitative action research study carried out by Salmon (2008) at two early childhood bilingual settings in Miami, Florida, investigated the young child's mind and the way they make thinking visible in written and oral activities. Teacher's field notes, videotapes, and students' artefacts were used for data collection. The findings suggest that creating a culture of thinking in the classroom promotes students' communication and provides strategies to make their thinking visible in written and oral form.

## MATERIALS FOR CRITICAL THINKING AND ARGUMENTATIVE WRITING

This research study provides useful insights concerning the development of children's thinking skills and how they use them when writing.

In reference to critical thinking and writing, the qualitative action research study carried out by Laverde, Salazar, and Soler (2015) with third graders at a private school in Bogotá examined the improvements of the participants' writing process by applying critical thinking skills. Despite the fact of studying at a bilingual school and having a good level of English, researchers found that, students were unable to structure clear ideas in their English compositions. Through the information gathered by using surveys, rubrics, and students' artifacts, researchers concluded that task-based lessons had a positive effect in students' writing productions. This study is pertinent because it explained how written productions improved when critical thinking skills are developed and applied using appropriate materials.

Similarly, the qualitative action research study conducted by Quevedo (2008) at a private school in Bogotá with children in elementary school explored the importance of a change in writing classes to include a critical dimension. The researcher collected data through different instruments such as surveys and students' artifacts. Some of the findings of this research showed that students included a critical point of view in their written productions after exploring the social components and facts that surround them. Having their own voices about their context when writing, is the aspect that I consider more significant to my study.

In relation to writing and materials development at the local level, the action research study carried out by Jiménez (2015) with fourth grade students at a private school dealt with the implementation of workshops based on short stories to improve the writing process. The teacher researcher collected data through field notes, students' artifacts, and questionnaires. After the intervention, she suggested that the implementation of cooperative writing workshops

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encouraged students to be aware of writing as a process and to make better use of English in their compositions. This study contributes to my research because it described how the implementation of contextualized materials enhanced the writing process of the students.

In the same way, the action research study conducted by Muñoz (2010) with first graders at a private school in Bogotá analyzed students' writing development when using designed instructional materials. To collect data, the researcher used students' artifacts, video tapes and field notes. The research revealed how the participants became more creative writers by recalling prior knowledge and integrating L1 and L2 elements. This study is relevant to my research because it showed that children became better writers with the implementation of appropriate materials.

Likewise, at the international level, the action research study conducted by Korosidou and Griva (2016) in a private school in Greece with fourth grade students, analyzed the development of productive skills in an EFL classroom with the design, implementation, and evaluation of a mini-syllabus. Students participated in a variety of creative activities that gave them the opportunity to express themselves in written productions. The findings of the study indicated students' improvement regarding productive skills in the target language, as well as the development of children's citizenship awareness and sensitivity towards diversity. This research is useful to my study because it addresses materials development, writing, elaboration of arguments using the TL, and offers results regarding sensitivity to diversity, which are aspects that lead students to think critically toward controversial issues.

### **Setting**

This research study took place at Colombo American School (CAS hereafter). This is a private school located in the north of Bogotá. The school's philosophy contemplates the idea of

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educating transformative leaders with excellent academic results. Besides the academic aspect, CAS also promotes the work on values that lead to authentic leaders. All these aspects included in the school's Proyecto Educativo Institucional (PEI hereafter as its acronym in Spanish) and the Manual de Convivencia. CAS is a bilingual school that follows the curriculum of the CIE (Cambridge International examinations) from Cambridge University. Also, the National English Program; Colombia Very Well 2015-2025 from the MEN.

The target population corresponds to fifth grade students who are between ten and eleven years old. The average number of students per class is twenty-two. These students have English classes ten hours per week, most of the times, two hours per day. The school promotes the use of the target language not only inside the classrooms, but also in every place around school. This constant exposure to the TL inside and outside the classrooms, promotes the high proficiency English level of the students selected.

### **Rationale**

First, I expected to contribute to the development of my students' critical thinking skills and to enhance their argumentative writing. This, through the implementation of a contextualized booklet that includes six lessons based on students' context to truly motivate and engage them in the completion of the activities. Likewise, I intended to encourage my students to try their best in the English classes, so their written products are well structured and supported according to their abilities.

Additionally, I desired to contribute to EFL community of teachers in the development of appropriate materials, so their writing classes are more productive. In the same way, I hoped to contribute to CAS community in the implementation of a contextualized booklet for writing activities in the syllabus and the curriculum for the entire school.

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Furthermore, this research study also contributed to the research line on Materials Development and Didactics ascribed to the research group: Critical Pedagogy and Didactics for Social Transformation. Hence, the theoretical contribution became evident as the pedagogical intervention was underpinned by six Second Language Acquisition (henceforth SLA) principles and a contextualized MD framework that considered the principles of “justice, equity and inclusion,” “empowerment and autonomy,” and “quality assurance and professional development” (Núñez, Téllez & Castellanos, 2013, p. 6). Accordingly, the booklet implemented was the same for each student, designed by the same teacher, and responded to the particularities of the teaching setting. Besides, it allowed students to feel confident about their thinking and argumentation skills and to work more autonomously. Moreover, as education face the challenges of a changing society, this pedagogical intervention fostered the innovation through materials development based on my students’ needs, encouraged me to assume a more dynamic role in the EFL classroom (Núñez, Téllez & Castellanos, 2012), fomented my professional growth and allowed the transformation of my teaching practices (Núñez & Téllez, 2015). In addition, the methodological contribution of the study became visible as the pedagogical intervention contemplated a customized and contextualized framework based on the CAS philosophy, that contemplates the idea of educating students as citizens of the world able and willing to transform their society with educational, cultural, and social contributions. Finally, this study contributed to the local, regional, and national community by fostering future investigations related to materials development, critical thinking, and argumentative writing.

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### Chapter II

#### Literature Review

As I stated above, the purpose of this qualitative action research study is to analyze the contribution of a contextualized booklet in the development of critical thinking skills when writing argumentative texts in an EFL classroom at a private school. This chapter deals with important scholars along with their theories to support the three constructs of this study: materials development, critical thinking and argumentative writing. Among many authors, I incorporated Gilmore (2007), Harmer (2004), Monsalve (1992), Montijano (2014), Núñez and Tellez (2012), Pineda and Núñez (2001), Rico (2012), Thomas (2014), Tomlinson (2012), Van Dijk (1997), Weston (2004), and Zubiría (2006).

#### Materials Development

In the field of Materials development (MD henceforth), there are a lot of researchers and studies that support teachers to design and implement materials based on students' needs. Therefore, finding materials that are meaningful and responsive to students' needs, it is important and a necessity for teachers to carry out successful lessons in which the learning of a language takes place. This topic is relevant for my research study to see the influence of contextualized lessons in the development of critical thinking when writing argumentative texts.

**Is MD a field of study?** This domain deals with aspects to clear up some conceptions about MD. First, it is necessary to mention that the creation of relevant and meaningful materials implies a lot of commitment and investigation by teachers. In relation to this, Edge and Wharton (1998) asserted that "research frequently begins with the identification of an issue which is salient for the teacher, and leads not only to perceived improvements in practice but, more importantly, to deeper understandings of the areas investigated" (p. 297). Moreover, Núñez,

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Pineda, and Téllez (2004) affirmed that developing materials “should not turn into a meaningless task with the sole purpose of enjoying and keeping the students busy” (p. 130). There is a close relation between learning-teaching processes and materials. Therefore, materials should reflect clear objectives and should be the product of research. In fact, researching sets the basis for designing, implementing and evaluating materials.

Indeed, after a lot of research by many scholars, it is pertinent to say that MD is a field of study. In this regard, Tomlinson (2012) affirmed that “as a field it investigates the principles and procedures of the design, writing, implementation, evaluation and analysis of materials” (p. 2). In the same order of ideas, Núñez, Téllez and Castellanos (2013) asserted that MD, as a field of study, “Demands an informed methodology that allows validating the efficiency, appropriateness and relevance of materials within the context of learning a language” (p. 10). Additionally, Graves (1996) contended that MD “is the planning process by which a teacher creates units and lessons within those units to carry out the objective s of the course. In a sense, it is the process of making your syllabus more and more specific” (p. 149). In sum, MD is a field of study because it requires more than practicing in the classroom. MD implies systematic research to elaborate, test and evaluate the materials based on the necessities of a specific group of students.

There are many factors involved in MD as a field of study. As Núñez and Tellez (2015) mentioned, “Reflection, awareness of and MD rationale, affect, motivation, teachers’ beliefs, creativity, and commitment are the components that interplay in MD” (p. 57). In relation to this, the authors also affirmed that “language pedagogy and applied linguistics have recently recognized that MD is a field of study focused on the effect of materials on the teaching-learning process of a foreign language” (p. 57). In essence, MD is a field that implies constant research and teachers’ awareness of students’ genuine needs.



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**Towards a materials definition.** Materials, among others, are resources teachers use to make teaching and learning processes take place in the EFL classroom. Considering that learning a new language can be challenging, if properly used, materials highly benefit the process of learning a TL. They are defined as “anything which is used by teachers or learners to facilitate the learning of a language” (Tomlinson, 2011, p. 2) and “can be anything which is deliberately used to increase the learners’ knowledge and/or experience of the language” (Tomlinson, 2011, p. 2). Furthermore, materials are anything “designed to satisfy learners’ needs and interests” (Masuhara, 2011, p. 239), “a colossal source of practical ideas on how to sequence the different linguistic constituents to teach” (Montijano, 2014, p. 268), “socio-cultural resources that facilitate not only linguistic interaction but also cultural exchanges” (Núñez et al., 2013, p. 10) and “a source of exposure for learners to language and culture” (Rico, 2005, p. 130). Having the previous definitions in mind and based on my experience, not only as a teacher but as a student, I contemplate the idea that materials are resources teachers use to help learners build knowledge and they enable socio-cultural interactions in academic contexts. Constantly, teachers create or adapt materials without being aware of it, to the extent of not systematizing them, ignoring how much they contribute to improve both, our students’ learning and our teaching practices.

**Typology of materials: Authentic vs non-authentic.** Teachers create and adapt materials to guide and complement teaching practice as well as to ease students’ learning process. In this sense, materials are resources teachers use to encourage learners to practice and apply their knowledge in context. Specifically, authentic and non-authentic materials are the two kinds of materials teachers consider when teaching a class.

Authentic materials meet different necessities, but their main purpose is not to teach. More precisely, in Tomlinson’s words (2012), “An authentic text is one which is produced in

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order to communicate rather than to teach”, (p. 162). In addition, Thomas (2014) claimed that “authentic materials are produced for real communication and that the purpose of authentic materials is to communicate meaning and information rather than to teach language” (p. 15). Moreover, as Montijano (2014) stated, “Authentic materials are those not produced specifically for language teaching purposes” (p. 281). However, several academics disagreed with the imperative of authenticity (Clarke, 1989; Day & Bamford, 1998) since both authentic and non-authentic materials support the curriculum and are educationally exploitable (Carter, as cited in Harwood, 2010; Núñez, 2010). In conclusion and regardless their nature, if authentic materials are properly used and combined with non-authentic materials, they can greatly benefit teaching and learning processes in the classroom.

Although professionals design commercial materials, they do not always motivate students’ learning process, as they do not consider the cultural context in which teaching and learning take place. For example, Rico (2012) highlighted the fact that “despite innovative ideas of how to bring cultural explanations to the classroom, course books stay with the idea of language training” (p.12). Furthermore, Gilmore’s (2007) suggested that “material writers have relied on intuitions about language rather than empirical data and have focused on imparting lexico-grammatical knowledge at the expense of pragmatics” (p. 13). Indeed, Hardwood (2010) attested that “materials writers obviously need to bear in mind the needs of the context and their audience” (p. 15). Material writers ought to go beyond the mere production of language textbooks and look for the fulfillment of the needs of students, teachers and the institution. EFL teachers must consider materials that raise students’ interest in learning the TL. In addition, these materials should relate not only to the contents of the TL, which are important as well; but also,

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to students' lives and experiences, cultural backgrounds, and ways to perceive the world which leads to a more meaningful and conscious learning.

In contrast to authentic materials, non-authentic materials are those developed for teaching purposes. At a more specific level, and within the materials designed for pedagogical or teaching purposes, materials include “coursebooks, videos, graded readers, flash cards, games, websites, and mobile phone interactions” (Tomlinson, 2012 p. 143). In addition, non-authentic materials can be “a learning-teaching exercise, a task, an activity, a lesson, a unit or a module composed by one or two units” (Núñez & Téllez, 2009, p. 175). Altogether, those materials fall into the category of non-authentic resources designed for academic purposes and with the intention of making the teaching-learning process easier and effective. For the purpose of this study, I conceived materials as pedagogical means to facilitate the achievement of my students' learning objectives. Thus, the contextualized booklet fits into the non-authentic category since it particularly addresses the development of critical thinking skills and argumentative writing enhancement of a specific group of students in a specific context.

In the pedagogical intervention in chapter three, I address Second Language Acquisition (SLA) principles that govern language-teaching materials. In the instructional phases, also in chapter three, I discuss the theoretical frameworks that structure them and propose a contextualized framework to develop materials.

Having discussed the first theoretical construct that informs this study, the following section deals with the second construct, which is critical thinking.

### **Critical Thinking**

People learn for different reasons and they aim to use knowledge in the appropriate moments. Then, accumulating information without being able to apply it in context makes no

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sense. Consequently, critical thinking (CT hereafter) becomes useful to analyze and assess information to establish one's point of view.

**Defining critical thinking.** Among different meanings, critical thinking is “the intellectually disciplined process of actively and skillfully conceptualizing, applying, analyzing, synthesizing, and/or evaluating information gathered from, or generated by, observation, experience, reflection, reasoning, or communication, as a guide to belief and action” (The Foundation for Critical Thinking, 1987, para. 3). No doubt that all the mental processes mentioned above influence the way individuals structure thinking to act in diverse situations. Likewise, Paul and Elder (2007) defined critical thinking as “the art of analyzing and evaluating thinking with a view to improving it” (p. 4). This suggests refining our thinking by making conscious use of it and deliberately structuring our thoughts. In the same way, Graham (1940) stated that critical thinking is “the examination and test of propositions of any kind which are offered for acceptance, in order to find out whether they correspond to reality or not” (p. 632). This benefits the process of deciding which information should be applied on different contexts. Similarly, Browne (2001) highlighted that critical thinking “consists of asking questions in an effort to reach a personal decision about the worth of what you have experienced” (p. 1). The excerpt above gives account of the importance of questioning our surrounding world to become analytical and assertive in decision making. In sum, critical thinking deals with the ability to analyze and evaluate relevant information to produce or build knowledge and to skillfully apply it on real contexts.

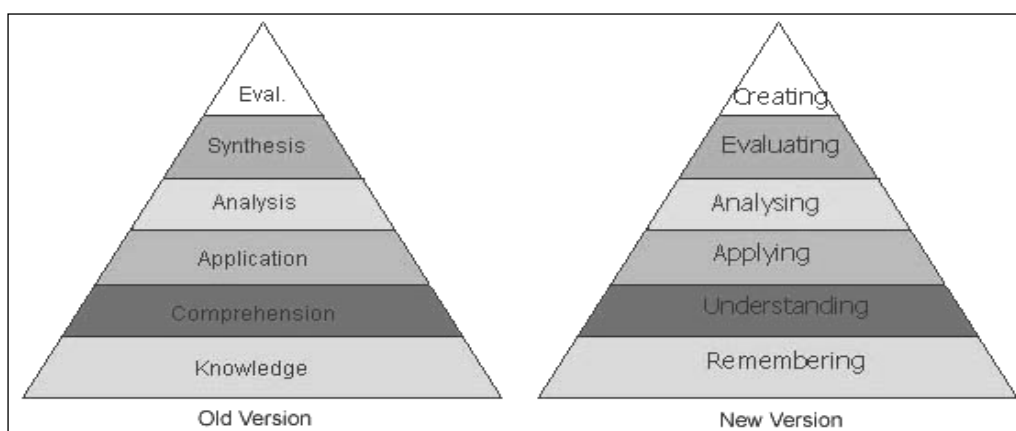
Thus far, it is important to mention Bloom's (1956) taxonomy because it provides insights of the way human beings build up their knowledge. More precisely, in Krathwohl's (2002) words, Bloom's taxonomy “is a framework for classifying statements of what we expect

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or intend our students to learn as a result of instruction” (p. 212). The psychologist Benjamin Bloom in collaboration with fellow colleagues, created the first version in 1956. Despite its revisions, Bloom’s taxonomy still contributes to foster CT in the classroom. In this regard, Coffey (2016) claimed that “by using Bloom’s Taxonomy in the classroom, teachers can assess students on multiple learning outcomes that are aligned to local, state, and national standards and objectives” (p. 3). This classification contributes to understand the way the brain gets and interprets information. The image below contains the first and the last revised versions; however, the new version is the one that served as reference for my research study as I consider the terms more suitable.

Image caption 1

*Revised Bloom’s Taxonomy (Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001)*



Source: <https://thesecondprinciple.com/teaching-essentials/beyond-bloom-cognitive-taxonomy-revised/>

Acknowledging the six levels of the new version of Bloom’s Taxonomy revised by Anderson and Krathwohl (2001). Firstly, remembering entails bringing back memories or retained information to be used for further ideas elaboration. Secondly, understanding means to perceive and interpret information. Thirdly, applying is the way we use information in context.

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Then, analyzing implies the examination of information in detail. Next, evaluating involves assessing information to determine its relevance and validity. Finally, creating indicates generating or producing new knowledge based on previous knowledge.

**Relating critical thinking to critical thinkers.** Up to this point, it is relevant to mention that thinking is different in every person as thinking skills vary from one person to another. Pineda (2003) acknowledged that it is “important to consider that critical thinking is not a measurable concept, nor is it a final stage a person can reach” (p. 41). People do not learn how to think; what they learn are strategies to reach certain levels of understanding. By the same token, as Pineda and Núñez (2001) sustained, “Human learning entails a cyclical activity in which we constantly add and refine our knowledge base so as to keep on elaborating more sophisticated thinking processes to which we also attach our beliefs and personal values” (p. 37). Indeed, thinking implies constantly changing our minds based on new knowledge and experiences lived within particular contexts. Furthermore, Parada (2008) affirmed that “a critical thinker is the one who looks for a basis or cause for some belief, action, fact or event” (p. 73). Before drawing conclusions, a person who thinks critically, finds the origin and the reason of the surrounding world. Similarly, in Facione’s (1990) words, a critical thinker is “well-informed ... open-minded, flexible, fair-minded in evaluation ... prudent in making judgments, willing to reconsider, clear about issues ... diligent in seeking relevant information, reasonable in the selection of the criteria, focused in inquiry, and persistent in seeking results” (p. 2). Therefore, thinking critically and argumentative writing are tightly related since both require being well informed and able to listen to others even in case of opposite points of view.

All in all, it is precise to say that a critical thinker reflects and elaborates upon information received. Moreover, a critical thinker is analytical, looks for different information

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sources, compares, and contrasts information to make accurate decisions. Under these notions, teaching practices, among others, should facilitate the development of CT skills, which contribute to students' ability to structure thoughts. Furthermore, students perform better in class, fully use their potential, and find learning meaningful when they become aware of how relevant it is to organize and structure their ideas before applying them in context. The present study focuses on the use of students' critical thinking skills to write argumentative texts; for that reason, it was essential to create a class environment that favors the process in which students become critical thinkers by elaborating clear arguments and showing argumentation skills in the compositions at fifth-grade level.

**Critical thinking skills and a contextualized booklet.** As stated before, materials should be responsive to students' learning needs and they should be contextualized so that the learning process becomes meaningful. As a teacher, I have had the opportunity to work with different EFL textbooks, unfortunately most of them do not ponder my students setting and background. These materials end up being just massive publications that do not respond to specific learning needs. Therefore, trying to develop CT skills with existing commercial decontextualized teaching resources that disseminate the idea of a hegemonic, monolithic and static culture (Guest, 2002) becomes difficult, since CT begins by analyzing problems of the surrounding world.

For this reason, and especially in EFL, it is crucial to frame classroom and teaching practices in students' context with activities that develop students' critical thinking skills. Thus, teachers should "teach English language based on our own context, where students have the chance to involve their critical thinking in the learning process" (Parada, 2008, p. 74). Moreover, teachers need to "see teaching as an opportunity to enhance students' ability to learn as well as to

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provide meaningful and engaging experiences in the class” (Gómez, 2010, p. 33). There is no doubt that students feel more comfortable, accomplish their learning goals, and improve their abilities by being in a familiar context, counting on teachers able and willing to create better learning settings that address cognitive and emotional aspects.

It is in the classroom where teachers have the opportunity to instruct, guide, encourage, and inspire students to always open their minds and try their best no matter the results. In addition, Kumaravadivelu (1999) asserted that a classroom is a place where “the prime elements of education-ideas and ideologies, policies and plans, materials and methods, teachers and the taught-all mix together to produce exclusive and at times explosive environments that might help or hinder the creation and utilization of learning opportunities” (p. 454). Thus, the classroom is the ideal place for teachers to carry out meaningful activities not only based on planning, curriculum, and institutional policies, but most importantly, meaningful activities that provide students with opportunities to express their points of view, explore and discover their own academic potential and set grounds to be prepare for the world they will face.

More often than not, decontextualized materials are more likely to bring tedium to the classes and to diminish students’ thinking skills. In relation to this, Pineda (2003) affirmed that “poorly designed materials, generate boredom and apathy” (p. 53). Hence, among EFL teachers, there is a strong necessity of designing materials that favor students learning process and, at the same time, motivates them. More precisely, in Richards’ (2005) words, “Effective materials in language teaching are shaped by consideration of a number of factors, including teacher, learners, and contextual variables” (p. 1). Although, materials benefit learning processes, it is well known that they do not serve their purpose of assisting teaching-learning processes if they do not consider classroom participants on real contexts. Overall, learning takes place in the



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classroom where teachers guide students on the process by using materials that are meaningful to them. In this sense, creating materials entails providing opportunities for students to remember, understand, apply, analyze, evaluate and create knowledge aligned to the school syllabus, considering their interests, values, preferences, and expectations.

**Critical thinking and argumentative writing.** There is a close relationship between critical thinking and argumentative writing as the former leads to the latter. Critical thinking “entails effective communication and problem-solving abilities” (Paul & Elder, 2006, p. 4). At the same time, argumentative writing deals with the idea of “reaching conclusions well supported by reasons, explained and defended through arguments” (Weston, 2004, p. 14). A critical thinker formulates clear and precise questions; gathers, assesses and interprets relevant information in multiples perspectives; differentiates facts from opinions; is open-minded at recognizing and evaluating assumptions, implications, and practical consequences; draws conclusions; proposes alternative solutions to existing problems; and elaborates arguments to communicate effectively with others aiming at persuading the audience.

In the previous section, I discussed critical thinking skills in relation to argumentation; in the following one, I address argumentative writing.

### **Literacy**

In relation to education, most people usually define literacy as the ability to read and write. According to Thoman and Jolls (2003), literacy means “having the skill to interpret “squiggles” on a piece of paper as letters which, when put together, formed words that conveyed meaning” (p. 6). Likewise, the Education for All Global Monitoring Report (2006, capitalization of the original) defined literacy as “a set of tangible skills – particularly the cognitive skills of reading and writing – that are independent of the context in which they are acquired and the

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background of the person who acquires them” (p. 149). Communication is a necessity and implicit in human relationships; reading and writing, among other things, serve this purpose regardless social settings. Furthermore, UNESCO (2008) added that “a person is literate who can with understanding both read and write a short simple statement on his (her) everyday life” (p. 17). With this in mind, literacy allows communication in daily situations. Moreover, reading and writing are skills applied in daily activities such as reading the newspaper, instructions for a recipe, writing a note, or the list to buy the groceries. In this regard, Keefe and Copeland (2011) stressed the importance of “teaching skills that individuals need for daily living as well as complex demands of a changing technological and economic environment” (p. 94). Both, academic activities which require thinking and logic, as well as routines which do not require elaborated thinking, benefit from acquiring reading and writing abilities. Indeed, a person that is able to read and write can apprehend and communicate information in different contexts where other forms of communication do not take place.

Furthermore, literacies of diverse sources emerge as cultural and technological changes occur. As underlined by Masny and Cole (2009), “The idea of literacy has also expanded and become a serial collocated suffix in new terms such as media literacy, information literacy, critical literacy, affective literacy, medical literacy, statistical literacy, technological literacy” (p. 1). While multicultural changes take place and technology advances rapidly, education settings face new challenges. In Kellner’s (1998) words, “Education today needs to foster a variety of literacies to empower students and to make education relevant to the demands of the present and future” (p. 103). Literacy is everywhere, it benefits the elaboration and the transformation of ideas. There is no doubt that there is a technological and cultural revolution. For that reason, education needs different perspectives to evolve and fulfill the expectations of a new world

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where different literacy practices constantly emerged. In relation to this study, literacy frames writing.

### **Writing**

Writing is an ability and a process that people learn, requires a lot of practice and has different purposes, being the main one to communicate. Accordingly, writing is “used in different settings, for different reasons, and to meet different communicative goals” (Cushing, as cited in Lombana, 2002, p. 45). In the same line of thought, Kirton and Macmillan (2007) stated that “writing is a way of communicating, but it is important to add that it is also what is being communicated” (p. 1). Likewise, Tribble (1996) claimed that “writing enables people to have access to social roles in an international community which uses language for trade or other types of contact” (p. 12). Hence, it is a duty of teachers to motivate students to write with a communicative purpose and to guide this process to make something out of it in diverse local, regional, and international sociocultural contexts. For my research study, it is essential to consider this construct.

**Writing as a process.** Writing suggests talking about different aspects such as coherence, cohesion, spelling, capitalization, punctuation and even handwriting among others. However, writing implies more than the form of a text. Harmer (2004) affirmed that teaching writing “is about helping students to communicate real messages in an appropriate manner” (p. 34). To a great extent, writing implies on the one hand, content. On the other hand, proper form. This way, communication of ideas becomes meaningful. In reference to this, Villanueva (1997) asserted that “there is a process in getting from mind to page” (p. 16). This has to do with the organization and structuring of thoughts right before putting words on paper. Similarly, Kerr (1995) suggested that “good writing is an absolutely non-derivative expression of thought. Good

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writing is autonomous, personal, individual” (p. 80). Indeed, having a point of view or a specific way to perceive the world is independent and eventually can promote the expression of ideas in written form. Additionally, as Elbow (1981) admitted, “Writing calls on the ability to create words and ideas out of yourself, but it also calls on the ability to criticize them in order to decide which ones to use” (p. 7). Writing begins with a perception of something, but requires further elaboration, investigation and evaluation. Overall, writing allows people to communicate ideas. Effective writing occurs once writers, through a composition, capture their thoughts in a clear way and make readers understand what they try to express.

Writing is a complex process that entails communicating ideas and thoughts to an audience. This means that writing must have a clear purpose; otherwise, it would be just writing for writing and not with the clear intention to communicate something specific. For instance, Harmer (2004) pointed out the idea that “not all writing activities necessarily help students to write more effectively, or, if they do, that is a by-product of the activity rather than its main purpose” (p. 34). Effective writing is connected to thinking skills and the ability to elaborate and clearly express ideas, not just putting words on paper. In the same way, Murray (1972) attested that effective writing has to do with “the continual excitement of choosing one word instead of another, of searching for the one true word” (p. 12) with the purpose of clearly communicate our ideas and thoughts. Thus, writing well involves the knowledge of a certain topic and the intention to convey meaning. It also implies the ability to reach the audience for which it is intended by effectively transmitting ideas and thoughts through a piece of writing.

It is also important to mention that some authors defined certain stages in the process of writing for it to take place and to be successful. Murray (1972) divided the process of writing into three stages: prewriting, writing, and rewriting. Regarding this, the author highlighted that

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“the amount of time a writer spends in each stage depends on his personality, his work habits, his maturity as a craftsman, and the challenge of what he is trying to say.” (Murray, 1972, p. 13). In other words, writing hinges on what the person tries to communicate, the person’s character and the efforts to do so. Similarly, Harmer (2004) established four stages in the writing process: planning, drafting, editing, and final version. He has also affirmed that “the process of writing is not linear, as indicated above, but rather recursive” (p. 5). As it is a process, it takes time, it involves successive executions, and it happens in different moments in every person. No matter the amount of stages, writing, requires spending time organizing ideas before putting them in a written way. When designing the booklet for the pedagogical intervention of this study, I took into consideration the stages Harmer (2004) proposed since they are more suitable for the target population. Besides, students at CAS follow these stages in their regular classes.

**Writing arguments.** Forming and giving clear arguments is not easy. From Weston’s point of view (2004), “Giving an argument means to offer a group of reasons or proofs to support a conclusion” (p. 14). For Núñez and Téllez (2012), arguments are “derived from thoughts that transcend mere expression” (p.34). In the same line of thought, Monsalve (1992) asserted that “an argument is an act of speech to persuade an audience to accept or increase the support to a given thesis” (p. 247). Acknowledging that merely communicating ideas does not necessarily imply argumentation, arguments emerge when evidence supports given points of view. Likewise, Zubiría (2006) stated that “arguments; thus, justified, support, and ratify what has been said” (p. 106). In light of this, arguments serve the purpose of endorsing original ideas. Hence, through the development of the argumentative competence, learners become conscious of the surrounding world with a critical perspective of it. As a result, thinking logically about different topics comes naturally.

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In the process of argumentation, it is essential to take into consideration the audience. More precisely, Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca (1989) affirmed that “to develop argumentation, it is precise; indeed, to pay certain attention to whom it is destined” (p. 53). Similarly, as Monsalve (1992) claimed that “knowing the audience is previous condition for the success of a rhetorical-argumentative action” (p. 60). Since the main purpose of argumentation is to reach a certain audience, writers elaborate arguments according to the expectations of the readers.

**Arguments vs fallacies.** An argument is an idea supported by clear reasons and evidence. If there is a mistake of reasoning to support an argument, it becomes a fallacy. In this regard, Weston (2004) declared that “a fallacy is a mistake, a mistake in an argument” (p. 123). Similarly, Tindale (2007) affirmed that “many of the fallacies are failed instances of good argument schemes or forms” (p. 14). Likewise, Woods, Irvine, and Walton (2004) pointed out that “a fallacy is any argument that deceives us because it appears to be a reliable argument, but in fact, it is not” (p. 6). In synthesis, a fallacy is a bad argument due to the use of invalid information to support an idea.

After the initial observations and considering students’ age and needs, for the present study I decided to focus my attention on the following types of argumentation. The first one is argument from authority, which is an argument based on the citation of an expert. The second one is argument by examples in which a statement is supported by true instances. The third one is argument by cause and effect in which an argument is supported by reasons and results relationships. (Padilla, Douglas & López, 2011). Additionally, as sometimes fallacies appear when forming arguments, I also took into consideration anecdotal fallacy, which pretends to make an argument out of an anecdote; appeal to belief, which generalizes a particular belief; and

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slippery slope, which refers to an argument based on the premise that an event always leads to a specific negative one. (Mayberry, 2009). as they are the most common ones.

**Argumentative writing.** Persuading others through written texts is a complex endeavor. It requires the ability to write properly, as well as the ability to form and support clear and solid arguments. According to Van Dijk (1997), in “communicative-persuasive interaction, special attention is used in the structure of the text” (p. 127). Hence, argumentative writing (AW henceforth) entails clear, well written and supported ideas. In addition, Núñez and Téllez (2012) affirmed that “arguments are generated in a particular context, elaborated from an opinion or point of view, supported with evidence and guarantees, and allow participants to debate with solid foundations or statements” (p. 34). Generally, arguments begin with a simple thought about the nearby world and are created based upon research which validates them. Likewise, Zubiría (2006) affirmed that “the role of a text author is mainly to argue a thesis ... a writer must think first, rank and organized the ideas, to capture them, later, in a written text.” (p. 184). Moreover, in argumentative writing rational and structured thoughts, planning and research become essential to portray the essence of what is being said in written form. Then, after researching several scholars, and finding definitions for argumentation and writing separately, I venture to conceptualize argumentative writing as structuring clear written ideas supported by solid evidence.

**Argumentative writing through a contextualized booklet in an EFL classroom.** To foster argumentative writing, contextualized materials become essential in the EFL classroom. Thus, they provide real contexts for students to analyze information and to create and support clear arguments more related to the reality of their immediate world. Besides, teachers motivate students by using contextualized materials, since this shows dedication, devotion and

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commitment to them and to their learning process. In this regard, Block (1991) has affirmed that "the personal touch in teacher- generated materials is highly appreciated by students. When students realize that the teacher has gone outside the course book and prepared something personally, they make remarks such "Oh, you work hard." (p. 214). Likewise, Taylor and Mulhall (1997) claimed that "contextualisation of learning occurs when the content of the curriculum, and the methods and materials associated with it, are related directly to the experience and environment of the learner" (p.5). Similarly, talking about contextualized materials, in McDonough, Shaw and Masuhara's (2013) words, "The possibilities for actually implementing them will be directly related both to the learners themselves –their needs, characteristics and so on – and to the whole educational setting in which the teaching is to take place" (p. 4). Furthermore, Ur (1996) stated that "sometimes, teachers need to explore teaching materials outside textbooks and modify them in order to be relevant to a particular group or students" (p. 185). To conclude, it is important to mention that contextualized materials give teachers the opportunity to explore students' abilities because this kind of materials provide appropriate and enriching environment in the EFL classroom. Furthermore, contextualized materials foster students' active participation, which correspondingly leads to more opportunities to reach learning goals and to better academic performances.



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### Chapter III

#### Methodological Design

##### Research Design

The purpose of this study is to analyze the contribution of contextualized lessons in the development of critical thinking skills when writing argumentative texts with fifth graders in an EFL classroom at a private school. This chapter deals with information about the research design and the instructional design.

**Approach.** The qualitative research approach frames this study since it provides a clear way to comprehend the social context of the participants. Regarding the qualitative approach, Sandin (2003) asserted that it is “a systematic activity guided to the comprehension of educational phenomenon” (p. 123) whose purpose is “to offer descriptions, interpretations and clarifications of naturalistic social contexts” (Burns, 1999, p. 22) and “to understand better some aspect(s) of the lived world” (Richards, 2003, p. 10), which involves “observations of humans in natural and social settings”, (Lichtman, 2006, p. 22) and “lived experiences of people” (Marshall & Rossman (1999, p. 2). Considering that this study is grounded on the identification of an existing problem within a particular context, the methodical observation, description and interpretation of students’ experiences during the implementation of the pedagogical intervention in a natural environment, contributed to make a better sense of its impact on the selected group.

**Type of study.** This is an action research study as it involves specific actions to identify and solve a problem. For Parsons and Brown (2002) it “is a form of investigation designed for use by teachers to attempt to solve problems and improve professional practices” (p. 32), which is “embedded within a system of values and promotes some model of human interaction” (Brydon-Miller, Greenwood & Maguire, 2003, p. 11). Its purpose is to describe “what’s

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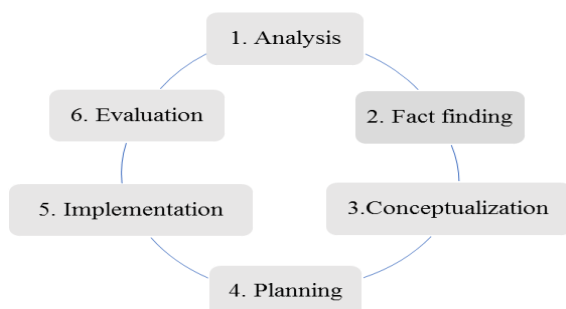
happening at our school” (Calhoun, 1994, p. 16), to give account of the “functioning of the real world and a close examination of the effects of such an intervention” (Cohen & Manion, 2000, pp. 226-27) and “to improve [teachers’] practice” (Elliot, 1991, p. 49). Correspondingly, this study aimed to improve fifth graders’ argumentative compositions, as well as the teacher’s pedagogical practice within the context of the English class at CAS School, by observing and analyzing students’ responses to the implementation of the contextualized booklet.

This study followed the cycles of action research Kurt (1993) suggested. To ratify the problem, I conducted a needs analysis through the design and administration of a survey. The findings of the survey led me to identify the aspects involved in the research concern, namely students’ interests and preferences in terms of learning topics, activities and strategies; students’ understanding of CT skills and argumentative writing. The survey served the purpose of both, ratifying the problem and determining the onset of materials development. Based on the aforementioned aspects, the conceptualization of the three theoretical constructs allowed me to inform the pedagogical intervention proposed to alleviate or solve my concern. After undergoing the previous stages, planning the methodological design entailed both the research and instructional designs. The implementation of the pedagogical intervention lasted one month considering the English proficiency of the participants and the number of hours allotted to the English classes since CAS is bilingual school. Finally, the evaluation of the pedagogical intervention of this study allowed me to adjust the learning activities and the teaching sequence, to develop critical thinking skills and enhance argumentative writing of fifth graders.

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Diagram 1

*Action Research Cycle (Kurt, 1993)*



**Participants.** Fifth graders and the English teacher were the participants of this study.

**Students.** The present study took place in an English class with fifth graders at Colombo American School. There were twenty-four students, fourteen girls and ten boys, all of them from ten to eleven years old. These students received 10 hours of English class per week. During the first observations, I noticed that despite their high-level proficiency in the TL according to the CEFR, they struggled when using their knowledge to elaborate clear written arguments. Therefore, I decided to carry out my research based on the identification of that specific problem. The sampling technique used to choose the participants was the convenience sampling considering that “in convenience sampling, researchers just use as participants those individuals who are easy to get” (Gravetter & Forzano, 2015, p. 147). In the same line of thought, Marshall (1996) established that this technique implies “the selection of the most accessible subjects. It is the least costly to the researcher, in terms of time, effort and money” (p. 523). Bearing this in mind, I carried out this study in my English classes since they offered me the opportunity to identify a problem, and the further design and implementation of the booklet. Also, as sampling technique states and because I had the chance to see the students every day throughout the time this study lasted, it was easy for me to reach the participants without extra class time or additional expenses.

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***Teacher-researcher and text developer.*** The implementation of the present study required three different roles from me: it led me to perform as a language teacher, a researcher, and a materials developer. Thus, as I assumed a more dynamic role in my classroom (Núñez et al., 2009), since teachers need to “become more aware of their roles as agents of change who act critically upon the curriculum” (Núñez, Téllez & Castellanos, 2017b, p. 27). As a teacher, I observed and guided my students during the process. As a researcher, I had the chance to take a closer look to my students’ needs to apply different strategies for them to develop better understanding and use of the TL. As a materials developer, I underwent a new stage in my professional development by designing suitable materials to help my students overcome their difficulties and to have a better performance in the English class.

**Data gathering instruments.** I opted for three instruments to collect and analyze the data of the present study, namely, students’ artefacts, teacher’s field notes, and a questionnaire. Indeed, “Teacher researchers aim to capture everyday “slices of life” that will help them to address the questions guiding their studies” (Lankshear & Knobel, 2004, p. 177). On the same spirit, Maxwell (1992) asserted that valid information comes from “what the researcher reports having seen or heard” (p. 286). Hence, it is essential to collect data in a real teaching and learning context during the implementation of the pedagogical intervention, concerning students’ responses towards the materials and the proposed learning activities. In particular, it is important to see how the contextualized materials supported the development of their critical thinking skills and the suggested stages for argumentative writing. It is relevant to mention that before the implementation of the pedagogical intervention the instruments selected were piloted with another group of fifth grade students, with similar characteristics in terms of age and English proficiency and some adjustments were made.

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***Students' artefacts.*** They are elements that indicate students' production. Regarding this, Kalmbach and Carr (2010) pointed out that “artifacts are pieces of physical evidence, such as student work, tallies of student, behavior, or test score results” (p. 78). Artifacts were useful for my study because they helped me to identify students' strengths and weaknesses when using critical thinking skills to write argumentative texts. Then, I analyzed students' artefacts, which allow me to detect their argumentation and writing strengths and difficulties.

***Teacher's field notes.*** These instruments provide clues about problems and dynamics of a classroom. In this sense, Arhar, Holly and Kasten (2001) affirmed that field notes are “direct observations of what is being said and done as well as impressions or hunches of the observer” (p. 140). Taking notes (See Appendix B), helped me to recall relevant information that emerged during the implementation of the contextualized materials in the class.

***Questionnaires.*** They provide teacher researchers with a clear view of students' opinions about their experience during the implementation. In this regard, Núñez et al. (2017a) suggested that a questionnaire provides information about participants' “opinions, feelings and ideas in regard[s] to various aspects” (p. 31). This was a significant instrument for this study because it glimpsed students' perceptions of the materials implemented and the procedures of the implementation. (See Appendix C)

Having addressed the first part of the methodological design, the research design, I will present the instructional design proposed in this study.

**Instructional Design.** My main concern and the one that led me to conduct this research was CAS fifth graders' difficulty to make proper use of the TL when trying to structure clear arguments in written production. Therefore, throughout this study, I wanted to help my students to develop critical thinking skills and to enhance their argumentative compositions. In regard to

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the use of didactic materials, I also felt the necessity to design and implement contextualized materials. Despite the fact of having textbooks, they belonged to a foreign context and did not meet my students' specific learning needs. Bearing in mind the previous reasons, I proposed the design and implementation of a contextualized booklet with six lessons as the pedagogical intervention for this research study.

**Pedagogical intervention.** For the present study, the design and implementation of a contextualized booklet that covers six lessons served as the pedagogical intervention. These lessons aimed to improve the writing skill, more specifically, to develop critical thinking and enhance argumentative compositions by using contextualized materials with fifth graders at CAS. During my observations, I realized that it was essential to facilitate the learning process by providing students with materials they could connect to their own experiences and environments. It is also relevant to mention that “contextualized learning materials, which bring into perspective the experience, culture and environment of learners need to be developed to enrich the learning experience” (ANAFE, 2010, para. 1). Hence, the creation of meaningful materials begins by knowing students' needs and the dynamics of the class.

On the subject of MD, it is important to take into account SLA principles as they underpinned the design of materials that become relevant when teaching the TL. In relation to this, Núñez, Téllez, Castellanos and Ramos (2009) highlighted that “as you engaged in the reading of the principles and strategic components for materials development, you may realize that they complement what you have already explored and put into practice in your language classroom.” (p. 43). These SLA principles also contemplated inclusive topics underlie with students' self-investment for self- discovery and independent learning, which pave the way for localized, experiential, and meaningful education. (Núñez, Téllez & Castellanos, 2013).

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Although there are many scholars who have referred to principles, such as Arnone (2003), Harmer (2007), Small (1997), and Tomlinson (1998), among others; to conduct my study, I took into consideration Tomlinson's (1998) principles. Six of these SLA principles were relevant and served as reference for my research study. Then, I will name each with a brief description and their contribution to this study. First, materials that have a positive effect on students make them feel enthusiastic and eager to work, contributing to a more successful learning process. Second, materials must facilitate the learning process by providing, among others, ways to make students feel confident and able to apply their knowledge in class contexts. Third, materials that relate to students' lives and that they consider important for their surrounding world make more sense for them since this gives students a sense of learning something useful, something they do not just leave behind in the classroom. Besides, materials should also foment students' discovering of their own potential by consciously applying learning strategies to overcome difficulties in their learning process. Moreover, materials should mirror suitable teaching sequences that favor readiness to attain students' expected production. Finally, materials should offer students opportunities to use their knowledge in context and with the purpose of communicating ideas.

The contextualized booklet created for the implementation of the pedagogical intervention, included six lessons about homework, uniforms, technology in education, studying for a test, bullying and pets, which are relevant and familiar topics for the participants. The chosen topics were framed in school's English program for fifth grade and gradually build on the concepts of citizens of the world. It is relevant to indicate that each lesson has the salient elements of Teaching for Understanding (TfU henceforth), such as throughlines and performances of understanding to be aligned with the school's methodology. Additionally, each

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lesson allowed students to structure their compositions under the four writing stages Harmer (2004) proposed: planning, drafting, editing, and final version, which are the stages adopted in CAS writing classes as they connect to the concepts of TfU that state building up knowledge by applying it in context.

The organization of the booklet guided students through the writing stages as critical thinking skills emerged. It is worth mentioning that critical thinking is not linear, students develop the six levels of Bloom's taxonomy in different ways and times, and the structure of the lessons, as well as the teacher's role during the implementation, was to help students develop CT skills. Besides this, enhancing argumentative writing was also addressed by deepening into the concepts of argumentation, specifically arguments of authority, of example, and cause and effect, as well as the concepts of fallacies of belief, anecdotal fallacies and slippery slope to avoid poor judgement on students' side. Moreover, these topics aimed to generate constant students' participation to alleviate the original problem, which was the lack of critical thinking skills to structure ideas to write clear and solid arguments. In the same way, the six lessons of the booklet reflected the six SLA principles chosen and considered the participants' needs, ages, interests, and cultural background.

### **Instructional objectives**

**General Objective.** To design and implement a booklet that comprises six contextualized lessons to foster critical thinking skills when writing argumentative paragraphs in an EFL classroom.

**Specific objectives.** (a) To promote learning environments for writing argumentative paragraphs; (b) to assist students in developing critical thinking skills; (c) to help students be



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aware of the importance of structuring and organizing ideas when writing arguments; and (d) to guide students to express their point of view effectively.

**Intervention as innovation.** Since, this is a research study in education, innovation becomes a significant matter. Having said that, it is important to define the term. Innovation, is an idea, practice, or object that is perceived as new by an individual or other unit of adoption” (Rogers, 2002, p. 990). It is also a set of “proposals for qualitative change in pedagogical materials, approaches, and values that are perceived as new by individuals who comprise a formal (language) education system” (Markee, 2001, p. 120) which “bring about improvement in classroom practice with the ultimate aim of enhancing student achievement” (Karavas-Doukas, 1998, p. 28). Certainly, educational innovation entails changes in teaching-learning practices and in teachers’ and learners’ perception of the education system. From my point of view, EFL classrooms need teachers who dare and are willing to innovate to create motivating environments in which students easily accomplish academic goals as they transform and expand their minds by learning a new language.

In this study, innovation became evident when creating the contextualized booklet to develop critical thinking skills and enhance argumentative writings in fifth graders, due to the fact that CAS students use foreign textbooks that disregard their genuine needs and wants. In this regard, Núñez et al. (2004) affirmed that “teachers as innovative professionals, have the potential to explore their creativity by designing materials for their classes” (p. 130). The implementation of the booklet in the EFL class aim to change the exclusive use of the textbook and to make them feel more motivated and engaged in activities closely related to their lives. It is essential for teachers to “consider this diversity when teaching the target language and when developing their materials trying, at the same time, to keep a balance among students’ language learning needs,

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preferences, motivations and expectations, their affective needs, and the institutional policies.” (Núñez & Téllez, 2009, p. 173). Based on the previous idea, this study focused not only on the use of new materials having in mind students’ needs, but also the school’s methodology.

Therefore, it is pertinent to mention that this research was innovative in the development of CT skills when writing argumentative texts with fifth graders in a Teaching for Understanding (TfU hereafter) context. Students were familiar with TfU, which states that students can use their knowledge in context. In this regard, Blumenfeld (1997) asserted that TfU emphasizes “on the role of the individual learner in constructing understanding and the influence of the social environment on that construction” (p. 819). However, prior to the implementation of the pedagogical intervention, I noticed that despite the fact of being proficient in the target language, students struggled when analyzing information to create clear arguments. I also observed that students preferred to write following models than to create their own arguments.

Innovating through MD is an issue of relevance in this study. To this respect, Núñez et al. (2009) affirmed that teachers are able to “embark upon the fascinating task of developing their own didactic materials based not only on their teaching experience, but also on their expertise in the cognitive and learning processes needed by EFL/ESL learners” (p.16). In the same line of thought, Núñez et al. (2017a) stressed on how important it is for teachers to develop “innovative, contextualised materials that respond to their local needs and which are intended for particular uses and users in our EFL contexts” (p. 57). As a reflective, creative and critical teacher, I brought innovation to the fifth grade EFL class at CAS School with the implementation of contextualized materials based on students’ needs, interests and own culture.

**Theory of the nature of language and language learning.** This study acknowledged two of the four perspectives Tudor (2001) established about the nature of language. The first one

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is the functional perspective. As Tudor (2001) asserted, “Students are learning a language in order to be in a position to do something in or with this language” (p. 57). Learning a language fits its purpose when learners are able to apply what they know in context. The second one is the culture and ideology perspective, which perceives language not just as a linguistic system but a communication tool. Tudor (2001) affirmed that “language will embody and express aspects of the culture and world view of its speakers” (p. 69). Being familiar with a language means more than knowing its codes, it also involves knowing its culture.

The view of language learning in this study included aspects from the experiential learning and the analytical learning from Tudor (2001). Regarding the first view, learning takes place by doing and experiencing in context. According to Tudor (2001), “The use of the TL for communicative purposes is not only the goal of learning, but also a means of learning in its own right” (p. 79). The author also added that learning occurs “around problem-solving activities or tasks which require learners to use the language in ways which are likely to be relevant to them in the future” (p. 83). Students learn more effectively when they get involved in communicative situations where they can apply language. Likewise, the analytical learning view contributed to my study. As underlined by Tudor (2001), “Students should be able to make productive use of the full range of their cognitive skills – including their analytical skills – in their language learning” (p. 85). When students learn how to analyze information, their production in the TL improves.

**Methodological approach underlying the pedagogical intervention.** Teaching for Understanding underpinned this pedagogical intervention for two main reasons. First, CAS follows TfU as a teaching method. Second, this approach perfectly fits the purpose of this study, to enhance critical thinking and argumentative writing. Indeed, this approach states that

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understanding occurs when learners are able to apply their knowledge in context. More precisely, in Perkins and Blythe's words (1994), "Understanding a topic of study is being able to perform in a variety of thought-demanding ways" (p. 5). Besides, these authors added that "understanding is being able to carry out a variety of "performances" that show one's understanding of a topic and, at the same time, advance it" (p. 7). In sum, understanding involves abilities to do something with the knowledge and to be able to apply that knowledge in context.

Moreover, understanding not only implies knowing certain concepts, but also being competent to apply those concepts in determined situations. In this regard, Tishman, Jay and Perkins (1992) maintained that "ability alone is not enough to ensure ongoing performance" (p. 1). In addition, as underlined by Blumenfeld, Marx, Patrick, Krajcik and Soloway (1997), "Understanding is contextualized and a function of social interaction with others, the tasks undertaken, the tools employed and the immediate context which reflects the culture in which ideas are developed and used" (p. 869). Understanding depends on students' abilities, activities and interaction with the surrounding world.

In reference to the role as a teacher in students' learning process and more important, in their understanding, it becomes crucial to consider what teachers do in the classroom to enhance knowledge. Researchers such as Wiske, Sick and Wirsig (2002) stressed that educators should "recognize that students must learn how to develop and apply knowledge creatively, not simply remember what they have been told" (p. 483). Similarly, Gardner and Boix-Mansilla (1994) asserted that "while students may succeed in "parroting back" phrases from lectures and texts, they often falter when asked to apply their understanding to new situations" (p. 14). Under these circumstances, it is necessary to change teaching practices, from memorizing and recalling

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information, to analyzing and applying information in context. Always having in mind that every student is capable of doing great things if motivated and guided properly.

**Connection of the pedagogical intervention with the research question.** When carrying out a research study, the connection between the research question and the pedagogical intervention becomes essential to address the concern itself. According to Richards (2005), “The route from research to application is by no means direct, since language teaching materials are also shaped by many other factors and constraints” (p. 18). There is a close connection between the instructional design of this research study and the three constructs of the research question. First, contextualized materials motivated and engaged students in class activities. Second, students developed critical thinking skills when they became aware of their abilities to remember, understand, apply, analyze, and evaluate information to create new knowledge. Finally, argumentative writing improved when students create clear arguments by using CT skills. Besides, TfU increases the chances of creating argumentative texts because it leads students to apply their knowledge in context.

**Instructional phases.** Herein I present the proposed material development framework, the informed consent, the sensitization and the implementation of the materials.

***Proposed materials development framework.*** To carry out the pedagogical intervention of my study, I first analyzed the MD frameworks proposed by Bedwell (2012), Graves (1996), Jolly and Bolitho (1998), Masuhara (2011), Núñez, et al. (2004), Núñez and Téllez (2009), Núñez et al. (2009), and Núñez et al. (2012, 2017a, 2017b). These frameworks have common stages that provide insights to the present study. Consequently, I propose my own framework to develop materials based on the previous scholars and on the institution philosophy. This philosophy contemplates the idea of educating students as citizens of the world able and willing

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to transform their society with educational, cultural, and social contributions (CAS Mission and Vision) (*trans*). In other words, the activities proposed in the lessons privilege students' daily life and experiences that allow them to recognize and value their local culture and relate it to the global one, as a pillar of citizens of the world.

Creating materials to fulfill students' needs in relation to language learning is not an effortless activity. MD is a systematic process that requires careful planning, elaboration, implementation, and evaluation. Therefore, having a framework to begin this process becomes indispensable. More precisely, as Núñez et al. (2004) affirmed, "A combination of experience and theoretical background could guarantee a better developed product" (p. 131). The MD framework is useful because it guides teachers when creating materials intended to fulfill students' needs.

Class materials, benefit both, students' learning and teachers' practices. Thus, they must have a defined intention and comply with learners and teachers' needs in the process of reaching set objectives. According to Núñez, Pineda and Téllez (2004) these objectives "should be clearly defined so that learners can accurately interpret them" (p. 130). These same authors further stated that "it is by combining their theoretical background and their teaching experience in the development of their materials that they can create positive conditions for language learning" (Núñez et al., 2004, p. 131). In the same line of thought, Graves (1996) affirmed that "clear goals and objectives give the teacher a basis for determining which content and activities are appropriate for her course" (p. 17). If teachers are able to establish specific, measurable, attainable, realistic and time-based objectives in the design of materials through theory and experience, materials end up being very useful for students.

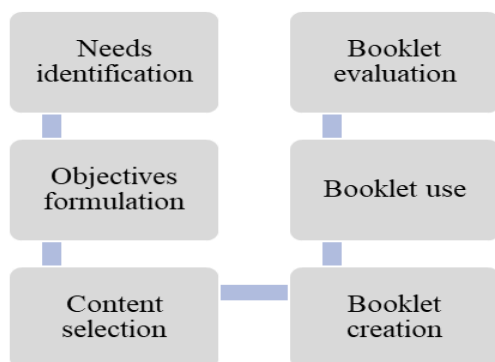
## MATERIALS FOR CRITICAL THINKING AND ARGUMENTATIVE WRITING

The first stage to carry out the pedagogical intervention, as Graves (1996), Jolly and Bolitho (1998), Masuhara (2011), Núñez et al. (2004), Núñez and Téllez (2009), Núñez et al. (2012, 2017a, 2017b), stated is the needs analysis or assessment to identify the real needs of the students. Likewise, Graves (1996), Masuhara (2011), Núñez et al. (2004), Núñez and Téllez (2009), Núñez et al. (2012), coincided on the stage to determine clear objectives before the creation of the materials. Besides, Bedwell (2012) and Masuhara (2011) mentioned the piloting stage to receive feedback and use it for further creation. Finally, to assess the suitability of the materials it is important to evaluate the materials implemented, which is a common stage for all the scholars mentioned above.

Based on the previous theory, my teaching experience, and the insights of critical pedagogues regarding teachers as social and historical thinkers and creators that transform (Freire, 1998), critical intellectuals (Giroux, 2012), intellectual transformers (Kumaravadivelu, 2003), and critical thinkers (Richards, 1998), I proposed the following framework: needs identification; objectives formulation; content selection; and booklet creation, use and evaluation (Diagram 2). The contribution of this framework is the contextualization of the booklet's lessons, especially in the creation stage.

Diagram 2

### *Proposed Framework to Develop Contextualized Materials*



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***Informed consent.*** (Appendix C) - To begin the implementation of the materials, it was necessary to send a consent letter to inform parents and students about the study and its implications, as well as to clarify doubts, about the confidentiality of the data obtained. It allowed me to get the corresponding authorization to conduct the study.

***Sensitization.*** After informing parents and students through the consent letter, I socialized this study with my students in class to prepare them to participate in it by explaining its benefits. The main idea of this stage was to make them aware of the benefits of the study in the development of critical thinking skills when writing argumentative paragraphs, which lead to a better performance in the class. In addition, I explained that the only cost of the implementation for them was time, that they were not going to be compensated, that it was not against their will, and it did not represent a risk for them since there was absolute confidentiality.

***Implementation of the materials.*** During the English classes, in accordance to school's chronogram, curriculum, and authorization, I implemented the six lessons. It took two class sessions, four hours each, to implement each lesson. No modifications were necessary as the booklet was aligned to CAS curriculum and it was previously piloted which allowed me to make adjustments prior to the implementation of the pedagogical intervention. The following table explains in detail the names of the lessons and the topics chosen.

Table 1

### *Booklet's Implementation Schedule*

Session	Lesson	Name of the Lesson	Topic
1-2	1	<i>Homework</i>	Advantages and disadvantages of doing homework.
3-4	2	<i>Uniforms</i>	Benefits and barriers wearing school uniforms bring.
5-6	3	<i>Technology in Education</i>	Does technology benefit the learning process?
7-8	4	<i>Studying for Tests</i>	Do you get better results when you study for evaluations?
9-10	5	<i>Bullying</i>	How does bullying affect you or others?
11-12	6	<i>Pets</i>	Are the responsibilities of owning a pet worth it?



## Sample of lesson

# *Lesson 1*

## *Homework: friend or foe*

***General Objective:***

- To identify arguments and fallacies by expressing ideas about homework.

***Specific Objectives:***

- To distinguish between an argument and a fallacy.
- To express clear arguments about homework without confusing them with fallacies.
- To use the target language in writing arguments about homework.



*a. What do you think about homework?*

*b. Do you like doing it or not? Why?*



*c. Is homework helpful or not? Why?*

*d. Is it important or not? Why?*

## MATERIALS FOR CRITICAL THINKING AND ARGUMENTATIVE WRITING



**Throughline:** What is the difference between an argument and a fallacy?

1. Using your previous knowledge, write what you consider an argument and a fallacy is.

*Learning strategy:* using previous knowledge to define arguments and fallacies.

a. I think an **argument** is...

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b. I think a **fallacy** is...

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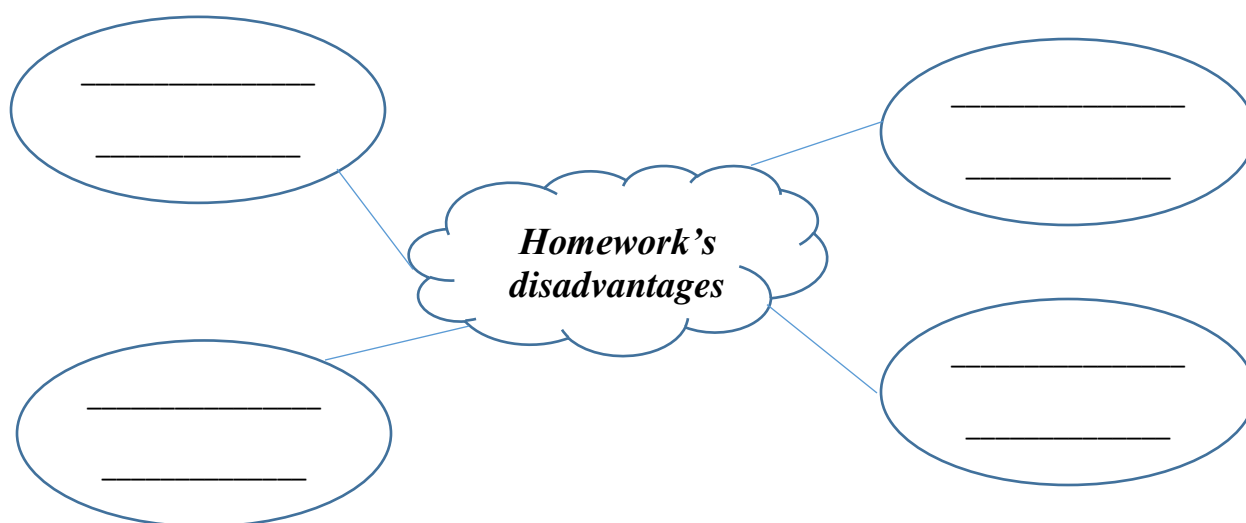
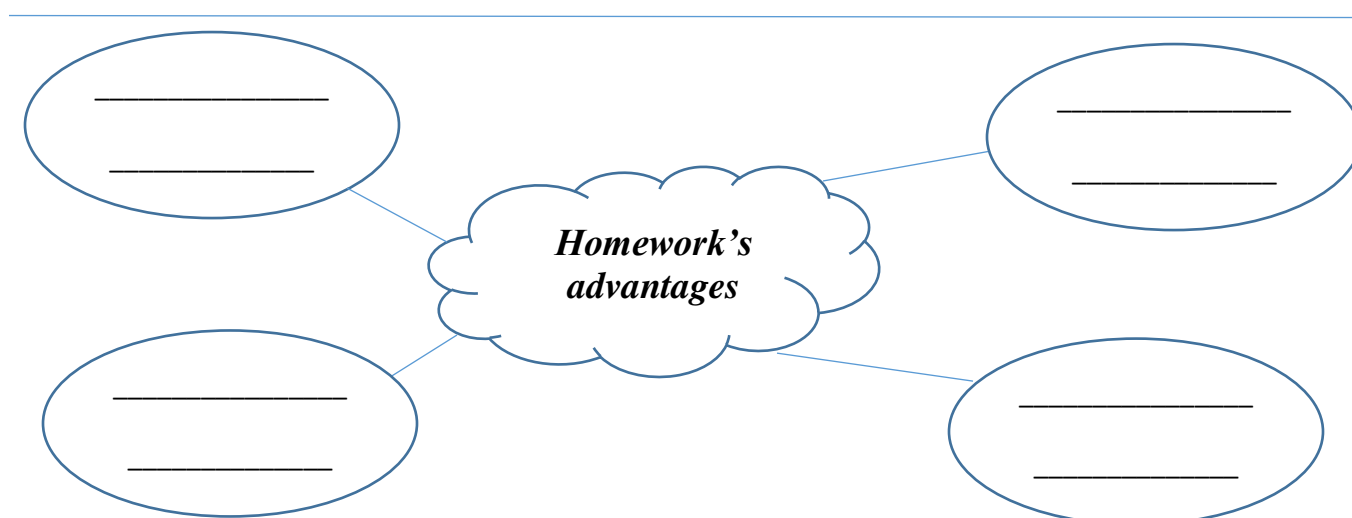
2. Now, compare your answers with a classmate.

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## MATERIALS FOR CRITICAL THINKING AND ARGUMENTATIVE WRITING

3. Think about homework's advantages and disadvantages and complete the following webs.

**Learning strategy:** brainstorming ideas about homework.



## MATERIALS FOR CRITICAL THINKING AND ARGUMENTATIVE WRITING

4. Read the following statements about homework. Write A if the statement is an argument and write F if the statement is a fallacy.



*Learning strategy:* analyzing and classifying information.

- a. \_\_\_\_\_ According to our principal, homework is an effective way to learn discipline and responsibility.
- b. \_\_\_\_\_ Every day, students on the school bus say that homework is simply busy work and not meaningful learning that is why I think homework is a waste of time.
- c. \_\_\_\_\_ Homework prepares students for hard work once they finish school. For instance, hard workers began by doing homework every day.
- d. \_\_\_\_\_ One day, I cried a lot doing my assignment because I did not understand what to do and I was alone, so homework can be stressful and time consuming.
- e. \_\_\_\_\_ My parents have noticed that homework promotes study habits. When I was moved to this school with a clear policy on homework, I started to do it daily and on my own.
- f. \_\_\_\_\_ Homework improves students' school performance and grades. Students who do homework pass the year for sure.
- g. \_\_\_\_\_ Students do not waste time on television or video games. Instead, they spend their time doing productive stuff.
- h. \_\_\_\_\_ All my friends, my cousins, and even my parents think homework gets in the way of family time, so I think the same.

## MATERIALS FOR CRITICAL THINKING AND ARGUMENTATIVE WRITING

5. Based on what you have learned so far in this lesson, write a definition of an argument and of a fallacy in relation to your perception of homework. Then, write two examples of each.

*Learning strategy:* defining arguments and fallacies.



a. An **argument** is...

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b.

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a. A **fallacy** is...

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---

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b.

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## MATERIALS FOR CRITICAL THINKING AND ARGUMENTATIVE WRITING



**Performance of understanding:** Now you are ready to write an argumentative paragraph to express your point of view about homework. Consider the previous planning activities to support your ideas. Do not forget to do the drafting and final version taking into account the teacher's feedback and the writing rubric.



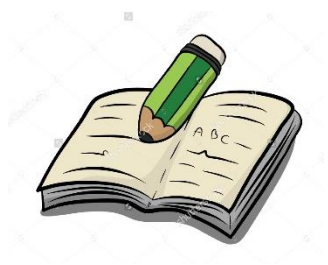
**Learning strategy:** writing an argumentative paragraph.

**Tip:** An argumentative paragraph contains clear and well supported ideas or thoughts. It can be supported by true examples, reference to authorities in the matter, and cause and effect relationships. Avoid using fallacies, which are bad arguments.



### Writing Rubric

<b>Ideas</b> (Clear focus and supporting details)	
<b>Organization</b> (Well organized and easy to read)	
<b>Criteria</b> (Displays consistent evidence)	
<b>Voice</b> (Maintains a confident point of view)	
<b>Conventions</b> (Proper use of grammar, spelling, capitalization, and punctuation)	



**6. Draft**

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## MATERIALS FOR CRITICAL THINKING AND ARGUMENTATIVE WRITING

## Self-assessment

This lesson...	 Yes	 Can be better
proposes a variety of attractive activities with interesting content and nice lay out.		
makes me feel relaxed and comfortable while developing the activities.		
is useful because it guides me into writing arguments in a clear way.		
promotes the application of learning strategies to solve my tasks easier.		
gives me the opportunity to apply previous and new knowledge in the same task.		
provides activities to express my feelings, emotions, and opinions in the written tasks.		
presents the tasks in a very clear and organized way.		
evidences planning and follow a consistent structure.		
produces a positive effect on me before writing because they are motivating/appealing.		
<b>Critical Thinking Skills are a useful tool to...</b>		
provide evidence to back up my point of view towards a topic.		
evaluate the importance of being consistent when maintaining a position in a written task.		
develop and organize reflective thoughts about a given topic.		
<b>Argumentative writing...</b>		
allows me to structure my thoughts and present my opinion effectively in English/TL.		
benefits the way I communicate my point of view in a written argument.		
opens my mind to new ideas and to topics that are relevant in life.		

Illustrated by Andrei Salamanca Gómez

Images taken from:

<http://www.parents.com/kids/education/homework/>

<https://www.colourbox.com/vector/cute-cartoon-brain-with-having-an-idea-vector-7010024>

<http://www.clker.com/clipart-tool-tip.html>

<https://www.shutterstock.com/es/image-vector/cartoon-pencil-writing-on-note-book-130543808?language=es>

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## **Chapter IV**

### **Data Analysis**

This chapter covers the analysis of data gathered during the pedagogical intervention by applying the instruments selected: students' artefacts, teacher's field notes and questionnaires. Besides, it presents the categories and subcategories that emerged from the data collected.

#### **Data Analysis Procedure**

The grounded theory approach served as the method to analyze the data collected for the present study as it brings significant tools to portray all the information that arose with the three instruments applied: students' artefacts, teacher's field notes and questionnaires. Since theory can be constructed based on data, grounded theory "aims to generate explanatory propositions that correspond to real-world phenomena" (Patton 2002, p. 489). Besides, it "provides us with relevant predictions, explanations, interpretations and applications" (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p. 1) and "allows for identification of general concepts, the development of theoretical explanations that reach beyond the known, and offers new insights into a variety of experiences and phenomena" (Corbin & Strauss, 2015, p. 6). In this sense, the grounded approach benefits the understanding of the data through clear descriptions of the information gathered. It also permits the identification of similarities, differences and relations to make sense of the contribution of a contextualized booklet to develop fifth graders' critical thinking skills and argumentative writing. As Corbin and Strauss (2015) affirmed, "In grounded theory research analysis and data collection are interrelated. After initial data collected, the researcher analyses that data, and the concepts derived from the analysis" (p. 7). With this in mind, this method supported this study in the analysis and understanding of the information collected, the identification of salient and recurrent patterns and the construction of categories and subcategories that answer the research

## MATERIALS FOR CRITICAL THINKING AND ARGUMENTATIVE WRITING

question evincing the contribution of a contextualized booklet in critical thinking skills development and argumentative writing enhancement.

After the systematization and initial analysis of data, I began the implementation of the color coding technique which is “a process of attempting to reduce the large amount of data” (Burns, 1999, p. 157). This allowed me to identify key words and expressions that became recurrent patterns to identify the research subcategories and categories. Indeed, “The use of color for encoding information can greatly improve the observer’s understanding of the information” (Bianco, Gasparini & Schettini, 2014, p. 85). Thus, this technique let me comprehend and recognize significant aspects from the data collected that became regular, visible and interconnected, facilitating the interpretation of these salient patterns.

To achieve validity of the findings, I triangulated the information gathered. According to Freeman (1998), triangulation establishes “relationships among the categories to see how the parts connect into a whole” (p. 100). Furthermore, triangulation facilitates the process of taking “different perspectives on an issue under study” (Flick, 2009, p. 445). Considering that data came from three different instruments, I applied the methodological triangulation, and since various scholars along with their theory supported the findings of this study, I employed the theoretical triangulation (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). Thus, the triangulation process helped me to gain a better understanding of the phenomena from the data gathered through the three instruments for further interpretation. Likewise, it let me establish three research categories with their corresponding subcategories to answer the research question that originated this study.

### **Research Categories**

Three categories with two subcategories each emerged from the data analysis process, corresponding to the three theoretical constructs underlying my research question. The first one

## MATERIALS FOR CRITICAL THINKING AND ARGUMENTATIVE WRITING

relates to the particularity, practicality and possibilities contextualized materials offered to students. The second one explains how the exchange of ideas related to students' lives fostered critical thinking (CT henceforth) skills. The third one deals with the importance of structured thoughts to attain argumentative writing (henceforth AW). The chart below presents them in detail.

Table 2

### *Research Categories*

<i>Research question</i>	<i>Categories</i>	<i>Subcategories</i>	<i>Recurrent patterns</i>
How do the design and implementation of a contextualized booklet develop critical thinking skills and enhance argumentative writing of fifth graders in an EFL class at a bilingual private school?	Reaching particularity, practicality and possibility in contextualized materials	<p>Relevant and useful materials contribute to achieve confidence in activity fulfillment.</p> <p>Scaffolded strategy-based materials foment learning and using knowledge in context.</p>	<p>-Attain impact-enthusiasm and eagerness. -Help learners feel at ease to facilitate learning process</p> <p>-Be relevant and useful and content related to Sts lives. -Develop confidence and willingness to complete activities</p> <p>-Self-investment for self-discovering -Readiness or appropriate level of challenge-ready to acquire</p> <p>-Opportunities to use knowledge in context</p>
	Exchanging reliable ideas related to students' lives fosters critical thinking skills	<p>Mutual exchange of ideas to think critically</p> <p>Reflective, organized and consistent standpoints related to students' lives</p>	<p>- Exchange thoughts and ideas. - Provide evidence and develop critical thinking</p> <p>-Evaluate the importance of being consistent in standpoints. -Develop and organize reflective thoughts about students' life topics</p>
	Structured thinking for argumentative writing	<p>Structured thinking for arguments</p> <p>Attaining argumentative writing</p>	<p>-Structured thoughts.</p> <p>- Foster unbiased argument significant to students</p> <p>- Benefit arguments in composition. -Enhance writing in English</p>

## MATERIALS FOR CRITICAL THINKING AND ARGUMENTATIVE WRITING

Before describing the findings of this research study, it is pertinent to inform the reader that the way I present the evidence follows a consistent order like this: students' artifacts along with the corresponding self-assessment as they are the constituent and the starting point of the implementation; teacher's field notes that report what was observed during the implementation of the pedagogical intervention; and questionnaires which depict students' perceptions of the contextualized booklet regarding its contribution to the development of CT skills and AW. Even if the samples of evidence provided for each one of the subcategories are presented and described separately, there is a close connection among them giving rise to self-explanatory categories.

### **Reaching particularity, practicality and possibility in contextualized materials.**

Materials play an important role in EFL settings. For example, they connect students to the language, complement and assist teachers during teaching time, and offer a variety of visual aids that motivate students. Besides, "they serve as the basis for much of the language input learners receive and the language practice that occurs in the classroom" (Richards, 2001, p. 1). In this sense, it is ideal to contextualize materials to create genuine learning environments that take into account students culture, backgrounds, and settings. For that reason, teachers as critical and intellectual professionals are responsible for creating materials that bring a change into classroom practices and established syllabuses. More precisely, Kumaravadivelu (2003) claimed that teachers should create materials that reach particularity by being "sensitive to a particular group of teachers teaching a particular group of learners pursuing a particular set of goals within a particular institutional context" (p. 34), materials that attain practicality as they are adequate to recognize "that no theory of practice can be fully useful and usable unless it is generated through practice" (p. 35) , and materials that attain possibility as they "call for recognition of learners'

## MATERIALS FOR CRITICAL THINKING AND ARGUMENTATIVE WRITING

and teachers' subject-positions, that is, their class, race, gender, and ethnicity, and for sensitivity toward their impact on education" (p. 36). Since the current educational system is based on imposed methodologies, uniformed textbooks, and classroom practices that leaves students' needs and expectations aside, its transformation largely relies on teachers through pedagogical teaching practices. By designing and implementing contextualized materials that are relevant, useful, strategy-based, and supportive of activity fulfillment and use of knowledge in context, teachers set the grounds for innovative educational changes generating theory through practice.

Generally, capitalism is the priority in the creation of commercial materials. More often than none, text developers create materials with the main purpose of selling. Consequently, these materials do not meet all individual teaching and learning needs since they "are necessarily generic and not aimed at any specific group of learners or any particular cultural or educational context" (Howard & Major, 2005, p. 101). Moreover, those kinds of materials do not consider different cultural and academic backgrounds and settings. They are intended to reach large groups of people focusing on profit, without considering specific teaching/learning needs and contextual factors. Under such circumstances, education groups are "dehumanized, stereotyped, and treated not as communities of individuals but as an indistinguishable mass about whom one could amass knowledge" (Kumaravadivelu, 1999, p. 463). Even though, published materials intend to fulfil learning-teaching expectations, they "do not always provide the type of texts and activities that a teacher is seeking for a given class" (Block, 1991, p. 211). As a result, teachers end up working with what is in the EFL textbook market which in the end is forced by the decisions of educational institutions. Therefore, to generate a significant change, curriculum choices must "take as reference the social conditions of the learners" (Rico, 2005, p. 28), as they are "into the hands of those directly involved – teachers and learners" (Littlejohn, 2012, p. 295).

## MATERIALS FOR CRITICAL THINKING AND ARGUMENTATIVE WRITING

Materials ought to meet learners and teachers needs in specific learning contexts, they cannot just be created to satisfy profitable interest of publishing houses.

Accordingly, materials particularity, practicality and possibility become real when they target learning-teaching needs in specific contexts. Specifically, materials reach particularity by being unique, exact, and detailed. According to Lopera (2014), “When teachers design their own materials, they keep away from the one-size-fits-all imposed by commercial materials.” (p. 131). In this sense, when teachers grow into materials developers, materials become more meaningful and convenient for the specific context they were created for.

Likewise, materials reach practicality through the relation between theory and practice. Teachers’ observations lay some grounds for investigation and theory development. Therefore, “Teachers should possess ... the ability to connect theory and research to practice” (Núñez et al., 2004, p. 131). Thus, teachers’ observations and experiences in the classroom, as well as knowledge and readiness to research, lead to new interpretations and theoretical concepts based on the reality given by theory and practice.

In the same way, materials reach possibility when they facilitate the learning process and bring along with them, opportunities to be applied regardless class, race, gender, and ethnic particularities of the educational context. Regarding materials, McDonough, Shaw and Masuhara (2013) maintained that “the possibilities for actually implementing them will be directly related both to the learners themselves –their needs, characteristics and so on – and to the whole educational setting in which the teaching is to take place” (p. 4). Indeed, the opportunities to have contextualized materials increase the possibilities of a successful learning process for each student to whom the materials are intended for and for the specific context they are created.

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In view of having conducted this study in an EFL class at a bilingual private context, in which texts are available but not contextualized, in the following subcategories I will explain in detail the impact of the created materials in the learning process of the fifth graders including the relevance of the booklet, motivation to complete the activities, and strategies used to create arguments based on real life situations.

### ***Relevant and useful materials contribute to achieve confidence in activity fulfillment.***

There is no doubt, that materials attain impact on students' confidence in activity completion, only if the activities proposed make sense to them. On this matter, "teacher-made materials are ... relevant and personalized" (Ur, 1996, p. 191) and appropriate "within the context of learning a language" (Núñez et al., 2013, p. 10); they also "build confidence through activities which try to push learners slightly beyond their existing proficiency" (Tomlinson, 1998, p. 9) and "make learners feel comfortable and confident because both the content and type of activities are perceived by them as significant and practical to their lives" (Núñez & Téllez, 2009, p. 184). In the present study, students were familiar with the topics suggested to write the argumentative paragraphs. As they found these topics relevant, useful and challenging; they felt motivated, eager and confident to develop the activities of the booklet and performed better in their writing process.

The aforesaid statements corroborate the need for contextualizing materials that respond students' sociocultural and academic backgrounds. In this regard, Ramírez (2004) contended that "contextualization makes learning significant to students by helping them become interested and aware of what happens around them" (Ramírez, 2004, p. 5). This is to say, that the participants of this study were not just completing an activity as a requirement for the course.



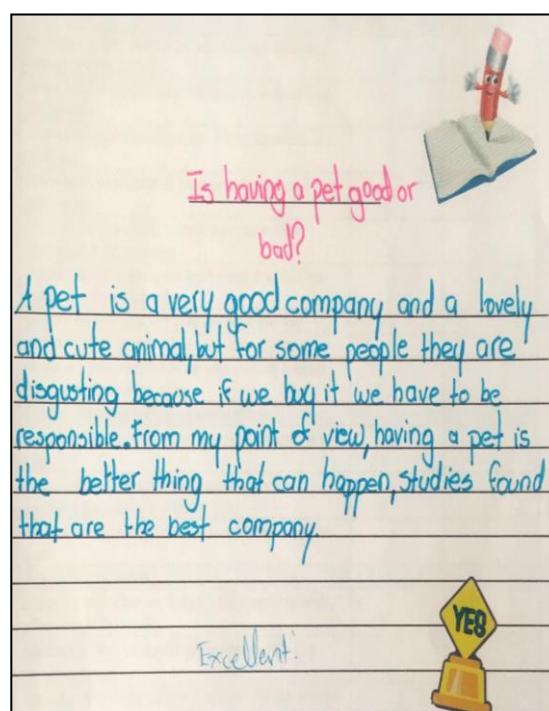
## MATERIALS FOR CRITICAL THINKING AND ARGUMENTATIVE WRITING

They were really involved and showed confidence since they could use their thoughts and feelings regarding topics they liked and understood.

As disclosed in the following examples, students completed the activities entirety. Most importantly, they demonstrated understanding of the topics and required little teacher's help with vocabulary or grammar aspects of the lesson. For example, in activity 3, lesson 6, students were asked to complete a graphic organizer (T chart); this, to get ideas to further elaborate an argumentative paragraph about pets as seen in activity 7, lesson 6. Likewise, in activity 3, lesson 5, students worked on a spider web to brainstorm ideas about bullying to write an argumentative paragraph as shown in activity 7, lesson 5. These activities were fully completed in the expected time as the booklet was motivating, contextualized, considered students' needs, and included learning strategies along with clear instructions.

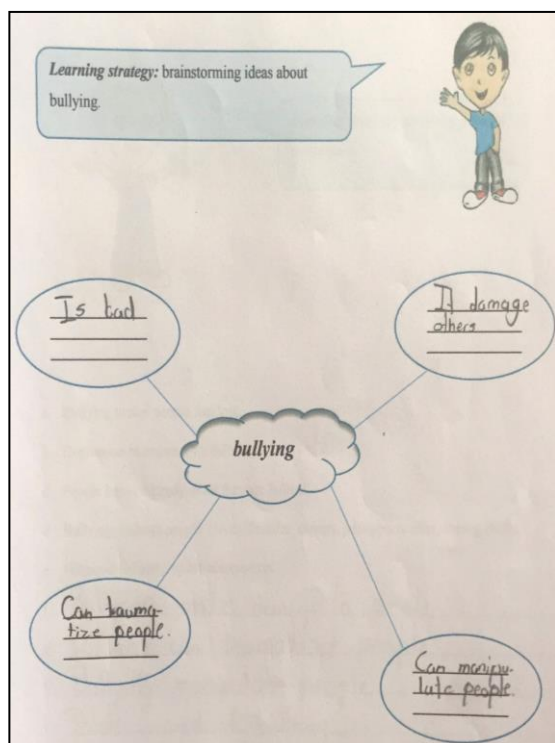
Pets benefits	Pets barriers
You get more love	You need to clean the poop
You start to be more organized	The bad smell
You have more company	Can destroyed things
You can play with it all the time.	Can quit you many money.

*(Student's artifacts, lesson 6, activity 3)*

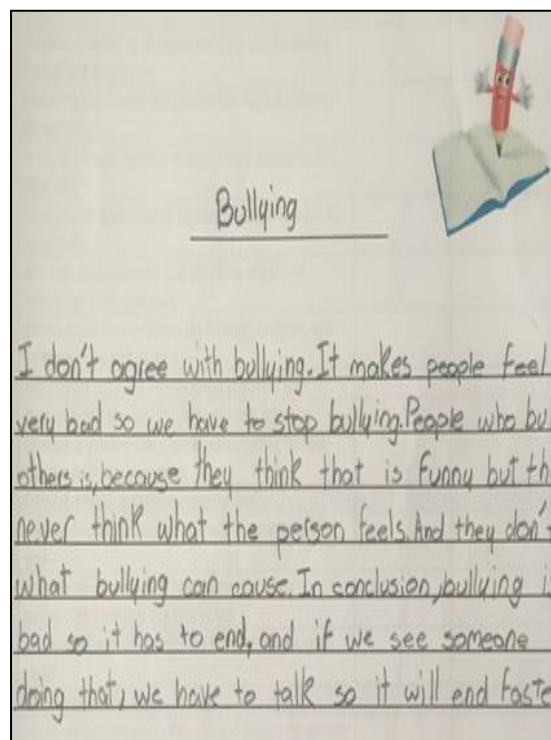


*(Student's artifacts, lesson 6, activity 7)*

# MATERIALS FOR CRITICAL THINKING AND ARGUMENTATIVE WRITING



*(Student's artifacts, lesson 5, activity 3)*














*(Student's artifacts, lesson 5, activity 7)*

The subsequent self-assessment reflects the impact of the booklet in the development of the activities proposed. Considering students' likes and CAS context, I designed a booklet which included familiar and friendly topics for fifth graders. The textbooks used in regular classes are full of foreign topics far away from students' reality. Hence, "Sometimes, teachers need to explore teaching materials outside textbooks and modify them in order to be relevant to a particular group or students" (Ur, 1996, p. 185). Instead of "consuming" existing materials, I created a contextualized booklet in an attempt to get the best of my students and to make the most of my English classes. By designing and implementing a contextualized booklet, I managed to make the lessons more meaningful to students. Indeed, all participants expressed not only that they found the booklet attractive, but also and most importantly, they found the activities in each lesson relevant and helpful for completion. In fact, completion was accomplished thanks to the

## MATERIALS FOR CRITICAL THINKING AND ARGUMENTATIVE WRITING

booklet's structure, as it included SLA principles, as well as a suitable pedagogical sequence.

Moreover, teacher's constant guidance and support during the implementation, facilitated and complemented the design booklet's lessons.

This lesson...	 Yes	 Can be better
proposes a variety of attractive activities with interesting content and nice lay out.		
makes me feel relaxed and comfortable while developing the activities.		
is useful because it guides me into writing arguments in a clear way.		
promotes the application of learning strategies to solve my tasks easier.		
gives me the opportunity to apply previous and new knowledge in the same task.		
provides activities to express my feelings, emotions, and opinions in the written tasks.		
presents the tasks in a very clear and organized way.		
evidences planning and follow a consistent structure.		
produces a positive effect on me before writing because they are motivating/appealing.		

*(Student's artefacts, self-assessment, lesson 4)*

The teacher's field notes also corroborated that relevant, useful and contextualized materials facilitated the culmination of activities proposed making the learning process more engaging, significant and comfortable for students. On this matter, Block (1991) affirmed that "the fact that the students are talking about something as real as their home town makes the practice activity much more relevant and engaging" (pp. 213-214). In other words, students have better experiences in the classroom since learning becomes more meaningful and related to their context. Then, it is fundamental for students to learn about something they can use in real life as can be appreciated in these field notes excerpts.

"They think this lesson is the best. They are enjoying the topic and the activities because they like and own pets. Students feel excited, they like the pictures chosen for the discussion, and they want to start writing right away. I noticed students paid special attention to this topic and the lesson in general." [sic]

*(Teacher's field notes, lesson 6, section 1)*

"Students express they like the booklet after taking a look at it. They feel it is attractive, colorful, they like the pictures, the images, and they like the fact that it is completely new to them. A student express gratitude towards the teacher for designing a booklet for them. Another student says she likes to see the teacher's name at the bottom of each page. Even if they have plenty of resources for their regular classes, they like the topics included in the booklet since they are related to their lives." [sic]

*(Teacher's field notes, lesson 1, section 1)*

## MATERIALS FOR CRITICAL THINKING AND ARGUMENTATIVE WRITING

Questionnaire responses ratified how much students enjoyed working with contextualized materials. In fact, "The personal touch in teacher- generated materials is highly appreciated by students" (Block, 1991, p. 214) and "the most important result that learning materials can achieve is to engage the emotions of learners, laughter, joy, excitement, sorrow and anger" (Tomlinson 2003, p. 18). Despite having textbooks, fifth graders did not feel very attracted or connected to them. Course books are too general, they do not contain information related to learners' lives. Students were amazed and felt grateful with the booklets their teacher had exclusively created for them. In this sense, contextualized materials became relevant for the present study as observed in the analysis of the third data instrument.

"I felt very happy with all the proposed things and this activities were very productive for us to other classes just like Language Arts, Math. We talked about arguments in social studies" [*sic*]  
(*Questionnaire, question 2, student A*)

"The booklet was really creative it had a lot of colors that made me feel more interested in the argumentative writing topic.  
I felt very good because it wasn't the monotonous class that we only read, in this one we can tell our anecdotes, talk, share and have fun learning, miss Jenny make the booklet and gave one to us" [*sic*]  
(*Questionnaire, questions 1-2, student G*)

### ***Scaffolded strategy-based materials foment learning and using knowledge in context.***

The present study revealed the importance of scaffolding the materials. Such process entails manifold knowledge: contextual variables, the nature of language, and the processes of learning and teaching (Núñez et al., 2017a). In doing so, learning strategies facilitate the learning and teaching processes, the ability to use knowledge in context, and the feasibility to incorporate strategies to other subjects. Up to this point, it is relevant to mention that at the beginning of the implementation the learning strategies were explained and modeled. As the implementation elapsed, students became more conscious of the use of strategies to develop the proposed activities.

## MATERIALS FOR CRITICAL THINKING AND ARGUMENTATIVE WRITING

Moreover, before completing the activities, students found and discussed strategies without the teacher telling them to do so. This subcategory emerged from the previous premises. In Oxford's (1990) words, "Learning strategies are specific actions taken by the learner to make learning easier, faster, more enjoyable, more self directed, more effective, and more transferrable to new situations" (p. 6). The author further asserted that "strategies are used to help the learner relax or gain greater confidence, so that more profitable learning can take place" (Oxford, 1990, p. 11). Thus, strategies are essential for language learning whereas they foment students' involvement, guarantee a more effective learning process and lead to using language in real life settings.


Considering this, I explained the importance of the conscious use of learning strategies and modeled them during the first couple of sessions. After that, students read and interpreted the strategies on their own. The ensuing pictures show how fifth graders consciously used the learning strategies provided in the booklet to develop the activities proposed. For instance, in activity 3, lesson 2, students completed a T chart about the benefits of and the barriers to wearing uniforms. In activity 4, lesson 3, students analyzed and turned some statements into fallacies to avoid them in their argumentative paragraphs. In activity 4, lesson 2, students classified information about uniforms into arguments from authority, arguments by examples, and arguments by cause and effect. In activity 3, lesson 3, students brainstormed ideas about technology and completed a graphic organizer. In all the aforesaid activities, the learning strategies helped students in the completion process by making them feel confident as they knew exactly what to do and what was expected.



## MATERIALS FOR CRITICAL THINKING AND ARGUMENTATIVE WRITING

3. Think about ideas of benefits or barriers about wearing school uniforms and write them down in the following T chart.

**Learning strategy:** looking at ideas about wearing school uniforms in detail.




Uniforms benefits	Uniforms barriers
It identifies us as a community.	Sometimes is very uncomfortable.

(Student's artifacts, lesson 2, activity 3)

4. In pairs, complete the following statements about the use of technology in class by making them fallacies. Teacher will help you with your responses.

**Learning strategy:** analyzing what fallacies are and how to avoid them when writing their argumentative paragraphs.



**Fallacies of belief.**


According to everybody in 3D, when they work with the tablets in class the work is fun and quickly.

Teachers think technology broadens students' minds by searching in google and learning more.

(Student's artifacts, lesson 3, activity 4)

4. By writing the letter in the corresponding space, classify the following statements about school uniforms into arguments from authority, arguments by examples, and arguments by cause and effect.

**Learning strategy:** analyzing and classifying information.




- ✓ a. Mrs. Melo has mentioned that uniforms keep students focused in education, not their clothes.
- ✓ b. School uniforms help to prevent bullying. For example, bullies have one less thing to make fun of others.
- ✓ c. If students wear uniforms all year long, parents or tutors save money spent on clothes.
- ✓ d. Little students are safer when they wear uniforms. For example, if a student gets lost, people can help by identifying the school the student belongs to.
- ✓ e. The school's philosophy contemplates that uniforms enhance school pride, unity, and community spirit.
- ✓ f. By knowing what to wear every day, students' punctuality improves since they spend less time thinking about what to wear.

Arguments from authority	Arguments by examples	Arguments by cause and effect
a e	b d	c f

(Student's artifacts, lesson 2, activity 4)

3. Think about the benefits of using technology in education and complete the following web.

**Learning strategy:** brainstorming ideas about the use of technology in education.



Some benefits the use of technology can offer to students are...



- a. know how to use technology
- b. interact with the other students by technology
- c. learn faster
- d. use different materials to the class be funnier

(Student's artifacts, lesson 3, activity 3)

Self-investment leans on learning strategies and their mindful use. On this subject, Grabe and Stoller (2002) defined strategies as “abilities that are potentially open to conscious reflection and use” (p. 17). In addition to retrieving prior knowledge and analyzing and classifying information, fifth graders were asked to reflect upon the instructions, discuss the activities

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among themselves, and ask questions to the teacher to evince that they were aware of their skills and the possible obstacles before completion. Some of the findings of the present study unveiled that students consciously and successfully used learning strategies provided in the booklet's lessons to solve the activities. The self-assessment below evinced how the learning strategies became useful to them.

This lesson...	 Yes	 Can be better
promotes the application of learning strategies to solve my tasks easier.	✓	
gives me the opportunity to apply previous and new knowledge in the same task.	✓	

*(Student's artefacts, self-assessment, lesson 2)*

During the implementation of the pedagogical intervention, it was noticeable that students not only applied different learning strategies, but at the same time, they were conscious of the benefits of applying them. Referring to this, O'Malley and Chamot (1990) stated that learning strategies help students “comprehend, learn, or retain new information” (p. 1). Moreover, students used learning strategies to understand, receive and apply new information in context. These segments from the teacher's field notes disclose students' perceptions towards the learning strategies in the booklet and how after some lessons, they became so familiar with them that it was no necessary to explain or model them again.

“Students liked the strategies proposed for the oral discussion, they led to a very interesting conversation and to the completion of the activities. Before writing, students devoted some time to define arguments and fallacies as a strategy to write a consistent paragraph. Learning strategies helped students to complete the activities, to comprehend arguments and fallacies, and to develop critical thinking skills as knowledge was socially built within the classroom context. Students used what they learned in the final writing activity, argumentative paragraph.” [sic]

*(Teacher's field notes, lesson 3, section 1)*

“Now that some lessons have been implemented, students became familiar with learning strategies. They even mention liking and needing them to work. Student D: “Miss Jenny, the booklet is organized and I like the strategies in the blue clouds because they help us. Students always read them before doing any activity.” [sic]

*(Teacher's field notes, lesson 4, section 1)*

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Eventually, as sessions of the pedagogical intervention elapsed, students began to be more autonomous and independent in the use of learning strategies to solve their academic endeavors. Concerning the use of learning strategies Núñez and Téllez (2009) highlighted that they “facilitate student self-investment, which aids the learner in making efficient use of the resources to facilitate self-discovery” (p. 176). As it is a SLA principle, self-investment foments students’ exploration of their abilities by intentionally applying learning strategies to overcome difficulties in their learning process. The data gathered suggest the cognizant application of learning strategies as shown in these questionnaire responses.

“I analyze all the information and I choose the important ideas before to write it there. The strategies help me to do the activities not asking the teacher what to do” [*sic*]  
(*Questionnaire, question 8, student C*)

“First I elaborate arguments with the first think that a had in my mind. But then I use strategies.” [*sic*]  
(*Questionnaire, question 8, student B*)

The aforementioned ideas envisaged the impact of contextualized materials in students’ learning process. Following, I will disclose the findings of the second category related to critical thinking skills.

### **Exchanging reliable ideas related to students’ lives fosters critical thinking skills.**

This category entails the findings regarding the development of critical thinking skills when exchanging ideas prior to writing argumentative paragraphs about topics related to fifth graders’ lives and experiences. On the one hand, Hillocks (2010) explained the importance for us teachers to place “critical thinking in the forefront of what we ought to be doing in the English education of our students” (p. 24). On the other hand, Tomlinson and Masuhara (2010) highlighted the need to “expose students to ... language in context ... to make them communicate and to think “critically” (p. 399). For these reasons, “materials will focus on the communicative abilities of interpretation, expression and negotiation” (Rico, 2005, p. 105). Thus, the booklet designed for



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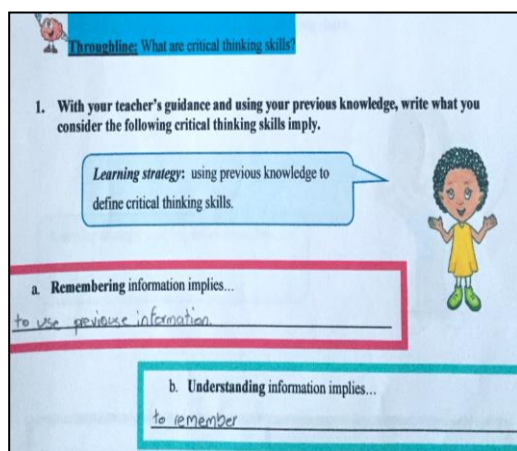
the pedagogical intervention of the present study considered students' ages and addressed, among others, the development of Bloom's Taxonomy (1956) critical thinking skills through the engagement in conversations that allowed students to remember, understand, analyze, use, evaluate information to exchange ideas, and create arguments based on topics related to their lives. Moreover, these skills encouraged students to think critically and prompted reflective, organized and consistent standpoints to elaborate arguments.

***Mutual exchange of ideas to think critically.*** In every lesson of the pedagogical intervention students were involved in critical discussions about given topics related to their social context, considering their age, academic knowledge, cultural background and English proficiency. In view of that, they were helping each other to structure their thoughts and to find the correct evidence to back up their viewpoints and generate arguments. Bearing in mind that "critical thinking involves questioning and reflecting upon ideas" (UCL Transition Programme, n.d.), the moments devoted to discussions were essential. Even though, participants of this study were children, they demonstrated that they can be taught to think critically as they gave reasons for their conclusions, "from learning how to make peanut butter sandwiches to playing with a new toy, children flexibly make use of many sources of information to understand the causal structure of the world around them" (Buchsbaum, Gopnik, Griffiths & Shafto, 2011, p. 331). By swapping ideas related to their lives, students engendered new perceptions, remembered previous knowledge, made interpretations and analyzed the concepts being learned, evaluated which information was relevant to elaborate their arguments, and applied previous and new knowledge in the creation of their argumentative paragraphs.

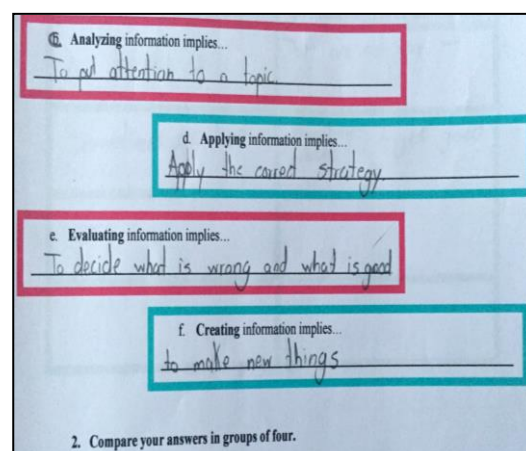
As can be found in students' artifacts, they developed some activities that prepared them for the writing moments. Take, for example, these group activities included throughout the

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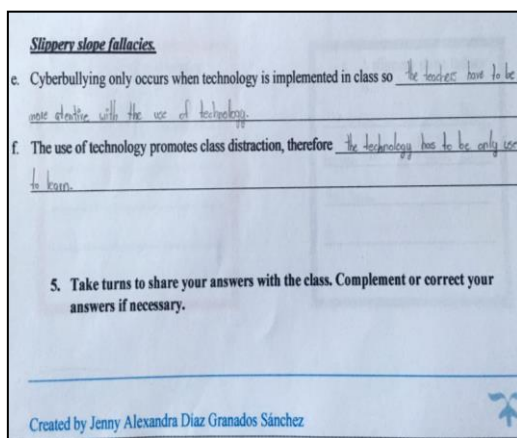
booklet which suggest teacher-student, as well as student-student interaction. In activity 1, lesson 4, with teacher's support, students identified what CT skills imply. Subsequently, activity 2, lesson 4, shows how after working with the teacher, students analyzed and exchanged ideas about CT skills in groups of four. Then, activity 5, lesson 3, illustrates how working as a plenary, students evaluated information, compared and complemented their ideas as they understood the concepts of the fallacies included in the booklet. Finally, activity 4, lesson 5, demonstrates pair work as students read some information about bullying and created sentences which expressed their thoughts about this topic. It is pertinent to mention that there was constant teacher monitoring during the pedagogical intervention even when students worked independently.



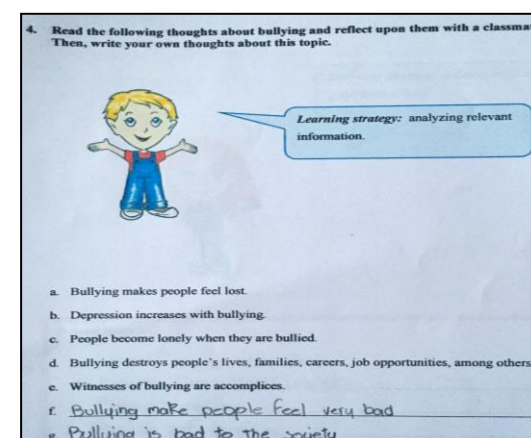
(Student's artifacts, lesson 4, activity 1)



(Student's artifacts, lesson 4, activity 2)






(Student's artifacts, lesson 3, activity 5)



(Student's artifacts, lesson 5, activity 4)

## MATERIALS FOR CRITICAL THINKING AND ARGUMENTATIVE WRITING

Bearing in mind what thinking critically entails, students analyzed evidence to determine which information they could use to back up specific points of view. Critical thinking requires, as underlined by Sumner (1940), “The examination and test of propositions of any kind which are offered for acceptance, in order to find out whether they correspond to reality or not” (p. 633). As shown in the self-assessment, students considered critical thinking skills beneficial to convert their points of view into arguments supported with evidence.

Critical Thinking Skills are useful to...	 Yes	 Can be better
provide evidence to back up my point of view towards a topic.		

*(Student's artefacts, self-assessment, lesson 2)*

Some of the findings of this study suggest that critical thinking skills contributed to the creation of arguments evince in the argumentative paragraphs. This study examined the six levels for critical thinking skills in Bloom's taxonomy (1956), which was later revised by Forehand, (2005), formerly supported with the corresponding theory in chapter two. Prior to the implementation of pedagogical intervention and even during the first lessons, students used CT skills unaware of them and their benefits. In fact, I could notice that in the discussions and the writing moments, fifth graders remembered, understood, applied, analyzed, evaluated, and created information (Forehand, 2005). As Lai's (2001) affirmed, “Critical thinking includes the component skills of analyzing arguments, making inferences using inductive or deductive reasoning, judging or evaluating, and making decisions or solving problems” (p. 2). Correspondingly, as the lessons passed by, students started using CT skills consciously knowing that they contribute to more structured and critical thoughts. In some of the teacher's field notes, I indicated the aforementioned ideas.

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“Even though, students are not familiar with Critical thinking skills’ concepts or Bloom’s Taxonomy, they seem to use all the stages in the development of the first lesson: they remember, understand, apply, analyze, evaluate, and create information based on the evidence found. It was evident during and after activity completion. At the end of the lesson, they were both, more careful, and more conscious about Bloom’s taxonomy which was explained at the beginning” [sic]

*(Teacher’s field notes, lesson 1, section 2)*

“Students talk about CT skills while developing the lesson. As they are involved in the oral discussion or develop the activities in the booklet, they say: Miss we are remembering, we are applying, etc. They also say” miss, we do that in other classes. After an explanation on the six levels of Bloom’s taxonomy, students realized this is something they do all the time, not only in academic contexts but in other contexts too. Student E: miss, we do that when we talk to parents or friend or we play because we create things when we play.” [sic]

*(Teacher’s field notes, lesson 6, section 2)*

Consequently, students acknowledged how much they gained in terms of argumentation by being aware of critical thinking skills as they aim to create sound arguments supported with evidence. Woods, Irvine and Walton (2004) purported that “an argument is a presentation of reasons or evidence in support of some claim” (p. 21). Therefore, claims turn into sound arguments when the reasons given to support them are well structured, which is possible when CT skills are present in such process. These are students’ perceptions about the benefits of critical thinking skills in the creation of arguments.

“because CT help me to make good arguments and future works I probably have to give and support my ideas with evidence” [sic]

*(Questionnaire, question 7, student B)*

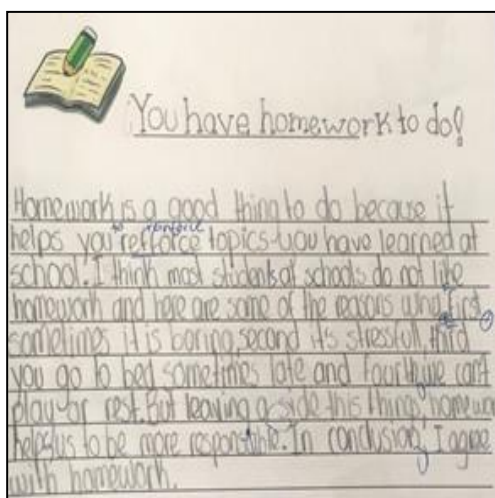
“I elaborate arguments by using critical thinking and then adding evidence” [sic]

*(Questionnaire, question 8, student E)*

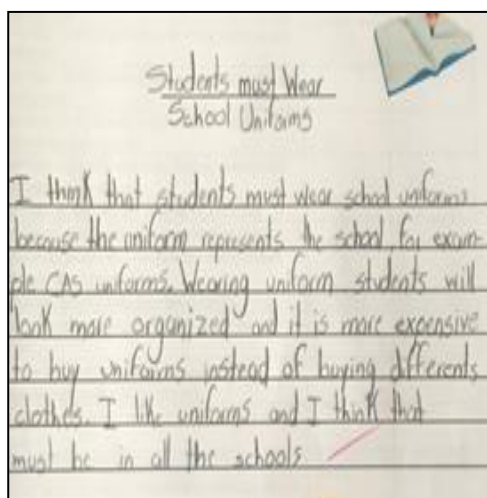
***Reflective, organized and consistent standpoints related to students’ lives.*** Students opinions about familiar issues became more thoughtful and gained consistency through the autonomous and conscious use of critical thinking skills as it “involves knowledge, experiences, dispositions (attitudes or habits of mind) and intellectual abilities” (Carbogim, Oliveira & Püschel, 2016, p. 5). Although children do not possess wide knowledge in many fields, they learn fast if you give them thought provoking themes and activities. Indeed, “the very fact that children know less, paradoxically, make them better, or at least, more open-minded learners”

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(Lucas, Bridgers, Griffiths & Gopnik, 2014, p. 290). Attaining knowledge is not enough to think critically, it implies remembering, understanding, analyzing, applying, evaluating information and creating based upon previous and new knowledge. Hence, as a result of the development of these skills, participants of this study expressed reflective, organized and consistent standpoints based on topics related to their lives as evinced in the following samples.



*(Student's artifacts, lesson 1, activity 7)*







*(Student's artifacts, lesson 2, activity 7)*

In the two previous paragraphs, more reliable, planned and thoughtful viewpoints about homework and uniforms are displayed. In these specific cases, students applied the CT skills above-mentioned, kept their initial ideas, developed them through the text, and gave reasons to support them. Moreover, since they investigated each topic at home before each session and complemented the information with the activities of the implementation, it was easy for them to structure their ideas.

Keeping a consistent viewpoint is essential in argumentative writing. Thus, the lessons in the booklet were intended to encourage and instruct students into doing so. Standpoints are established by “searching for hidden assumptions, noticing various facets, unraveling different strands, and evaluating what is most significant” (Barnet & Bedau, 2011, p. 3). The pedagogical

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intervention offered students opportunities to establish and maintain their positions based on beliefs and the supporting evidence as acknowledged in the self-assessment.

Critical Thinking Skills are a useful tool to...	 Yes	 Can be better
evaluate the importance of being consistent when maintaining a position in a written task.		
develop and organizing reflective thoughts about a given topic.		

### *(Student's artefacts, self-assessment, lesson 6)*

The teacher's field notes corroborated the fact that students were able to maintain a strong position during the discussions and the written activities by acting as good thinkers do: they analyzed information, were able to solve problems, looked for several sources of information, became more open minded, and enhanced their communicative abilities. As underlined by Halpern (1996), "Critical thinking is the use of cognitive skills or strategies that increase the probability of a desirable outcome" (p. 5). Moreover, students learn to defend their arguments with the corresponding support in the evidence. The excerpts below give a comprehensive account of this.

"For the discussion, students kept in mind the concepts of CT learned in previous lessons and were using them consciously maintaining a firm position. They talked about their perceptions about the booklet's topics, asked questions, and listen to others' opinions to complement their thoughts. Since the iPads were available, they asked me if they could read a little bit more about bullying because they wanted to create better arguments and they were conscious of the importance of backing up ideas on evidence. They even mentioned doing this in their regular English, Spanish and Social Studies classes since they were working on argumentation and debates. Student B: Miss Jenny, Miss Gina asked about arguments and we were the only ones raising hands because we remembered this." [sic]

*(Teacher's field notes, lesson 5, section 2)*

"Students defend their viewpoints in a consistent way and respect others' opinions. They complement each other and correct their classmates if they think it is necessary. They are conscious of CT skills, they even give examples of using them in the sessions and in other subjects. Students say now they always try to remember, understand, apply, analyze and evaluate to create new things." [sic]

*(Teacher's field notes, lesson 4, section 2)*

Finally, students confirmed how CT skills prompted them to express their opinions and defend their ideas to create arguments. Specially, since they felt what they were learning was significant and relevant because "the purpose of developing critical thinking is ... for students to

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obtain a meaningful learning for their lives.” (Parada, 2008, p. 74). As shown below, students made a better sense of new knowledge and integrated it with previous concepts.

“before these lessons I never analyze nothing but now I analyze and I understand evaluating because if I finish something, if I evaluate I will make sure my answers are correct, and creating because if I make the other two steps I can create very good things with my opinions.” [sic]  
(*Questionnaire, question 6, student A*)

“CT helps us thinking better at the moment of answering open questions and have options to give your opinion.” [sic]  
(*Questionnaire, question 7, student G*)

The previous explanations demonstrate how students developed critical thinking skills through the booklet’s implementation. Hereunder, I will unveil the findings on the final category related to the third construct of the research question, argumentative writing.

**Structured thinking for argumentative writing.** Thinking is as natural as breathing; after all, it is what tell us apart from other animals; however, structured thinking implies more than just having simple thoughts. According to Woods and Irvine (2004), structured thinking “requires that we learn to evaluate arguments” (p. 5). By this means, structured thinking fosters deeply understanding of all the situations that surround us, including academic situations. Correspondingly, analysis is fundamental for structured thinking.

Once we learn to structure our thoughts, we may begin the process of building arguments in AW. If we do not want our ideas to remain as simple claims, we need supporting evidence. In this regard, Mayberry (2009) maintained that “an opinion is based not so much on evidence as on belief, intuition, or emotion. Argument, on the other hand, is a position supported by clear thinking and reasonable evidence, with a secure connection to solid facts” (p. 29). Even though, arguments come from opinions, perceptions and feelings, they need to be supported with reasons and evidence to prove the original idea, which for the purpose of this study encompasses reference to authority, true examples and cause and effect relationships. There is a number of

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factors in building arguments. Nonetheless, the principal is communication; the compilation of emotions, ideas, and opinions that seek for language representation. Then, AW demands assuming a position towards a given topic, doing research on the topic, gathering and evaluating all the possible evidence, and finally, giving reasons based on the evidence collected. AW “involves making a claim supported by reasons or evidence from multiple sources that connects to the claim in a principled way” (Newell, Beach, Smith & VanDerHeide, 2016, pp. 274-275). All in all, argumentative writing entails assuming a position and providing reasons to support that stance based on the evidence collected through the search of different sources.

The next subcategories uncover the way fifth graders structured thoughts about given topics to form sound and significant arguments, as well as the argumentative writing process on their level.

***Structured thinking for arguments.*** As it was previously mentioned, thinking comes in a natural way. Whether we do it consciously or not, thinking is part of our everyday routine. However, thinking skillfully takes time as students learn to analyze and evaluate information. Structured thinking helps “pupils go beyond the mere acquisition of knowledge in order to deepen their understanding and apply ideas, generate new possibilities and make decisions” (Northern Ireland Curriculum, 2007, p. 2). Establishing and defending one’s position is demanding; particularly, for fifth graders.

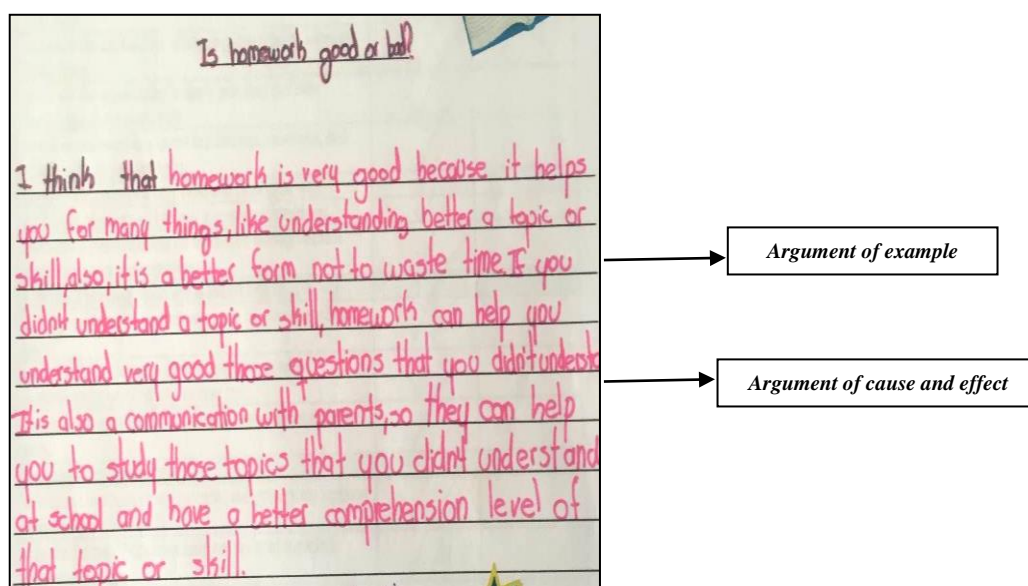
As explained and evinced in previous subcategories, there is a number of factors that interplay in the process of structuring thinking into arguments such as: students’ disposition (seen in the completion of learning activities), along with appropriate input like relevant and familiar topics for the learners (topics selected according to students’ choices) to generate critical thinking (completing graphic organizers, matching critical thinking skills to what they imply, and



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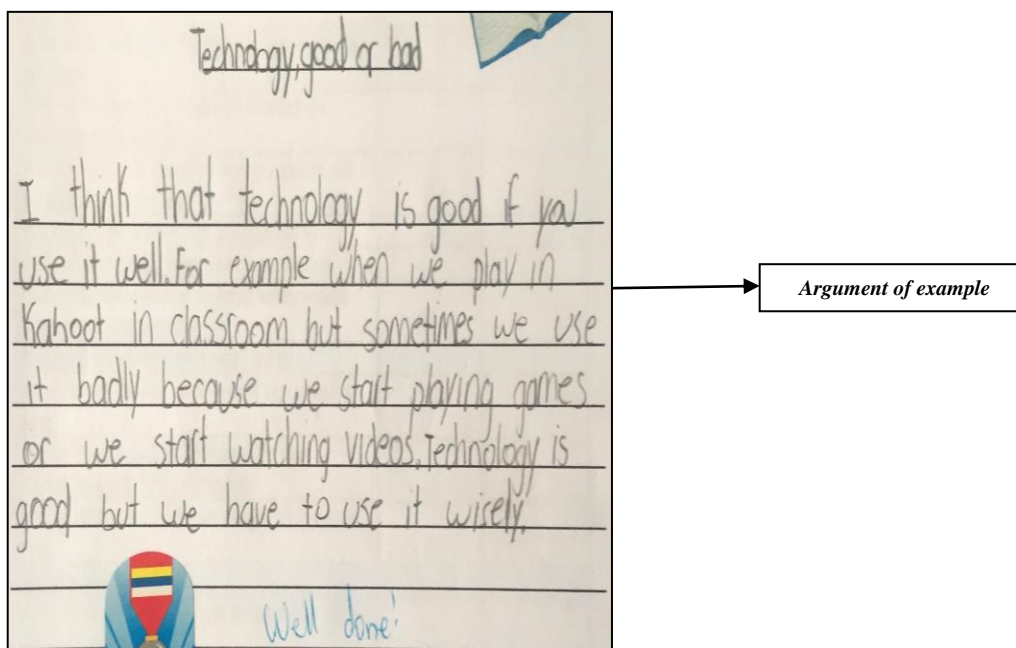
identification of fallacies), teacher's guidance explaining or solving doubts during the booklet's implementation (throughout the entire process), the booklet's suitable didactic sequence (learning activities designed to work from simplest to more complex aspects on argumentation), teaching procedures to ease students' learning process, (use of technology, teacher's individual and group assistance), and learning strategies use to facilitate comprehension and engender better academic performance (explanation and modeling of learning strategies).

Gradually, participants of this study learned to think in a more structured way to create arguments of authority, examples and cause-effect relationship, according to their English proficiency and ages. For instance, in the following paragraphs, it is evident how students incorporated the three kinds of arguments aforementioned. Students elaborated their paragraphs based on their thoughts about homework (Activity 7, lesson 1), technology in education (Activity 8, lesson 3), and school uniforms (Activity 7, lesson 2), with the corresponding supporting evidence they got from the oral discussions held during the implementation sessions, the research done as homework (CAS policy), and the information read in class. As portrayed in these pictures, students' compositions reflect more structured thinking in written arguments.

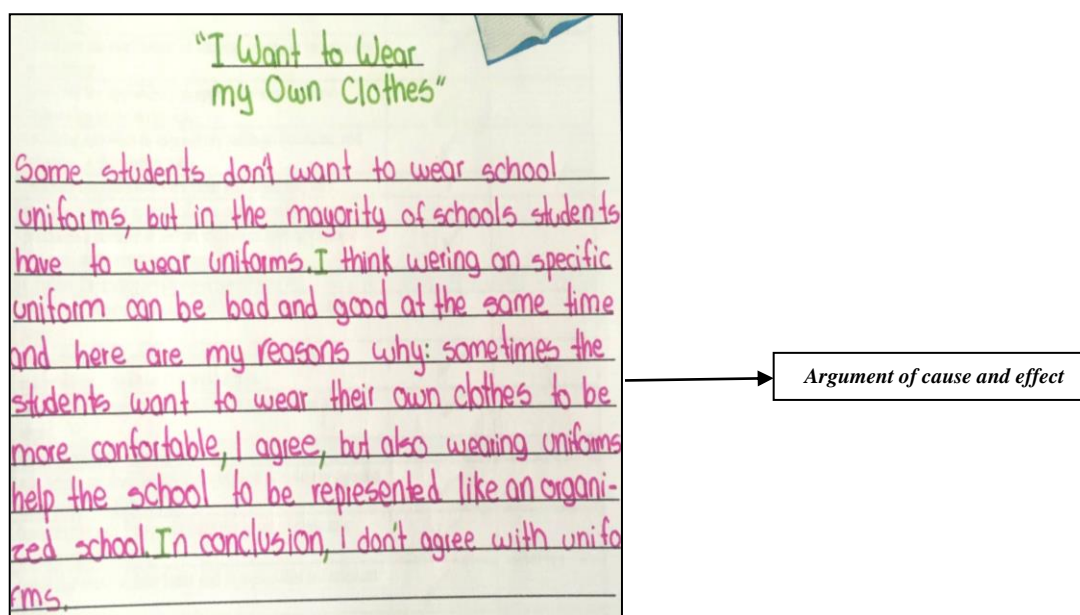


*(Student's artifacts, lesson 1, activity 7)*

## MATERIALS FOR CRITICAL THINKING AND ARGUMENTATIVE WRITING



(Student's artifacts, lesson 3, activity 8)





(Student's artifacts, lesson 2, activity 7)

Based on students' insights, working on the basics of argumentation helped them to structure their thoughts and communicate their points of view more effectively in English in written form. More precisely, in students' words, writing in English was not among the activities they enjoyed the most in the EFL class. This is because writing "can be frustrating and difficult"

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(Cihak & Castle, 2001, p. 1), specially, if they do it using a language they are learning and improving as they attend classes. During the implementation of the booklet, students felt more confident and they were able to express themselves clearer when writing arguments in English as shown in the previous artefacts samples as well as in the following self-assessment section.

Argumentative writing...	 Yes	 Can be better
allows me to structure my thoughts and present my opinion effectively in English/TL.	✓	
benefits the way I communicate my point of view in a written argument.	✓	

### *(Student's artefacts, self-assessment, lesson 5)*

As the implementation of the booklet took place, students' improvement regarding structured thinking and argumentation was evident. Undoubtedly, creating arguments while maintaining structured thoughts is demanding. Saddler, Moran, Graham and Harris (2004) remarked that argumentation "is not only hard work, it is an extremely complex and challenging mental task" (p. 3). However, with the appropriate pedagogical guidance and materials that include thought provoking activities, children can express their opinions and assume a position towards a given topic. In line with this point of view, Neill (1994) stated that "making everything easy for the child is fatal because life presents many difficulties" (p. 102). The author further affirmed that "a child should not do anything until his own opinion is formed" (Neill, 1994, p. 102). The ideas portrayed in the field notes excerpts below exhibit students' progress and the changes in the way they organized ideas, gave their opinions and elaborated arguments.

"The improvement on students' compositions is evident, they are developing their ideas more consistently, I can notice their ideas are more structured. They are also making better use of the TL. Before the implementation, when asked to do a composition, students seemed to write the first thing that came into their minds just for completion. At this point of the implementation, after working on the basics of argumentation always keeping in mind their ages and English level, students follow the writing stages more thoughtfully. They spend real time planning before beginning the composition. Then they do their drafts, editing and final paragraphs. Feedback is also important for them. They like to share with the teachers and among them." [sic]

### *(Teacher's field notes, lesson 5, section 3)*

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“Students are making an effort to structure their compositions better. I can tell, they are taking the time to organize their thoughts. They also look for evidence. Very significant for this study and specially for me, students keep in mind the three types of argumentation and fallacies we have been working on. Student F: Miss Jenny this is an argument from authority because Mrs. Melo [the owner and general director] knows about this. Student G: Miss Jenny, this is not a fallacy because is not something that I invented just to write here.” [sic]

*(Teacher’s field notes, lesson 4, section 3)*

Finally, the questionnaires corroborated the enhancement of students in argumentative writing. Being more competent at analyzing information, leads to more structured thoughts and significant arguments. Due to contextualized materials and clear instructions, students reached this point in their writing process. In respect of prior instruction to successful writing process, Graham and Harris (2005) claimed that it betters “if students experience effective writing instruction right from the start” (p. 19). The previous idea applies to argumentative writing. With the right materials and the right instruction, fifth graders developed better argumentative compositions. These questionnaires responses exemplify the previous perceptions.

“My argumentative skills after development the activities were a lot better. I can write arguments with evidence.” [sic]

*(Questionnaire, question 10, student I)*

“I can say that I learn more because I learn to make good arguments and support ideas.” [sic]

*(Questionnaire, question 10, student B)*

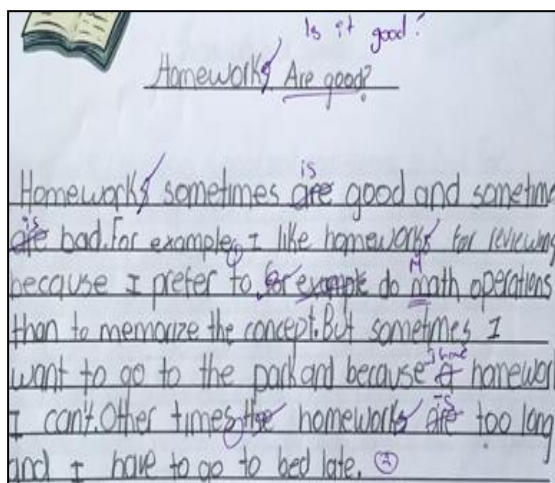
The next subcategory, related to the third construct of the research question, maintains and expands the concepts of argumentative writing addressed during the pedagogical intervention using the contextualized booklet designed.

***Attaining argumentative writing.*** The end of the pedagogical intervention revealed the presence of structured thinking in argumentative writing as students supported their compositions with evidence. In relation to this, Mayberry (2009) attested that argumentative writing “seeks agreement about a point through the use of reasonable evidence” (p. 29). Keeping consistency between opinions and the evidence provided to back up ideas is fundamental in the

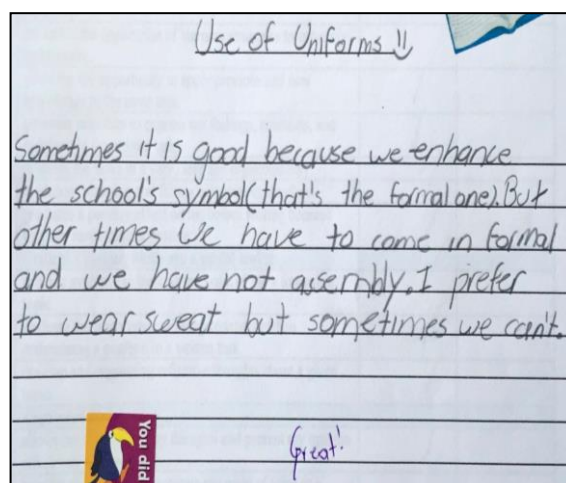
## MATERIALS FOR CRITICAL THINKING AND ARGUMENTATIVE WRITING

argumentation process. As a result of that consistency, the reasons provided make arguments. It is noticeable how students improved their arguments.

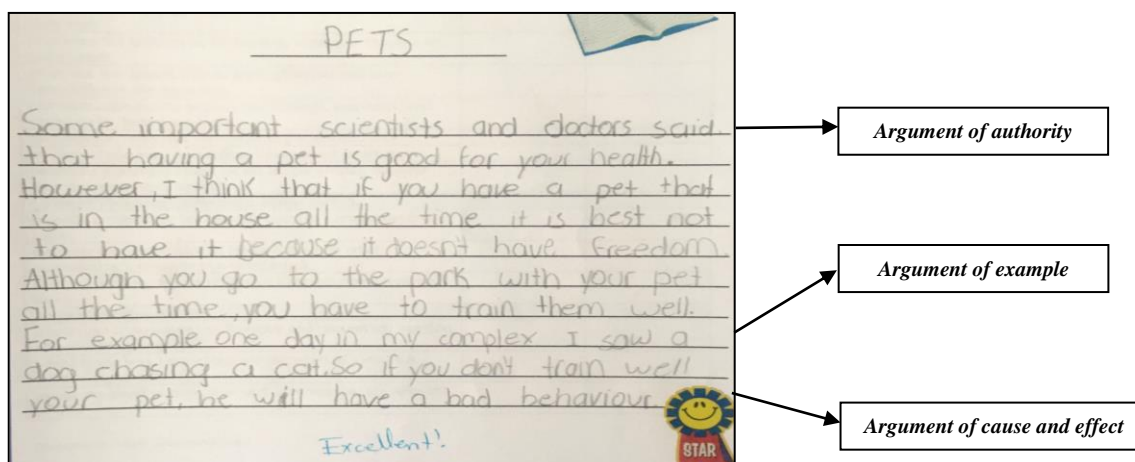
As depicted on the samples below, initial paragraphs were short, they were not very structured, ideas were not fully developed, and they did not have enough evidence. As the pedagogical intervention was implemented, students began to write longer and more structured paragraphs, they kept consistency, and supported their ideas with evidence collected from class discussions, online research and homework. These paragraphs were written by the same student evincing the AW progress attained during the implementation of the pedagogical intervention.



(Student's artifacts, lesson 1, activity 7)



(Student's artifacts, lesson 2, activity 7)



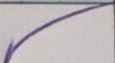


(Student's artifacts, lesson 6, activity 7)

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As observed in activity 7, lesson 6, student F not only developed a more structured and consistent paragraph, but he also included arguments of authority, example and cause and effect relationships in his composition. This demonstrates that the basic concepts of argumentation were learned and argumentative writing was attained.

It is worth mentioning that students' perception towards argumentative writing was positive. According to them, learning about arguments broadened their perspectives to give more relevant opinions when talking about different topics. Weston (2006) determined that "arguments are essential, first, because it is a way of trying to get informed about which opinions are better" (p. 11). After all, arguments emerge from opinions. as portrait in the next self-assessment item.

Argumentative writing...	 Yes	 Can be better
opens my mind to new ideas and to topics that are relevant in life.		

*(Student's artefacts, self-assessment, lesson 2)*

The use of evidence to support ideas in the creation arguments flourished with each lesson. The booklet guided students on this process since "students must learn to search for the information that would assist them in developing their evidence" (Gleason, 1999, p. 102). These field notes ratify the fact that students internalized the idea of using evidence in every attempt to create an argument and demonstrated it when writing the argumentative paragraphs.

"Argumentative writing is noticeable in the development of the last lesson. Students do not only give their ideas or opinions, they support them by providing reasons and evidence. They also try to use the three types of arguments learned. They keep in mind not to use fallacies in their arguments." [sic]  
*(Teacher's field notes, lesson 6, section 3)*

"During this session, it is evident that students seem to develop their ideas in depth, provide evidence applying CT skills and including argumentation types and avoiding fallacies learned during the lessons." [sic]  
*(Teacher's field, lesson 6, section 3)*



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Subsequently, students demonstrated their progress in terms of argumentative writing after working on the contextualized booklet designed for the implementation of the pedagogical intervention. Argumentative writing “involves strategic communicative abilities that facilitate interacting and disagreeing, offering convincing alternatives towards the resolution of the opinion-related problem” (Van Esmeren & Grootendorst, as cited in Núñez & Téllez, 2012, p. 32). Throughout the pedagogical intervention students refined their written communicative skills. Certainly, the booklet fulfilled the expectations by being innovative and helpful during students’ learning process. Likewise, the advancement became visible in the argumentative paragraphs written as part of the booklet implementation. Finally, students self-evaluate their performance during the application of the questionnaires as follows.

“I think that after development of the activities is that I understand better how to put evidence in text.” [*sic*]  
(*Questionnaire, question 10, student E*)

“I improved a lot because I wrote my ideas clearly than before Now I know what argument and fallacy is” [*sic*]  
(*Questionnaire, question 10, student F*)

Having addressed the research categories and subcategories, and supported them with evidences gathered during the implementation of the pedagogical intervention, the following chapter presents the conclusions, pedagogical implications, limitations and questions for future research.

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### Chapter V

#### Conclusions and Pedagogical Implications

This final chapter presents the conclusions, the pedagogical implications for me as a teacher, a teacher-researcher and a materials developer, the limitations I faced during the implementation and three possible questions for further research concerning this qualitative action research study which emerge from the research question: How do the design and implementation of a contextualized booklet develop critical thinking skills and enhance argumentative writing of fifth graders in an EFL class at a bilingual private school?

#### Conclusions

The main objective of this research study was to analyze the contribution of a contextualized booklet made up of six lessons in the development of fifth graders' critical thinking skills when writing argumentative texts in an English as a Foreign Language classroom at a bilingual private school. Thus, to accomplish my research goals, I designed and implemented the materials, gathered data from the instruments selected, organized and analyzed the information to find the categories that correspond to each construct. Hereunder, I address the findings that emerged from the research categories.

With respect to the first research category, this study indicates that the contextualized booklet reached particularity, practicality and possibility (Kumaravadivelu, 1999). Students were responsive to the materials as they felt motivated and considered the topics relevant and useful. (Tomlinson, 2003). A feature that stands out here is the fact that developing critical thinking skills and argumentative writing is not simple, it is challenging for teachers and students what makes it not so much motivating (Saddler et al., 2004). However, the booklet impacted students in a positive way; they felt confident as topics were related to their lives, became more



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participative and expressed their feelings (Núñez & Téllez, 2015), while understanding the basics of CT and AW. Besides, the scaffolded strategy-based materials fomented learning through the use of strategies and using knowledge in context (Graves, 1996; Masuhara, 2011; Oxford, 1990; Mc Donough et al., 2013).

Regarding the second research category, the data informed that exchanging reliable ideas related to students' lives fostered the development of critical thinking skills, which prompted reflective, organized, and consistent standpoints as students remembered prior knowledge, understood new concepts, analyzed information, applied knowledge in context, and evaluated relevant evidences to create argumentative paragraphs (Bloom, 1956). Moreover, the contextualization of the booklet aroused students' interest to share their opinions and provided confidence in activity fulfillment which students highly appreciated (Block, 1991). Furthermore, as students exchange their thoughts, they began to think critically (Pineda & Núñez, 2001; Tomlinson & Masuhara, 2010) and found better ways to back up their viewpoints with evidence (Mayberry, 2009).

Concerning the third research category, structured thinking for argumentative writing was achieved through the work on the basics for argumentation as students attained argumentative writing. Throughout the implementation of the contextualized booklet and being familiar with the topics chosen, students gained confidence to structure their thoughts and to elaborate arguments (Woods, et al., 2004). As arguments were visible and supporting evidence was used (Gleason, 1999), argumentative writing was attained.

All in all, the findings of this research study suggest that certainly, contextualized materials play an important role in the classroom since they facilitate teaching practices, while they offer students genuine learning opportunities. Furthermore, the findings evince that young

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learners can be taught to think critically (Gopnik et al., 2011), can give and support their opinions and have enough for the creation of arguments if appropriate materials, teacher's guidance and positive classroom environments are provided.

### **Pedagogical Implications**

This research study represents a great opportunity to enhance my professional and personal growth (Núñez & Téllez, 2015; Núñez et al., 2017a). Even though, developing materials is an inherent activity for us, teachers, and it is part of our practice routine; doing research in MD provided me with knowledge in this field of study and in research per se, which made me more skillful in the creation of contextualized materials and in the identification of their contribution to students' learning process. Additionally, the results of this study generated in me consciousness of the importance of creating materials based on my students needs and their immediate socio-cultural reality for a more successful learning process (Rico, 2005). With this in mind, I invite teachers to resist the imposition of commercial books (Lopera, 2014) and to fearlessly embark on the great experience of materials development based on students' needs and contextual realities (Núñez et al., 2017a). In the same vein, I call on educational institutions so that they rely more on teachers' knowledge, experience and expertise to foment the academic and practical endeavor of materials creation, as well as to accept and embrace the significant changes contextualized materials may bring to the educational settings.

Due to the increasing need for a more analytical generation (Núñez, 2010), I strongly encourage teachers to work on critical thinking and argumentation with young learners. With so many things children can accomplish, why to wait for them to become older to develop thinking and argumentation skills? This, is so if we are aware of students' current mental development, their life stage, and their Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) (Vygotsky, 1978), always

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counting on the idea that with the right input and pedagogical guidance, students can accomplish great things as they feed and transform their minds every second, especially when they are young. From my point of view, this will turn into something beneficial for adolescents and adults to face the challenges of their academic lives as the process becomes more complex. It implies, developing the basics on CT and AW in elementary, and refining concepts as students go through middle school, high school and college.

This research study also impacted the CAS community, since based on the reports of the pedagogical intervention, it was institutionally decided to create English booklets based on the academic expectations for the different grade levels and curriculum; most importantly, booklets designed considering students' needs, settings and backgrounds. In fact, after the research implementation I designed an institutional English booklet for Second grade in which I applied all the knowledge acquired on MD during this research process. Additionally, this study has a local and regional impact. In addition to setting the grounds on MD research, it serves as a starting point for future investigation.

### **Limitations**

Throughout the entire implementation, the main limitation was time. Although, students evinced positive and tangible results in terms of the contribution of the contextualized booklet in their CT skills development and AW enhancement, the time for the implementation was not long enough to work in depth. Since CAS is a bilingual school with excellent results in national and international examinations, maintaining the high standards and expectations leads to very tight times and schedules for students and teachers. This did not allow me to spend more time implementing the activities on the booklet and emphasizing on the concepts of CT and AW.

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### **Questions for Further Research**

The main findings of this research study unveil the questions below. Since I consider them interesting and pertinent for further research, I venture to pose them as follows: How do the development and implementation of contextualized materials focused on written argumentative skills foster students' intercultural awareness? How do the development and implementation of contextualized materials activate critical thinking skills to hold in-class debates? And How do the development and implementation of critically-developed materials grounded on the community based- pedagogies benefit critical thinking processes?

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**Appendices****Appendix A: Entry Survey**

**Dear Students,**

As you already know, I am doing my Master's in Education at Universidad Externado de Colombia. For that reason, I am conducting this survey as part of my research study named "Materials for Critical Thinking and Argumentative Writing." The purpose of my study is to analyze the contribution of contextualized materials in the development of critical thinking skills when writing argumentative paragraphs.

I would really appreciate your help by answering these questions carefully. Remember that there are not correct or incorrect answers since this is not being evaluated just be honest. Your answers will help me a lot and they will be used only for research purposes. Thanks!

**Your teacher, Jenny Díaz Granados Sánchez**

1. Do you consider didactic materials important?
  - a. very important
  - b. somehow important
  - c. not important at all
2. Do didactic materials help you in the process of learning a new language? You can choose more than one option.
  - a. Materials are very useful. Without them, I feel lost and I cannot practice.
  - b. Materials contribute by giving me the chance to practice and to reinforce.
  - c. I do not need materials because I can learn just by listening to the teacher.
3. Which order from one to four, being four the most important and one the least important; would you give to the following aspects about learning materials to have a more successful learning process?
  - a. \_\_\_\_\_ Clear instructions
  - b. \_\_\_\_\_ Colorful images
  - c. \_\_\_\_\_ Key words
  - d. \_\_\_\_\_ Diversity of activities
4. Which of the following, do you find more useful to learn how to write in English class? You can choose more than one option.
  - a. textbooks
  - b. workbooks
  - c. worksheets

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5. Would you improve your writing process if the materials used in class are according to your likes and dislikes?
  - a. I agree. Materials motivate me to write better compositions.
  - b. I do not agree. Materials have nothing to do with writing.
6. Why do you think we write in English class? You can choose more than one option.
  - a. To remember information previously learned.
  - b. To understand what I learn in class.
  - c. To analyze information and come up with new ideas.
  - d. To apply my knowledge in context.
  - e. To evaluate the relevance of the things I learn.
  - f. To create well structure compositions.
7. How important do you consider writing in the English class is?
  - a. very important
  - b. somehow important
  - c. not important at all
8. From one to three, being three the most difficult and one the least difficult, which one do you find more challenging when writing argumentative texts?
  - a. \_\_\_\_\_ Finding the correct words in the TL according to what I want to say.
  - b. \_\_\_\_\_ Trying to give my point of view using the TL.
  - c. \_\_\_\_\_ Organizing my ideas in a clear way.
9. How well do you think you write in English?
  - a. I write very well. It is very easy for me.
  - b. I write well although I have many things to correct and to improve.
  - c. I have many difficulties to write in English.
10. Among the following options, which one makes you feel more confident and relaxed?
  - a. Writing about my own opinions towards a topic.
  - b. Writing a narrative text like a tale or a story.
  - c. Writing argumentative texts based on real information others have already said.
11. What is the first thing you do when being asked to write a text?
  - a. Write the first thing that comes to my mind according to the topic.
  - b. Think clearly and rationally about what I am going to write.
  - c. Ask for help to my teacher or classmates because I cannot do it on my own.
12. From your point of view, analyzing information before using it in to write arguments...
  - a. helps a lot to structure ideas better.
  - b. gives ideas but it is not necessary.
  - c. does not affect positively or negatively the final result.

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13. Taking a position or expressing my opinion to form arguments is...
- a. very easy because I organize my ideas quick.
  - b. something I need help with most of the times.
  - c. very difficult for me because I cannot express my ideas clearly in written way.
14. Which of the following should I take into account before writing argumentative texts?  
You can choose more than one option.
- a. Distinguish between pertinent or not pertinent information to be included.
  - b. Create arguments based on authority, true examples and cause-effect.
  - c. Use real information in new compositions.
15. What can you do to think more effectively?
- a. Question the purpose of the information used.
  - b. Check if the information is relevant.
  - c. Recall previous information and relate it to new ideas.

## MATERIALS FOR CRITICAL THINKING AND ARGUMENTATIVE WRITING

## Appendix B: Teacher's Field Notes

<b>School:</b> Colombo American School <b>Teacher:</b> Jenny Alexandra Díaz Granados Sánchez <b>Class:</b> _____ <b>Topic:</b> _____ <b>Lesson:</b> _____ <b>Session:</b> _____ <b>Date:</b> _____		
Research question	Research Objectives	
How do the design and implementation of contextualized lessons develop critical thinking skills and enhance argumentative writing of fifth graders in an EFL class at a bilingual private school?	<b>General objective.</b> To explore how the design and implementation of contextualized lessons develop critical thinking skills and enhance argumentative writing of fifth graders in an EFL class at a bilingual private school.	<b>Specific objectives.</b> (a) To assess the appropriateness and usefulness of contextualized lessons in developing fifth grade students' critical thinking and argumentative writing; (b) to describe the process in which students apply critical thinking skills in written compositions; and (c) to analyze students' way to structure clear written ideas supported by solid evidence.
Observations		Analysis
Students' strengths		
Students' weaknesses		
Materials' strengths		
Materials' weaknesses		
Critical thinking skills' strengths		
Critical thinking skills' weaknesses		
Argumentative writing's strengths		
Argumentative writing's weaknesses		

## MATERIALS FOR CRITICAL THINKING AND ARGUMENTATIVE WRITING

**Appendix C: Questionnaire****Dear Students,**

Thanks for your participation in my research study “Materials for Critical Thinking and Argumentative Writing.” I would really appreciate your help, once again, by answering the following questionnaire about your feelings during the implementation.

Remember that there are not correct or incorrect answers since this is not being evaluated, just tell me your sincere opinion. Your answers will help me a lot and they will be used only for research purposes. **Thanks!**

**Your teacher, Jenny Díaz Granados Sánchez**

**Name:****Date:**

1. What do you **think** about the **booklet**?
2. How did you **feel doing** the **activities** proposed in the **booklet**?
3. What was your **favorite aspect** from the **booklet**? You may choose more than one option.
  - a. colorful images
  - b. content and layout
  - c. variety of activities
  - d. opportunity to use previous and new knowledge
  - e. use of learning strategies to solve the tasks easier
  - f. none of the above
  - g. all of the above
4. What was your **favorite lesson** from the **booklet**? Why?
5. How did **critical thinking skills** support you when writing the argumentative paragraphs proposed in the **booklet**?
  - a. They helped you to provide evidence to support your opinion.
  - b. They helped you to be consistent when maintaining a position.
  - c. They helped you to develop reflective thoughts about a topic given.
  - d. none of the above
  - e. all of the above



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6. Which of the following **critical thinking skills** did you find more **helpful** to do the activities proposed in the **booklet**? You may choose more than one option.

- a. remembering
- b. understanding
- c. analyzing
- d. applying
- e. evaluating
- f. creating
- g. none of the above
- h. all of the above

Explain:

7. Do you think you can use **critical thinking skills** in other **subjects**? In **future** activities? Yes? No? How?

8. How did you **elaborate arguments** in the activities proposed in the **booklet**? What **strategies** did you use?

9. Which of the following aspects did you **develop** or **improve** through the argumentative writing activities proposed in the **booklet**? You may choose more than one option.

- a. Structuring and organizing your thoughts before writing.
- b. Presenting your opinion effectively in English.
- c. Communicating your point of view in a written argument.
- d. Opening your mind to new ideas.
- e. Expanding your interest in new topics.
- f. none of the above
- g. all of the above

10. What can you say about your **argumentation skills** after the **development** of the activities proposed in the **booklet**?

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## Appendix D: Parents' and Students' Consent Letter

Bogotá, febrero de 2017

Padres de familia y estudiantes grado quinto  
Colombo American School

Apreciados padres de familia y estudiantes:

Cordialmente me dirijo a ustedes con el fin de solicitar su colaboración en la realización del proyecto de investigación de una Maestría en Educación con Énfasis en Didáctica del Inglés que estoy adelantando en la Universidad Externado de Colombia. El proyecto se denomina “Materials for Critical Thinking and Argumentative Writing” y tiene como propósito hacer un análisis del impacto que tiene un recurso didáctico que diseñé (talleres) en el desarrollo de habilidades de pensamiento crítico en la construcción de textos argumentativos.

Los temas a tener en cuenta para desarrollar el material serán seleccionados teniendo en cuenta los intereses particulares de los estudiantes y estarán alineados con el programa de inglés que actualmente se imparte en el CAS.

La participación de sus hijos(as) consiste en la realización de 6 talleres que hacen parte de un cuadernillo didáctico, el cual ustedes podrán conocer si así lo desean. Los instrumentos aplicados para recolección de datos, así como el material desarrollado durante la implementación de este proyecto serán utilizados con propósitos académicos y con fines investigativos únicamente.

Cabe aclarar que la participación de su hijo (a) en este proyecto es de carácter voluntario y no ocasionará ningún inconveniente si desea no hacer parte de la investigación. Asimismo, se garantiza la confidencialidad de la información obtenida producto de esta investigación y la protección de sus nombres en el análisis de resultados.

De antemano agradezco su valiosa colaboración y participación.

Cordialmente,

Jenny Alexandra Díaz Granados Sánchez  
Docente de Inglés

Nosotros \_\_\_\_\_ y \_\_\_\_\_  
padres de \_\_\_\_\_ del curso \_\_\_\_\_ autorizamos la  
participación de nuestro hijo(a) en el desarrollo de este proyecto de investigación.

Firma del padre: \_\_\_\_\_ Firma de la madre: \_\_\_\_\_

Yo \_\_\_\_\_ estoy dispuesto a participar en el  
desarrollo de este proyecto de investigación.

Firma del estudiante: \_\_\_\_\_

**Appendix E: CAS Board of Directors' Consent Letter**

Bogotá, febrero de 2017

Señores  
Junta Directiva  
Colombo American School

Respetados miembros de la junta:

Como es de su conocimiento, me encuentro cursando tercer semestre en la Maestría en Educación con Énfasis en Didáctica del Inglés de la Universidad Externado de Colombia. Por tanto, les presento mi proyecto de grado que lleva por nombre “Materials for Critical Thinking and Argumentative Writing.”

El propósito de mi investigación es hacer un análisis del aporte que tiene el material contextualizado en el desarrollo de habilidades de pensamiento crítico y la mejoría de los textos argumentativos de los estudiantes de grado quinto.

Para poder desarrollar dicha investigación, solicito su aprobación para la implementación del proyecto en la clase de inglés de grado quinto. Los temas a tener en cuenta para desarrollar el material serán seleccionados teniendo en cuenta los intereses particulares de los estudiantes y estarán alineados con los contenidos y objetivos del programa de inglés Cambridge correspondiente al nivel que actualmente se imparte en el CAS.

De igual manera, quiero informarles que los instrumentos de recolección de datos que emplearé para la implementación de mi proyecto incluyen el desarrollo de una cartilla contextualizada por parte de los estudiantes, diario de campo con observaciones de cada sesión y cuestionarios. Asimismo, garantizo que preservaré el anonimato, la identidad y la confidencialidad de los participantes teniendo en cuenta las normas establecidas en la realización de investigaciones en ciencias sociales.

Adjunto el consentimiento informado que enviaré a los padres de familia y los estudiantes del curso seleccionado para su correspondiente aprobación de participación en mi proyecto.

De antemano agradezco su valiosa colaboración.

Cordialmente,

Jenny Alexandra Díaz Granados Sánchez  
Docente de Language Arts