

行政院國家科學委員會專題研究計畫 成果報告

結合辯論與英語教學：以台灣高中英語教育為例之基礎研究(Ⅲ)

研究成果報告(精簡版)

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執行單位：國立臺灣師範大學英語學系(所)

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處理方式：本計畫可公開查詢

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An Action Research on Teaching Oral English Argumentation to Taiwanese High School Students

INTRODUCTION

Teaching of debate/argumentation, however commonly practiced in all levels of schooling in the West (particularly in the US), is at best received with reservation in Taiwan. To promote and integrate oral argumentation into high school English education, what oral argumentation consists of and how to teach it are two pressing issues that need to be tackled. To this end, an action research was embarked on to devise a pedagogical model of oral English argumentation and an instructional approach for developing students' competence in oral argumentation. Specifically, the following questions are pursued: 1) What components or stages does oral English argumentation contain, 2) what basic abilities and skills does oral English argumentation entail, and 3) how can these components, abilities, and skills be taught to high school students?

ACTION RESEARCH

In recent years action research has been popularly used in educational field as a tool for professional development, such as solving pedagogical problems or improving teaching outcomes. Many models of doing action research have been proffered over the years (e.g., Kemmis, 1990; McNiff & Whitehead, 2002; Whitehead, 1985). Disparate as they are in the specific procedure to be taken, they all have certain steps in common, i.e., identifying an area of focus, developing an action plan, implementing and monitoring the plan, and finally evaluating and adjusting the plan. Whenever possible, the above steps should form a spiral of cycle to be repeated by the researcher until the actions are in line with what he/she wishes to happen (e.g., Mills, 2000; McNiff & Whitehead, 2002; Richards, 2003). It is by those steps and in that sequence the present study unfolded.

THE STUDY

Participants

To devise a pedagogical model and approach that can be applied to teaching oral argumentation to high school students in general, a group of twelve first-year senior high school students (4 females and 8 males) were recruited from a Taipei municipal high school on a voluntary basis in the spring semester of 2010. Among the participants, 2 had a final English score from the previous semester that is above 90; 6 had a score between 80 and 89; 3 had a score between 70 and 79; and 1 had a score between 60 and 69. With regard to their oral English proficiency, three could speak relatively fluent English, two could manage to express themselves without serious problem, and 7 had to struggle to get their meaning across from time to time. The participants' English teacher, who was interested in learning about oral argumentation, also took part in the project as an assistant and participant observer.

Five-step Action Research Procedure

Adopting McNiff and Whitehead's (2002) action research model for its simplicity and conciseness, the present study proceeded in the following five steps: 1) Identify an area of practice to be investigated, 2) imagine a solution, 3) implement the solution, 4) modify solution in light of the mini-evaluation, and 5) evaluate the solution at the end of the instruction. They are briefed as follows:

Step I: Identify an Area of Practice for Investigation

The area of practice to be investigated in this study is devising the content and method for teaching English argumentation to high school students. Argumentation here is defined as a verbal, social and rational activity in which individuals advance competing claims by putting forward a constellation of propositions justifying or refuting the proposition expressed in the claim (van Eemeren et al., 1996; Felton, 2004).

Step II: Imagine a Solution

To tackle this unprecedented and challenging task, a pedagogical¹ model that captures the gist of the argumentation process and the skills entailed is called for. Figure 1 captures the model of argumentation initially devised which consists of five components (i.e., "opinion" "justification," "challenge/refutation," "defense," and "concession"), four critical thinking skills (i.e., distinguishing facts from opinions, distinguishing strong from weak reasons, recognizing common fallacies, and using and testing evidence) and four discourse strategies (expressing and soliciting opinions, introducing and challenging/refuting reasons, refuting common fallacies, introducing and challenging/refuting evidence).

(Figure 1 here)

Following the construction of a pedagogical model of argumentation was the conceptualization of an instructional approach. An explicit teaching approach was adopted which aimed to tackle the components of argumentation and their related skills/strategies directly and systematically. Five stages (see Figure 2) were devised in this teaching approach, including, overview (i.e., giving students a holistic view of the argumentation process and repertoires of skills involved in the process), component-by-component instruction (i.e., expounding on the nature of each component and teaching the skills/strategies relevant to the enactment of that component), modeling (i.e., providing good samples of argumentative discussion with all components included), guided practice (i.e., students' practicing argumentative discussion with the instructor's assistance), and independent practice (i.e., students' practicing argumentative discussion on their own).

(Figure 2 here)

¹ What the study aims to conceive is a working model for instructional purposes, and not one that truthfully captures or reflects real life argumentation to its dots. To this end, some simplifications or alternations are not only necessary but also desired.

Steps III, IV, and V: Implement, Reflect and Modify the Solution

For any action research, the most critical phases ought to be implementation, reflection and modification of the plan that was conceived to tackle the problem area. In this study, prior to the course, a pretest was conducted, where the participants were paired for a dyadic argumentative discussion. Then the oral English argumentation course unfolded. Followed by the course was a posttest dyadic argumentation. Reflections and modifications of the pedagogical model and teaching approach were done on a weekly basis during the course as well as after the participants' posttest performance.

Pretest

In the pretest, based on their positions and interest levels concerning five controversial policies (i.e., “Smoking while walking should be legally prohibited in Taiwan,” “English listening test should be included in the Specified Subject Test,” “First-year university students should choose a college, instead of a department, to study in,” “homosexual marriage should be legalized in Taiwan,” and “capital punishment should be abolished in Taiwan”), the participants were paired to have a 10-minute discussion on one of the policies. In the end, three pairs argued on “legally prohibiting smoking while walking,” two pairs on “legalizing homosexual marriage,” and one pair on “abolishing capital punishment” in the pretest.

Oral English argumentation course

The oral argumentation course consisted of ten weekly sessions which ranged from 90 to 100-minute each time. Table 1 enumerates the topics (critical thinking skills as “CTS” and discourse strategies as “DS”) dealt in each session and the instructional phase to which the topics belong. No more than two topics were covered each time given the length of the session.

**Table 1 Instructional Content and Approach
Adopted for the Argumentation Course**

Session	Topics	Instructional Phase
1	a. Understanding the argumentation model b. Recognizing examples of argumentation	Overview
2	a. Revisiting the argumentation model b. CTS—distinguishing facts from opinions	Component-by-component instruction: Position ²
3	a. DS—soliciting and expressing opinion b. CTS—distinguishing strong from weak reasons	Component-by-component instruction: Position & Justification
4	a. DS—introducing and challenging/refuting reasons b. CTS—recognizing common fallacies	Component-by-component instruction: Justification & Challenge/Refutation

² The word “position” was referred to as “opinion” in the original pedagogical model of argumentation. The term “opinion” was later changed to “position” to make the focus and nature of such an opinion more clear.

5	a. Quick review b. CTS—recognizing common fallacies (cont.)	Component-by-component instruction: Justification & Challenge/Refutation
6	a. DS—refuting common fallacies b. CTS—using and testing evidence	Component-by-component instruction: Justification & Challenge/Refutation
7	a. CTS—using and testing evidence (cont.) b. DS—introducing and challenging/refuting evidence	Component-by-component instruction: Justification & Challenge/Refutation
8	Group debate	Guided practice
9	Debriefing on group debate	Guided practice
10	Group/Pair debate	Independent practice

To solicit the participants’ feedback on the content and activities adopted in each session, they were asked to fill out a simple feedback sheet at the end of each class. The researcher then spent another hour or so discussing with the English instructor of the participants who was present during class observing the researcher’s instruction and students’ responses.

Given the grand scale of the task involved in the study (i.e., conceiving a workable pedagogical model and instructional approach for teaching oral English argumentation to high school students) and the limited time granted for tackling the task, much of the action taken in each class were only reflected and evaluated by the researcher, along with the participants’ English teacher, for their effects and possible adjustments for future practice. Such adjustments, however, were not implemented and re-tested for their effects due to time constraint. Following are some major³ modifications of the pedagogical model and approach initially devised as well as suggestions for instruction.

Week 1

Reflections and modifications. Participants did not perform well on the exercise where they had to identify the dialogues that contain the major components of English argumentation. To make the participants visualize how “both” arguers maneuver the components, the researcher decided to add two arrows to the original process (see Figure 3) to indicate that as equal participants, both parties, at a certain point of the argumentation process, have to state their positions and justifications respectively. The second speaker may declare his/her position and justification right after the first speaker announces his/her justification or after he/she challenges/refutes the first speaker’s justification (after revision, this model could better capture the interactive nature of the argumentation process than the original one, but was still not without problems as the discussion in the final reflections and modifications section shows).

(Figure 3 here)

Week 2

Reflections and modifications. When introducing the component of “position” in oral

³ Because of the restricted length of the report, reflections and modifications from weeks 3 and 6 are not presented here, and those from other weeks are also simplified.

English argumentation, future instructors can call students' attention to some more cultural differences between Chinese and English-speakers in their treatment of "position." Peng and Nesbitt (1999) noticed that Chinese often deal with contradiction through what might be a compromise approach, showing tolerance of contradiction by finding a middle ground by which truth can be found in each of two competing propositions. Thus, they posited that Chinese might be less likely to take sides in a conflict. The implication of this cultural difference for teaching oral English argumentation to local high school students is that students have to side with one position, or in other words, fence-riding is not allowed in English argumentation.

Week 3

Reflections and modifications. When tackling the predicate (main verb or adjective predicate) of the claim, students seemed to rely on a gist rather than verbatim representation of the claim predicate as a past study has found (Larson, Britt, & Kurby, 2009). If students often rely on gist representations when making such judgments, it is then understandable that they would have difficulty judging whether a reason logically supports a claim. To tackle this problem, when learning to critically evaluate the justification (particularly its logical relevance to the position), students need to be reminded of keeping in mind the claim as a whole and not just a part of it. It also needs to be pointed out that the definitions of strong and weak reasons may be deceptively easy. Larson, Britt and Kurby found in their study that without an argument tutorial, high school and even college students frequently failed to distinguish acceptable arguments from structurally flawed arguments. While a short 15-minute tutorial may help students improve their rejection of unsupported opinion as acceptable arguments, it would take immediate feedback given at multiple appropriately spaced sessions for students to master the skill of detecting unwarranted arguments. Compared with position, justification is no doubt a much more challenging component for students to tackle in argumentation.

Week 4

Reflections and modifications. The purpose of any exercise given out in an argumentation course should be first and foremost on the cultivation of argumentation skills and not enlargement of lexical or syntactical knowledge. The exercises, therefore, should aim to build the participants' pragmatic competence of using words or sentences within their capacity to venture their argument. Guided by this pedagogical principle, the amount of new words and the number of expressions contained in the class materials need to be trimmed, and the exercises that are too restricting in forms (e.g., blank-filling questions) should be changed to a more open-ended format where students can choose expressions they are most comfortable in using to realize the pragmatic function called for in the exercises.

Week 5

Reflections and modifications. To reiterate the role of challenge/refutation, a Chinese idiomatic expression "Grandpa contends he makes sense; Grandma argues she makes sense"

(“公說公有理, 婆說婆有理”) was used to illustrate exchanges that only contain “positions” and “justifications” from both arguers. The participants were then reminded that to do English argumentation, it is imperative that they go beyond the “Grandpa/Grandma argues for his/her own stance” stage and engage themselves in the “Grandpa contends Grandma is not making sense, and Grandma argues Grandpa is not making sense” practice (“公說婆沒理, 婆說公沒理”), and thus the gist and spirit of the component of challenging/refuting. The parallel-tracks reasoning pattern, however commonplace in Chinese argumentation, falls short in English argumentation which markedly rests on the clash of these two opposing stances. Woods and Wang (2008) had a similar observation when they posited, “To Americans, particularly American debaters, nothing seems more natural than being ready to disagree when it comes to dealing with different opinions in the process of developing one’s argument. This, however, is by no means true across cultures worldwide” (p. 37). When teaching Chinese oral English argumentation, the instructor has to take a note of this cultural difference.

The large number of fallacies introduced in the course can be re-organized by using the categorization introduced by Johnson and Blair (2006), which classified the standard fallacies as failures of acceptability, failures of relevance, and failures of sufficiency. When teaching the topic of fallacies, a presentation of the general account of each fallacy has to be quickly followed by exposure to lots of actual examples (Blair, 2008), and students also have to explain their allegations and argue whether and how the arguments can be saved or improved.

Week 7

Reflections and modifications. Peng and Nesbitt (1999) pointed out that the dialectical approach Chinese are accustomed to may be accompanied by a tendency to accept too much at face value. This tendency, the researcher contends, may contribute to Chinese people’s reluctance to demand proof for the truth of an assertion. To help local students combat this human and culturally-conditioned tendency, the instructor of a future argumentation course has to root in students the habit of evidencing or seeking proof for any argument that lacks acceptable premises or common presumptions.

Week 8 & 9

Reflections and modifications. Concerning the participants’ argumentation performance, a number of problems were noted and suggestions were also made for tackling those problems. First, for not jotting down the opponents’ claims during the argumentation, the participants sometimes forgot and thus could not respond to the opponent’s arguments. To solve this problem, students in future exercises can be required to jot down key words on the flow sheet as a way to retain their memory of the opponents’ arguments. Second, many straw man fallacies were committed, particularly during challenge/refutation, due to the fact that the participants failed to fully comprehend the opponents’ justification. To prevent this from

happening, a phase of “restating the opponent’s argument” can be added to the beginning of the justification, challenge/refutation, and defense stages on the flow sheet (see Appendix). Third, quite a few unsupported assertions were spotted in the participants’ justifications (e.g., for “eradicating star high schools,” the participants made such claims as “Students are labeled, and so those who get into star schools are overly confident and do not want to study,” and “Students in star schools don’t have much time left for doing other activities”). To tackle this problem, students, when constructing justification for their position, need to constantly question themselves by asking, “How do I know that’s the case?” or “Is there a commonly held belief about the truthfulness of the point?” Finally, while justifying their position, the participants often engaged in abstract reasoning with only explanatory remarks but failed to substantiate and concretize their claims with proofs like facts, statistics or examples. To deal with this deficiency, similar to the solution to the previous problem, students have to constantly pose to themselves questions like “Am I only explaining the reason at an abstract level or am I illustrating it with concrete proofs?” and “Can I strengthen the claim with facts, examples, statistics and/or testimonies?” These inquiries, along with those mentioned earlier, can make a checklist to be used by students in the preparation process for detecting any possible flaws or weaknesses contained in their justification.

Posttest

A posttest was conducted in week 11 to assess the effects of this oral English argumentation course. To ensure the same basis of comparison, the participants were engaged in a 10-minute⁴ dyadic argumentation for the same position on the same controversy with the same partner as in the pretest. Like the pretest, all the dyadic argumentations were videotaped and transcribed.

Final reflections and modifications

The course has helped the participants become more aware of the components of the argumentation process. The pattern of most of the dyadic argumentations in the pretest was the typical parallel-tracks type where the participants took turns in developing only their own arguments, with only little questioning or refutation of the other’s arguments. This pattern, however, was greatly rectified in the posttest with one or both participants often following their opponent’s reason with a direct challenge or refutation. It was also noticed that while the “parallel tracks” organization pattern of the pretest argumentations posed no problem to the participants in introducing all the reasons for supporting their position, the back-and-forth challenge/refutation-response exchanges in the posttest led the participants to a difficulty in

⁴ When the posttest was in session, it immediately became clear to the researcher that the participants had a lot more to respond to their partner’s arguments than they did in the pretest, and so if the argumentation was terminated at 10 minutes, it would be curtailed to a much larger extent than it was in the pretest and possibly cause much frustration in the participants. Thus, on the spot, the researcher decided to extend the time by allowing the participants to cover most of the reasons they constructed for their position but only use the first 10 minutes for the pre- and posttest comparison.

deciding when to terminate the argumentative discussion of one reason and move on to the discussion of another reason. To better capture the dynamics of two parties building one's own case, refuting the other's case, and rebuilding one's own case in an argumentation process, and to drive home the point that the challenge/refutation-defense loop for each reason has to eventually come down to one party conceding to the other's challenge/refutation or defense of that reason, the argumentation process in this pedagogical model was revised again by marking out the two arguers and sequencing the move they take regarding each argumentation component in relation to their opponent's moves (see Figure 4). In this revised model, concession is the component that ends the argumentation on one reason and begins the argumentation of another reason. To ensure students are capable of enacting the act, the discourse strategy of agreeing also has to be added into the skill repertoire.

(Figure 4 here)

The increasing number of requests made by the participants for more hands-on practice in the final one-third of the course and the less satisfactory performance in the posttest dyadic argumentation all pointed to an inadequacy of and necessary adjustment to the five-phase instructional approach originally proposed in this study. Provided the participants' overall positive responses about the level of helpfulness regarding the materials and activities imparted respectively in the overview, component-by-component instruction, and guided practice stage, the problem seems to lie more in the arrangement or sequence of these stages than in the purpose or function of the stages. While the overview phase can still be placed at the very beginning for an orientation, phases two to five can be repeated for each argumentation component (see Figure 5). That is, after the overview phase, the instruction will move on to the introduction, modeling, guided practice and independent practice, in that order, of the first argumentation component, position. The same cycle will then be repeated for justification, challenge/refutation, defense and concession. In this way, not only is there less information to be covered in each stage, there is also a clearer focus on the skills and strategies for the teacher to model and for students to practice.

CONCLUSION

To explore ways of teaching oral English argumentation to average-level high school students, this action research has devised, tested, and modified a five-component pedagogical model and a five-phase instructional approach. This teaching model and approach may not be perfect or success-guaranteed, but as they are resulted from an empirical process of implementing, reflecting and testing, they stand a better chance for accomplishing the goals they set out to obtain. EFL scholars and teaching professionals are certainly welcome to experiment and modify the current model and approach or to invent their own. Only with more jointed hands on the road down the path of argumentation instruction can we eventually lead our students to the promise land.

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APPENDIX
Flow Sheet for Group Argumentation

Topic:

Position	
Justification A1	
Chall/Refut A1	
Defense A1	

Position	
Justification N1	
Chall/Refut N1	
Defense N1	

Justification A2	
Chall/Refut A2	
Defense A2	

Justification N2	
Chall/Refut N2	
Defense N2	

Justification A2	
Chall/Refut A2	
Defense A2	

Justification N2	
Chall/Refut N2	
Defense N2	

Notes:

1. "A" refers to the affirmative or the side that is for the proposition, and "N" refers to the negative or the side that is against the proposition.
2. Shaded boxes are for the negative to take notes in.
3. In the revised flow sheet, "restatement of justification" is added to the top of the column next to the "challenge/refutation" box, and "restatement of challenge/refutation" is added to the top of the column next to the "defense" box.

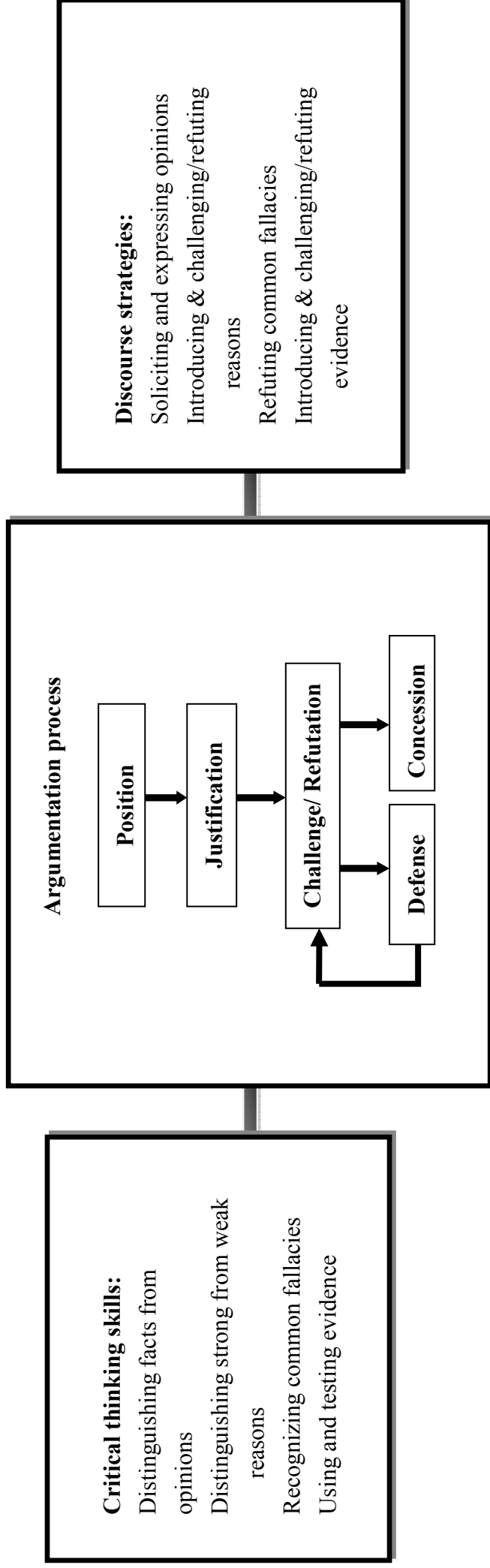


Figure 1 A pedagogical model of oral English argumentation process and skills repertoires (initial version)

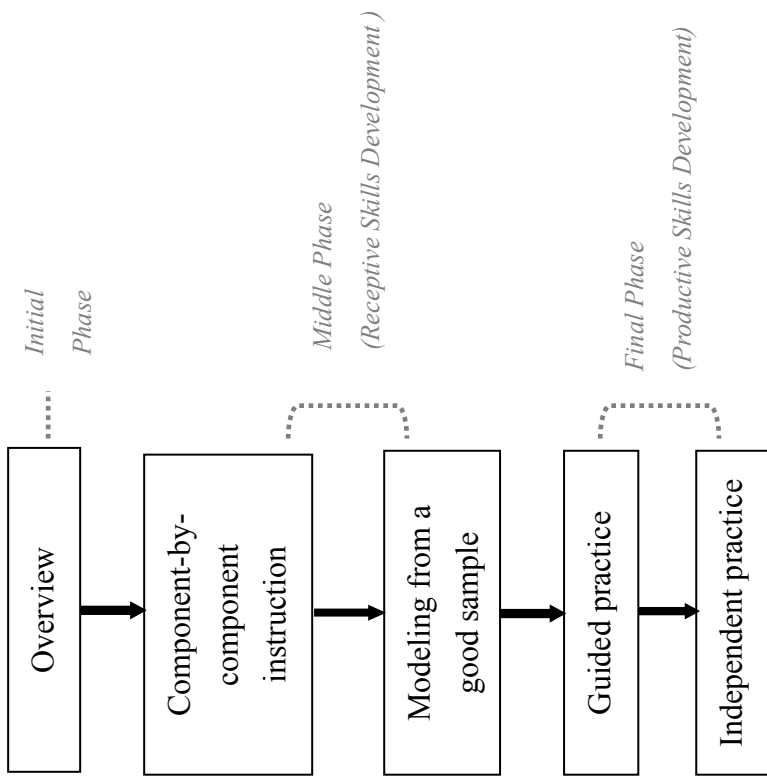


Figure 2 A pedagogical approach for teaching oral English argumentation

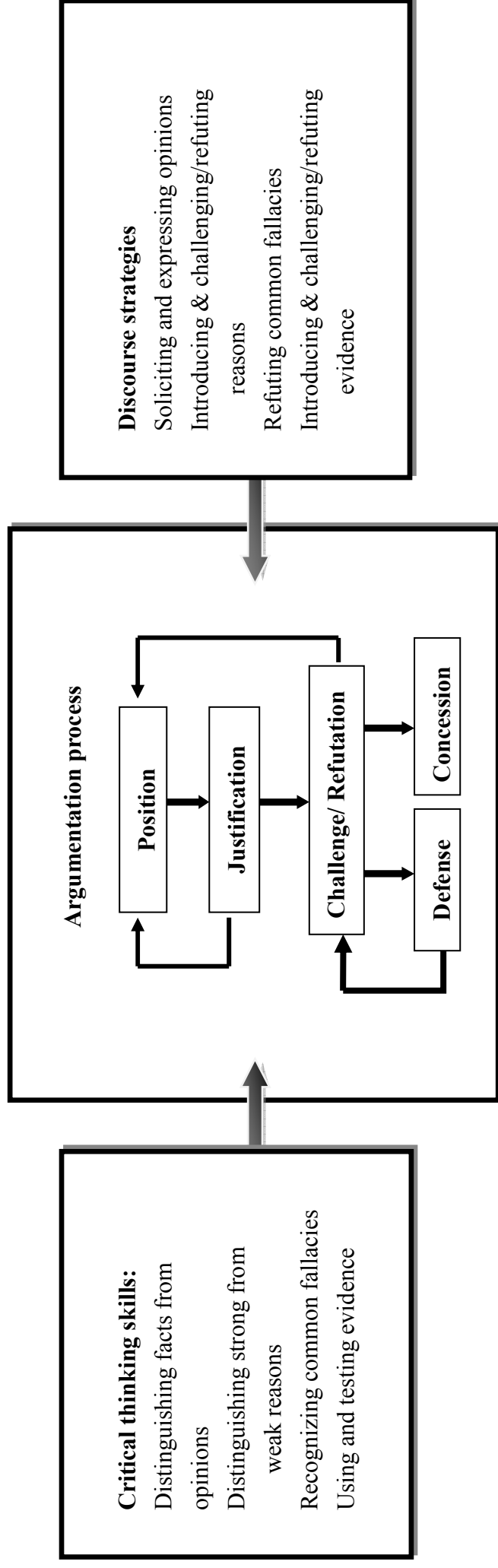


Figure 3 A pedagogical model of oral English argumentation process and skills repertoires (revised version)

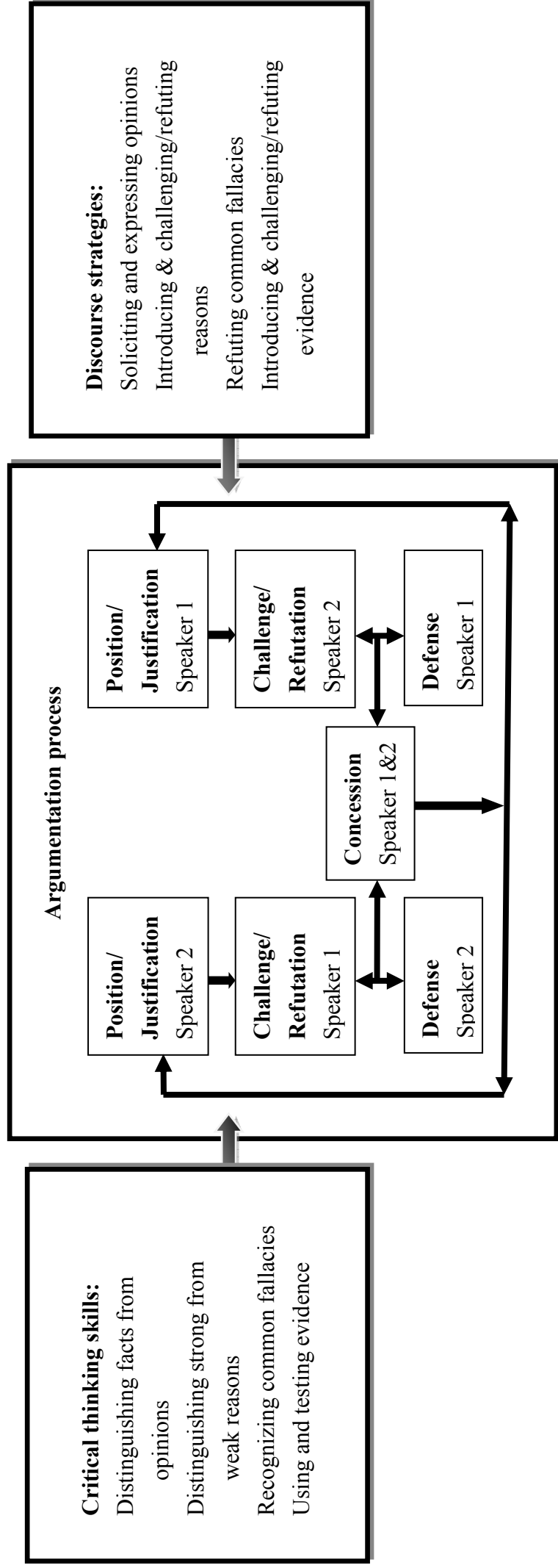


Figure 4 A pedagogical model of oral English argumentation process and skills repertoires (final version)

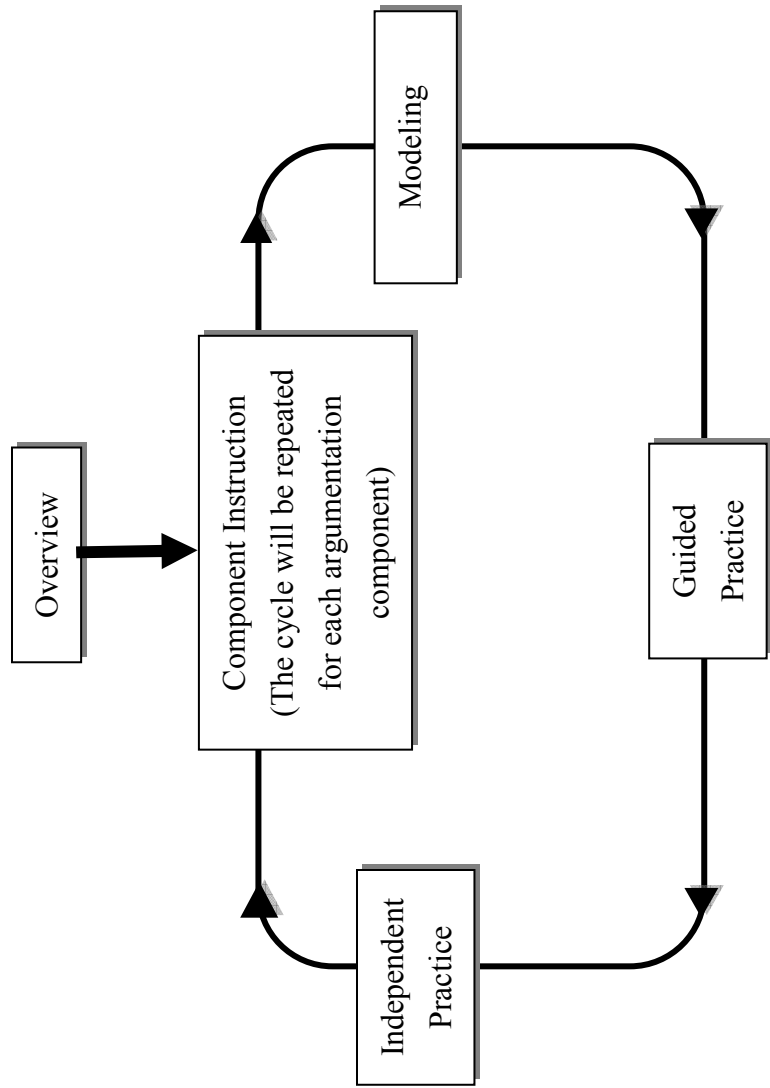


Figure 5 A pedagogical approach for teaching oral English argumentation (final version)

無研發成果推廣資料

98 年度專題研究計畫研究成果彙整表

計畫主持人：常紹如		計畫編號：98-2410-H-003-080-				計畫名稱：結合辯論與英語教學：以台灣高中英語教育為例之基礎研究(III)	
成果項目		量化			單位	備註(質化說明：如數個計畫共同成果、成果列為該期刊之封面故事...等)	
		實際已達成數(被接受或已發表)	預期總達成數(含實際已達成數)	本計畫實際貢獻百分比			
國內	論文著作	期刊論文	0	1	0%	篇	
		研究報告/技術報告	0	0	0%		
		研討會論文	0	0	0%		
		專書	0	0	0%		
	專利	申請中件數	0	0	0%	件	
		已獲得件數	0	0	0%		
	技術移轉	件數	0	0	0%	件	
		權利金	0	0	0%	千元	
	參與計畫人力 (本國籍)	碩士生	2	2	100%	人次	
		博士生	0	0	0%		
博士後研究員		0	0	0%			
專任助理		0	0	0%			
國外	論文著作	期刊論文	0	0	0%	篇	
		研究報告/技術報告	0	0	0%		
		研討會論文	0	0	0%		
		專書	0	0	0%		章/本
	專利	申請中件數	0	0	0%	件	
		已獲得件數	0	0	0%		
	技術移轉	件數	0	0	0%	件	
		權利金	0	0	0%	千元	
	參與計畫人力 (外國籍)	碩士生	0	0	0%	人次	
		博士生	0	0	0%		
博士後研究員		0	0	0%			
專任助理		0	0	0%			

<p>其他成果 (無法以量化表達之成果如辦理學術活動、獲得獎項、重要國際合作、研究成果國際影響力及其他協助產業技術發展之具體效益事項等，請以文字敘述填列。)</p>	<p>計畫成果雖尚未刊登成期刊論文，但已於 2010 年暑假在一次為高中生所辦之英語口語論辯工作坊中實施過，且學生學習成效及反應皆不錯。</p>
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	成果項目	量化	名稱或內容性質簡述
科 教 處 計 畫 加 填 項 目	測驗工具(含質性與量性)	0	
	課程/模組	0	
	電腦及網路系統或工具	0	
	教材	0	
	舉辦之活動/競賽	0	
	研討會/工作坊	0	
	電子報、網站	0	
	計畫成果推廣之參與(閱聽)人數	0	

國科會補助專題研究計畫成果報告自評表

請就研究內容與原計畫相符程度、達成預期目標情況、研究成果之學術或應用價值（簡要敘述成果所代表之意義、價值、影響或進一步發展之可能性）、是否適合在學術期刊發表或申請專利、主要發現或其他有關價值等，作一綜合評估。

1. 請就研究內容與原計畫相符程度、達成預期目標情況作一綜合評估

達成目標

未達成目標（請說明，以 100 字為限）

實驗失敗

因故實驗中斷

其他原因

說明：

2. 研究成果在學術期刊發表或申請專利等情形：

論文： 已發表 未發表之文稿 撰寫中 無

專利： 已獲得 申請中 無

技轉： 已技轉 洽談中 無

其他：（以 100 字為限）

3. 請依學術成就、技術創新、社會影響等方面，評估研究成果之學術或應用價值（簡要敘述成果所代表之意義、價值、影響或進一步發展之可能性）（以 500 字為限）

國內英語教學學領中有關口語論辯教學之研究，可說是鳳毛麟角，而此研究成果正好可彌補此方面教學研究之不足。同時因此研究為一行動研究，整個教學內容、過程、方法皆可循序清楚地呈現出來，故未來有志從事英語口語論辯教學之教育工作者或相關研究之學者，都能以此研究發現為依據，繼續推廣、深耕台灣英語口語論辯教學。

