A pragmatic and critical approach to critical thinking in EAP

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Aims

- to present how CT is taught on our Foundation EAP course

- to show how both pragmatic and critical EAP have been adopted

- to encourage EAP tutors to consider how CT can be used to empower students

Outline

- Background
- Aspects (steps) of CT focused on
- Limitations
- Questions
- Handouts and references available

Background

EAP in the 1990s: pragmatic versus critical EAP

- **Pragmatic**: functional, needs analysis
- **Critical**: questioning challenging, more political
  - Benesch (1993, 2001) - *rights analysis*
  - Pennycook (1997)
 - Canagarajah (1999)

- Marrying of both approaches

Background:
context

- Foundation programme:
  - Arts & SS (Business)
  - 18-20
  - international students
- Modules
  - language: *WCS &OCS*
  - content: *Business Methods or Media & Text*
  - *Critical Thinking*

Critical Thinking

- CT: newly restructured previously Analytical Thought (15 credit module)

- Development of the course and materials

- Critical reading to critical thinking: 6 aspects

6 aspects or steps
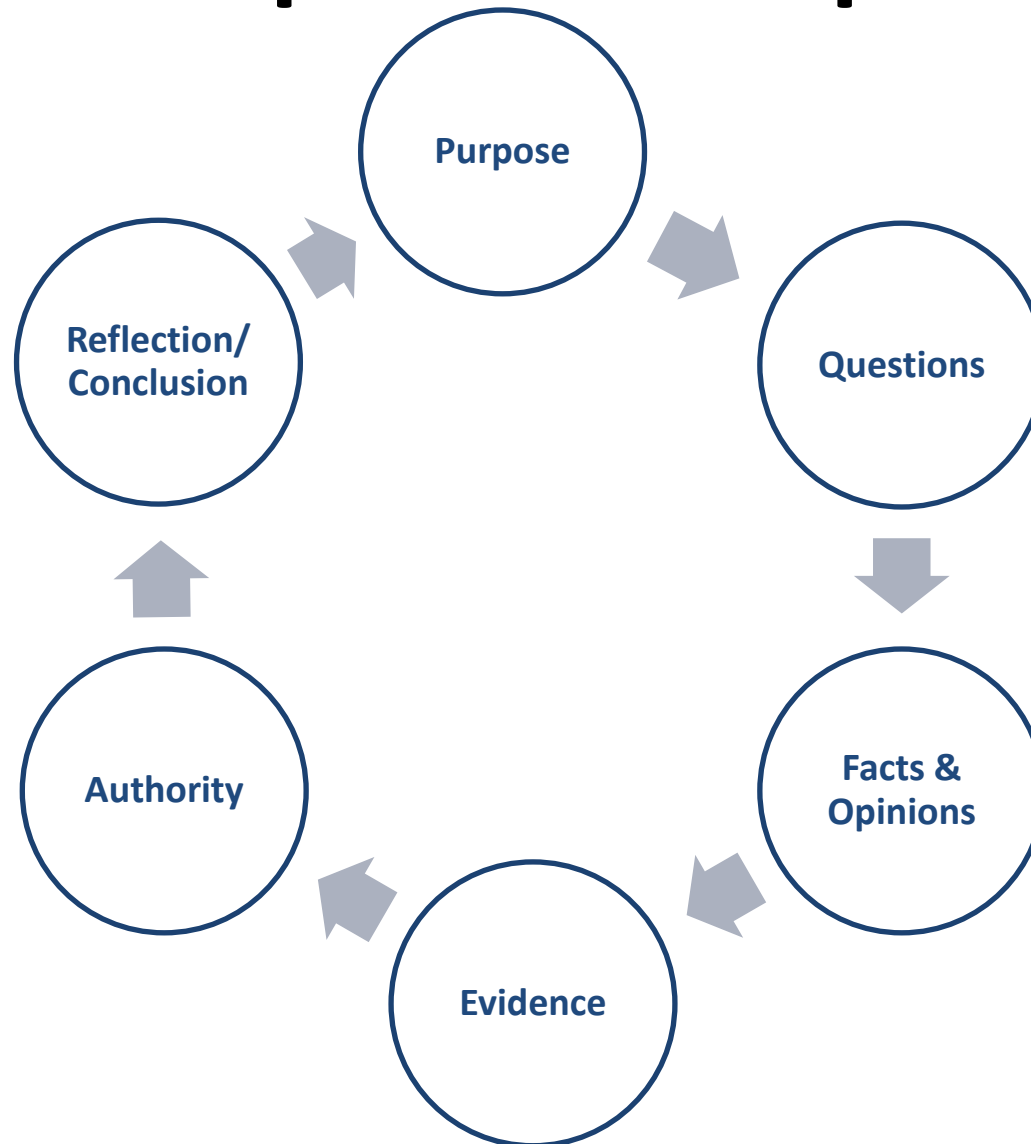
Purpose

Purposeful; awareness of purpose
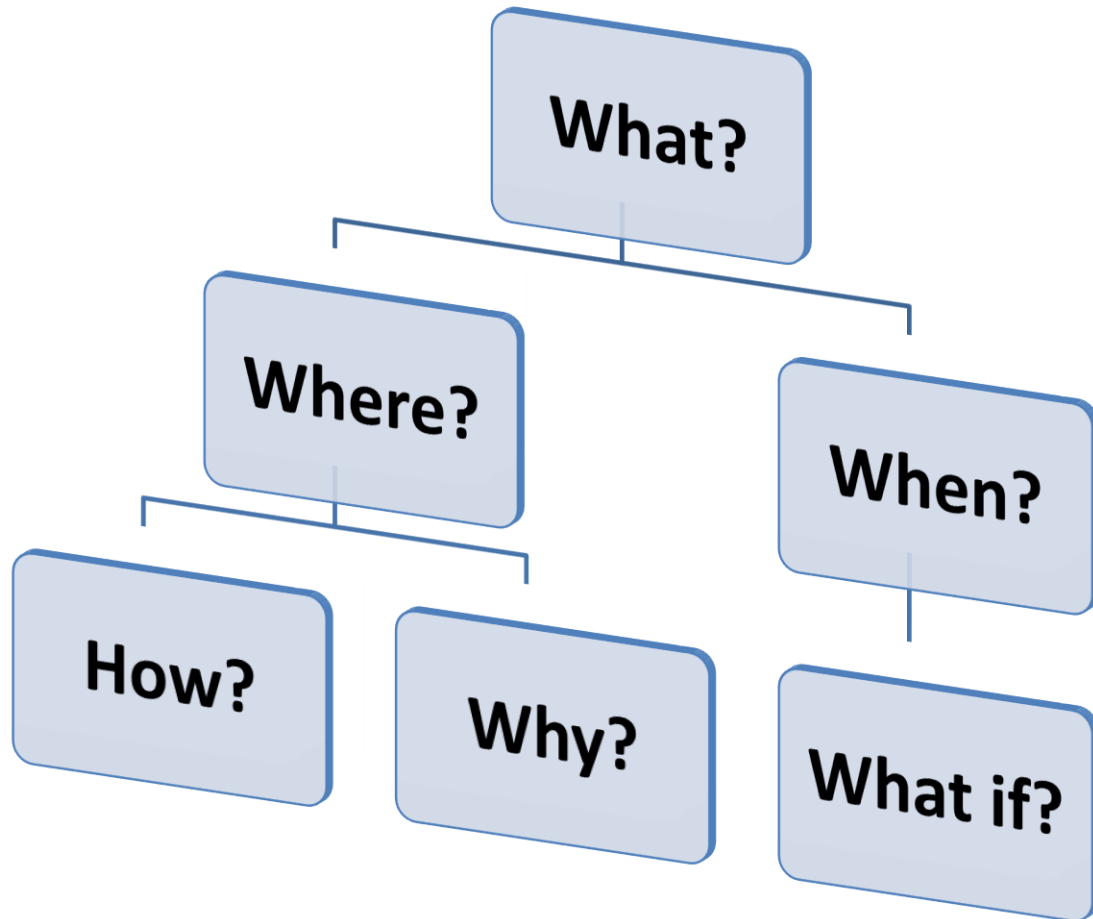
Paul (1994) : 'drive '

Purpose:
task

- Setting personal aims
- Relating to definitions of CT

Purpose

- **Pragmatic level**: to develop *intrinsic* purposes and aims

- **Critical level**: opportunity to explore their own learning and identify what's useful to them

Do I really want to proceed to HE?

(Effective) Questions

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"If you do not know what you want to know, you'll not be in a position to know how to find it out." (O'Leary, 2004)

Will we be tested? What does this mean? (Abdulaziz)

Can we change the (WCS) assessment? I think we should be allowed to choose our own topics (Hasan); why are we doing this?

(Effective) Questions

The Walt Disney Strategy; 3 rooms (*dream, realist, critical*) and posing a range of questions (**what, why, how**)

Task: create a new product or service and undergo the WDS process

(Effective) Questions

- **Pragmatic level**: thinking actively, being engaged
- **Critical level**: evolving their thinking; develop a questioning attitude towards learning

Facts and Opinions:
Truth, truth and beliefs

Truth/Knowledge

Facts

Theories
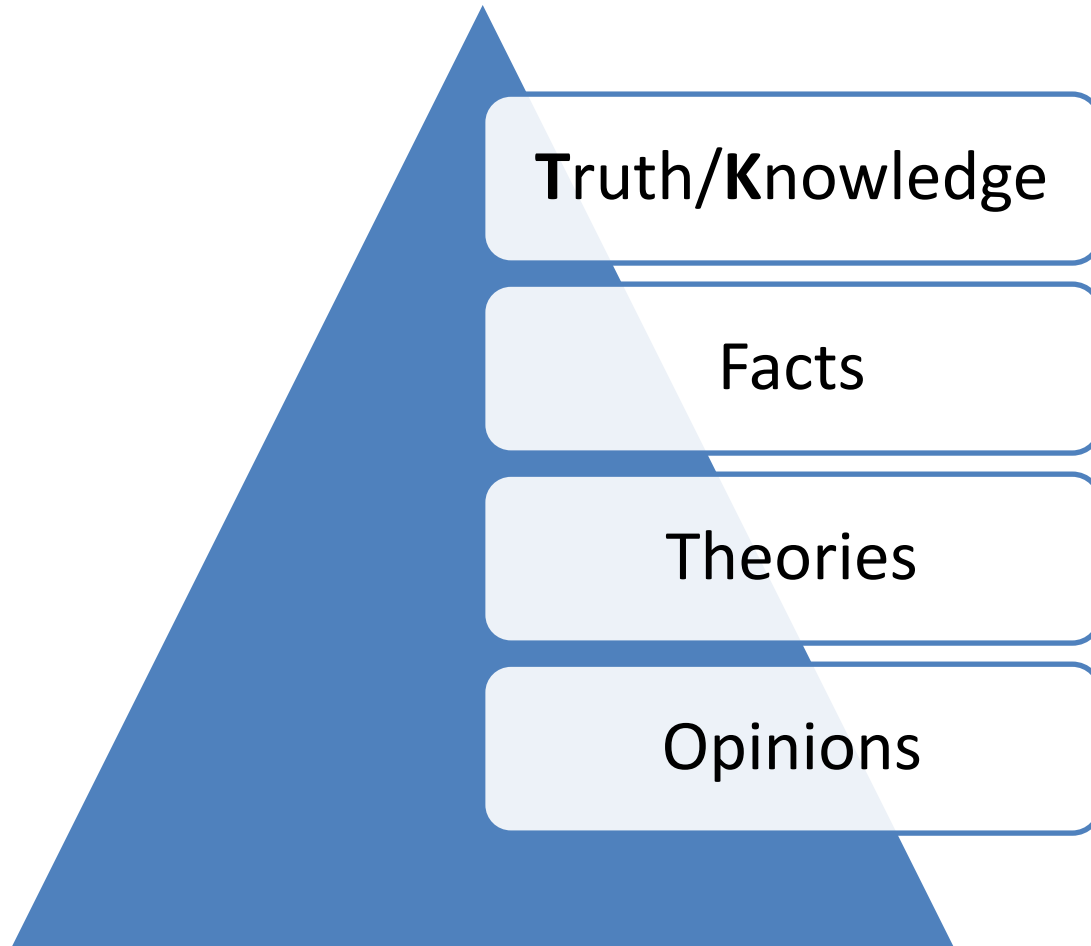
Opinions

Facts and Opinions:
discussion

- Professor Dame Jocelyn Bell Burnell on *Truth and Understanding*
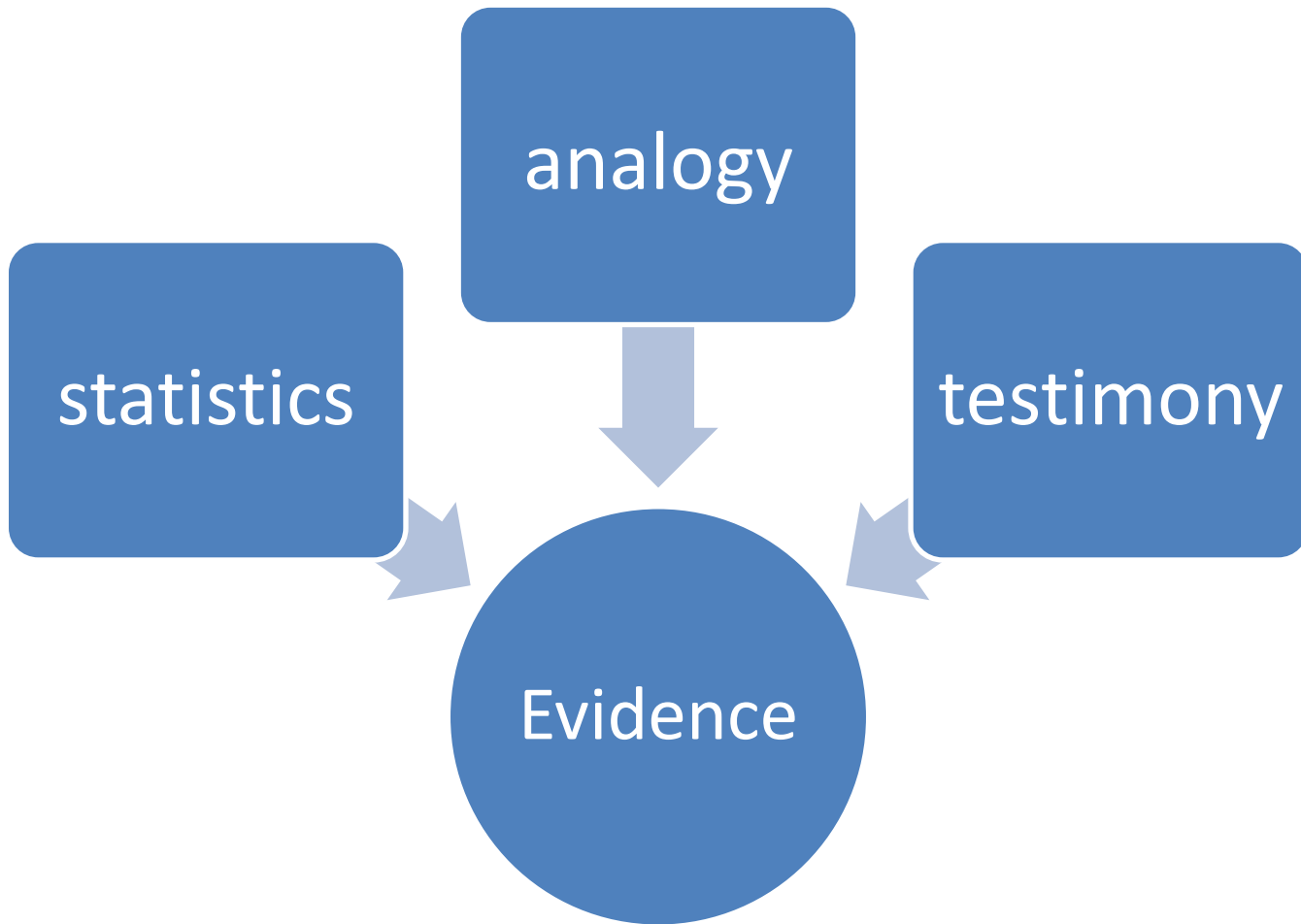

'no absolute truths'

Facts and Opinions

- **Pragmatic** level: use facts and opinions more judiciously
- **Critical** level: possibilities; change; knowledge can be contested

Evidence

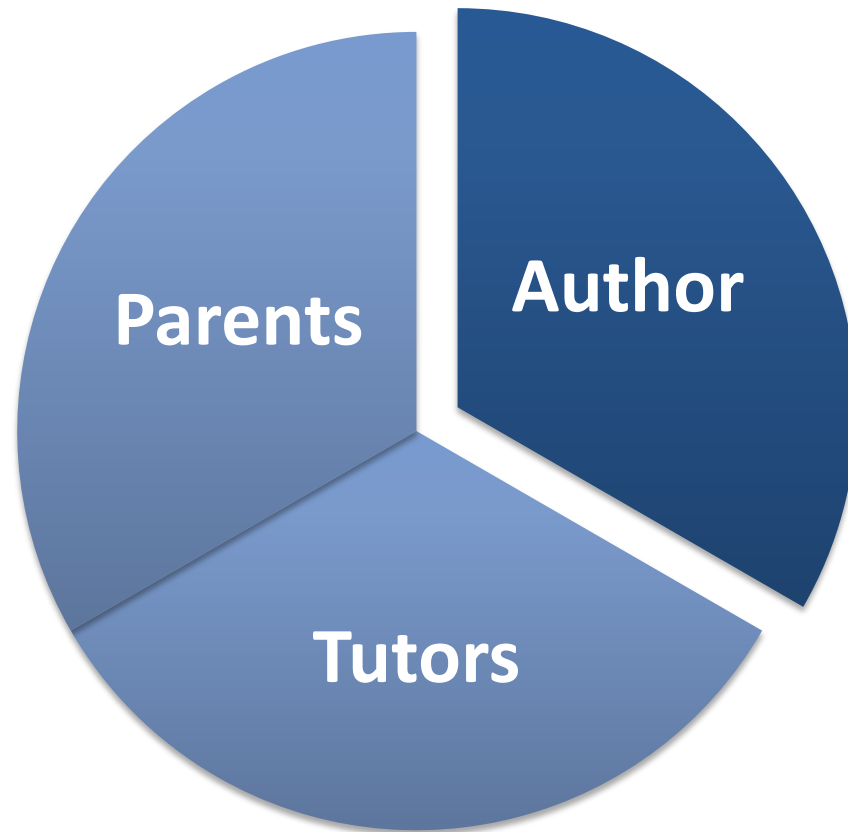claim + evidence = evaluation

Evidence

Evidence

- TASK : *How important is breakfast?*

- **Pragmatic level**: understand statistics
- **Critical level**: their right to challenge claims that are not substantiated regardless of the authority

Authority:
purpose and ideology

Authority

- TASK: to re-examine the assessment of WCS

- **Pragmatic level**: understand the existence of authority in academia

- **Critical level**: can question, challenge and introduce alternatives; more ownership of their learning

Reflective Conclusion

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- SEM 1: discussions
  - *Can men and women be friends?*
  - *Is it important to proceed to HE to be financially successful?*
- SEM 2 - to have debate in week 10 about '*goal of education*'

Mohamed: *the goal of (university) education is to get high grades and pass the course*

Reflective Conclusion

- **Pragmatic**:
  - presenting valid conclusions
- **Critical**:
  - to make informed decisions
  - reach personal and meaningful conclusions

Limitations

- EAP can be prescriptive
- work in progress: a lot more to explore
- success rate amongst students
- 1 class in a particular context

Key References

- Benesch, S. 2001. *Critical English for Academic Purposes: theory, politics, and practice*. Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.

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- O'Leary, Z. (2004) *The Essential Guide to Doing Research*. Sage Publications: London

- Paul, R. (1994). "Teaching critical thinking in the strong sense." *Rethinking Reason: New Perspectives in Critical Thinking.* Kerry S. Walters, ed. SUNY Press: Albany. pp. 181-198.

- Pennycook, A. 1997. Vulgar pragmatism, critical pragmatism, and EAP. *English for Specific Purposes 16 (4) 253-269*.

Questions

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