



PROJECT MUSE®

---

Critical Thinking in the Foreign Language and Culture  
Curriculum

Daren Snider

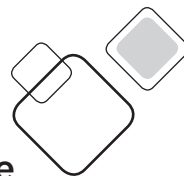
The Journal of General Education, Volume 66, Numbers 1-2, 2017, pp. 1-16  
(Article)

Published by Penn State University Press



➔ For additional information about this article

<https://muse.jhu.edu/article/703253>



# Critical Thinking in the Foreign Language and Culture Curriculum

DAREN SNIDER

**ABSTRACT** | The ability to think critically is considered an important component of a college education, and postsecondary institutions typically include critical thinking in student learning outcomes, particularly in the general education curriculum. Foreign language has traditionally been a staple discipline in general education. However, college foreign language instruction has not consistently integrated critical thinking in its approach to teaching and learning. Explicit teaching of critical-thinking skills in foreign language courses would strengthen higher-order thinking skills while enhancing language and cultural proficiency. This article (1) offers a definition of critical thinking that can be applied to foreign language and culture study, (2) outlines the role of critical thinking in postsecondary education, (3) discusses the various components that build communicative competence in a foreign language and culture, (4) describes the benefits of critical thinking to foreign language learners, and (5) suggests future research directions for integrating critical thinking into the foreign language curriculum.

**KEYWORDS** | foreign language pedagogy, critical thinking

One of the most highly regarded skills that employers desire in college graduates that they hire is the ability to think critically (Association of American Colleges and Universities, 2013). Critical thinking is viewed as being among the most important skills gained from a college education (Lampert, 2007), and it is commonplace to see learning outcomes for the general education curriculum of postsecondary institutions include critical thinking, owing at least in part to now decades-long nationwide discussions about its value. Critical thinking is a skill that allows college graduates to be independent thinkers and lifelong learners, which are two of the primary goals of a college education (Tsui, 2002). The need to strengthen critical engagement has been underscored of late

by high-profile controversies on postsecondary campuses about the nature and practice of freedom of speech. Faculty and administrators have been confronted with the question of how to strengthen students' capacity for and disposition toward independent, critical inquiry (McCrae, 2011). The need to nurture open critical inquiry appears more pressing than ever.

While there are a variety of models in scholarly and pedagogical literature about teaching critical thinking generally and in some disciplines in particular, there has been neither a significant ongoing discussion nor a formalized model for integrating critical thinking into the postsecondary foreign language and culture curriculum.<sup>1</sup> Through the study of foreign languages and cultures, students gain insight both into their own native environment and into other ways of viewing the world by means of making critical cross-comparisons. In that respect, the discipline of foreign language is well situated to be a means for strengthening critical-thinking skills.

Foreign language has traditionally been part of a liberal education, as reflected by the fact that so many general education programs include foreign language as either a requirement or an option in the general education curriculum (Warner & Koeppel, 2009). Integrating critical-thinking skills into the foreign language and culture curriculum could help learners develop key cognitive and life skills while also helping to enhance the prestige of a staple discipline in the general education curriculum. This study seeks to (1) offer a workable definition of critical thinking that can be applied to disciplines such as foreign language, (2) outline the broader role of critical thinking in postsecondary education, (3) describe the components of communicative competence in a foreign language and culture, (4) illustrate some of the benefits of a critical-thinking-oriented curriculum to learners of foreign language and culture, and (5) suggest future avenues of research on integrating critical thinking into the foreign language curriculum within general education.

## **Defining Critical Thinking**

The literature defining and operationalizing critical thinking is extensive and has existed for a very long time (Paul et. al, 1997), spanning from the teachings of Socrates to today's national discussions about the purpose of a college education. Critical thinking as a construct has been defined in a variety of ways, and there is no standard definition of what it is or normed approach to fostering its development. A definition of critical thinking from Halpern (1993), however, is typical of many views of critical thinking and may be helpful for understanding what it encompasses: "[It] is the kind of thinking involved in solving problems, formulating inferences, calculating likelihoods, and making decisions. Critical thinkers use these skills appropriately, without

prompting, and usually with conscious intent, in a variety of settings” (Halpern, 1999, p. 70).

Such a broad definition of critical thinking, while somewhat vague, is, however, reflective of its function as an umbrella term describing a number of complex cognitive processes. For example, the range of mental processes involved in critical thinking was famously articulated by Bloom (1956) in his well-known taxonomy, which scaffolds thinking skills from easiest to hardest: knowledge, comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis, evaluation. Other models of critical thinking are similarly generic and can be applied to many different circumstances, theoretical or practical. These may cover more complex thought, such as how to resolve an ethical dilemma, or more pedestrian concerns, such as how to plan one’s career path. No matter the purpose to which critical-thinking principles are applied, an articulated process can help ensure that one has accounted for multiple different ways of looking at a given concept or problem. It confirms that one has not merely relied on personal opinions, attitudes, or ideologies in formulating conclusions, and therein lies the usefulness of a critical-thinking approach.

At its roots, however, a critical-thinking process must help learners not only improve the organization of their thinking but also reflect on the quality of it. Paul and Elder’s (2009) definition of critical thinking rightfully focuses on this metacognitive aspect, positing that it is the “art of analyzing and evaluating thinking with a view to improving it” (p. 2). In other words, a critical-thinking approach should include engaging in self-reflection about the quality of one’s thinking.

Expanding on Paul and Elder’s clarifying definition, Brookfield (2012) adds that critical thinking is both a linear and a recursive process that consists of four elements: “1) Identifying the assumptions that frame our thinking and determine our actions; 2) checking the degree to which these assumptions are accurate and valid; 3) looking at our ideas and decisions (intellectual, organizational, and personal) from several different perspectives; and 4) as a result of the foregoing process, taking informed action” (p. 1). In Brookfield’s paradigm, thinking critically about a subject is not a onetime proposition; rather, our ideas become refined as we revisit them in light of new evidence, fresh perspectives, or new analysis. Brookfield’s model represents a comprehensive approach to critical thinking and is therefore a workable model for this discussion.

Inasmuch as critical thinking is viewed as a key cognitive skill, it pervades the learning outcomes commonly set forth in higher education. It has also been the topic of much discussion in recent years. But predating the current discussions about critical thinking in the college curriculum, researchers had long focused on its role in general education (Dressel & Mayhew, 1954). It appears that often when the postsecondary curriculum has been examined,

synthesized, or modified, the role that critical-thinking processes should play has been considered. Yet, surprisingly, despite the talk about the importance of critical thinking, there is evidence that college faculty members may not fully understand what it entails, let alone how to employ it in the classroom.

## Critical Thinking in Postsecondary Education

A study (Paul et al., 1995) of faculty members at sixty-six public and private universities in California is revealing. It found a disparity between what faculty members report they *believe* about the importance of critical thinking as opposed to what they actually *know* about engaging in it. On one hand, when asked if they felt that critical thinking was a primary objective of instruction at their institution, an overwhelming 89 percent said yes. Further, 67 percent of faculty members felt that the concept of critical thinking was clear in their mind. Yet, of those same respondents, only 19 percent could provide a working definition of critical thinking when asked, only 9 percent were clearly teaching (as defined by the researchers) critical-thinking skills in a typical class, and only 8 percent could articulate what cognitive skills are involved in critical thought.

The apparent disconnect between faculty members' perceptions and their actual understanding of critical thinking and how to teach it to students may be understandable, though, given that future postsecondary teachers do not consistently receive training as part of their graduate education in how to teach critical-thinking skills (Walker, 1985). Indeed, the level of understanding of critical thinking among faculty members indicates that there remains work to be done in educating them about critical thinking if it is to be infused throughout the curriculum. This is important since the learning outcomes of universities and colleges, especially in general education, frequently imply that it already is.

The focus nowadays in higher education on critical thinking as a skill derives from the view that college graduates ought to be disciplined, independent thinkers. Even in the applied fields and the professions critical thinking has come to prominence, and there is a concerted effort to find ways to teach students studying in these fields to become effective critical thinkers prepared to employ those skills in future professional life (see, for example, Braun, 2004; Gambrell, 2005; Huang et. al, 2014).

Further, the strong focus on teamwork in both educational and professional settings requires some level of engagement with critical-thinking skills since a primary aim of critical thinking is to view a problem or proposition from a number of different perspectives. A group effort succeeds only insofar as individual members are able to process what others in the group are suggesting and to synthesize those views into something new. The focus on critical thinking for life success makes sense, then, not only in college-related academic pursuits but

also for the future career success of students. College graduates not only should understand the concepts of their major discipline but should also be empowered to contribute in their future employment field and to their community by virtue of clear-sighted, disciplined, and creative thinking skills that they get in college, largely acquired in the general education curriculum.

But Chaffee (1992) points out that critical thinking is only infrequently taught in explicit ways in secondary education. Instead, the curricula of many college courses too often focus more on lower-level skills than on challenging, higher-level ones that require students to engage in cognitive tasks such as the application and analysis of the disciplinary knowledge they have gained. Perhaps for that reason, levels of critical-thinking competence are below where they should be in the United States at the postsecondary (Tsui, 2002, pp. 740–41) and other educational levels. It must be presumed that the deficiency is related to some extent to the lack of a comprehensive strategy for teaching critical thinking in colleges.

Haas and Keeley (1998), for example, note that college faculty members do not focus on explicitly teaching critical-thinking skills in their classes for a variety of reasons, ranging from faculty members not having been schooled in formal critical-thinking techniques during their own education to faculty members not perceiving there to be sufficient time in class. Further complicating the picture is faculty concern that making sweeping changes to familiar teaching methods can be precarious and time-consuming. Adopting a new and challenging conceptual model for instruction could be viewed by busy faculty members as an onerous task. However, the integration of critical-thinking models into the curriculum could ensue more successfully and more permanently if it occurs via careful adaptation of existing, commonly understood teaching techniques rather than by means of large-scale curricular disruption (Stroupe, 2006). (For examples of protocols for designing critical-thinking-oriented curricula, see Alnofaie, 2013; Beaumont, 2010; Brookfield, 2012; Halpern, 1999; Paul & Elder, 2009; Tsui, 2002.)

The teacher's guidance of students in their critical thinking equips them for practicing deep thought and gives them a protocol for approaching future questions in academic settings, in their eventual employment, and when confronting important questions throughout their life. This connection to life skills ensues because, by its nature, critical thinking focuses on topics that are directly relevant to life, in that the individual must examine his or her own biases and thought processes. In so doing, the learner begins to perceive connections between individual knowledge, on the one hand, and things that were formerly perceived as being outside the individual's personal sphere, on the other.

For example, a critical-thinking-based discussion about differences between U.S. culture and a selected immigrant culture could reveal to learners how their

own cultural biases (both positive and negative) inform their understanding of other cultures. Whatever conclusions a learner reaches in such an exercise, the thought process is designed to show the learner where his or her thinking had relied on stereotypes and tradition rather than on facts and reason. In that way, critical-thinking skills are exercised, and learners increasingly learn to trust their own judgment. Further, a focus on critical thinking presupposes and also invites ongoing reflection about the learning process that the individual is undergoing. In other words, because critical thinking involves “analyzing and evaluating thinking with a view to improving it” (Paul & Elder, 2009, p. 2), examining our thought processes means reflecting on the extent and scope of our learning.

The reward for integrating more critical thinking into the college curriculum, despite the challenges it presents, can be substantial for learners. Williams, Lively, and Harper (1994) point out that students are more motivated in their learning—regardless of their academic field—if they are stimulated by activities and discussions that are relevant to their own interests and which help them to see parallels between the content being learned and their own experiences. In other words, learners can have a richer experience and be more motivated academically by the very kinds of cognitive activities that critical thinking entails. Given the benefits of a critical-thinking-based curriculum, then, the question is not whether the presence of critical thinking in the college curriculum should be expanded but how. One logical area for greater inclusion of critical approaches is the foreign language and culture curriculum.

## Critical Thinking and Language Study

The acquisition of language is a complex process, and the study of it engages a variety of academic fields, including cognitive psychology, linguistics, psycholinguistics, and sociolinguistics. Since the 1970s, theories about how learners develop “communicative competence” (Hymes, 1972) in a foreign language—meaning the ability to use the grammar system and communicate in language that is appropriate to a given context—have focused on several distinct components. These components include grammatical competence, or the ability to use the language rules and vocabulary; sociolinguistic competence, meaning the ability to communicate appropriately within a given social context; strategic competence, which is the skill of the speaker to handle any breakdown or failure in communicating; and discourse competence, referring to the ability to construct coherent and cohesive written or oral communication (Canale, 1983; Canale & Swain, 1980).

Because of a growing consensus that effective communication is reliant upon speakers’ understanding of the culture of their conversation partner, the

concept of sociolinguistic competence was eventually expanded and called sociocultural competence. This component of communicative competence entails not only speakers' capacity to communicate appropriately within a specific social context but also the ability to effectively grasp the cultural context in which they are communicating (Celce-Murcia, Dörnyei, & Thurrell, 1995). In other words, being able to communicate effectively in a foreign language requires an understanding of the culture and its "meanings, values and connotations" as reflected in the language (Byram, 1997, p. 71). Overall communicative competence, then, includes knowledge of how social groups in the foreign culture function, what values drive that culture, and how that culture intersects with or differs from the culture of the language learner.

Helping learners develop communicative competence in a foreign language and culture requires building their competence in each of the various components of language. In practical and pedagogical terms, this usually means that instruction in foreign language has multiple focuses for the learner: (1) acquiring skills in using the language; (2) increasing understanding of the culture through study of civilization, literature, and media; and (3) pursuing specialized language studies such as those relating to career preparation, for example, business language or translation studies. Though a critical-thinking approach can be taken at various stages of the foreign language and culture curriculum, the most apparent areas of alignment may be in the study of culture, which is a component of sociocultural competence, and in the development of more advanced oral and written language skills, which are part of discourse competence.

In foreign language classes as well as in other disciplines, students' learning to engage in critical thinking is often best accomplished when the instructor serves as an example to the learners of how it is done. Mulnix (2010) found that an instructor making a critical-thinking approach explicit for students, modeling it for them, and then inviting them to attempt their own critical thinking can help both in developing those skills and in creating a positive classroom environment. In a foreign language class this can occur when, for example, a teacher initiates discussion of a literary text.<sup>2</sup>

Frequently the discussion of a literary text proceeds in a linear manner that, at a minimum, engages first the literal and then the figurative meanings of the text, finally analyzing the themes and evaluating the contextual role of the text within the culture. Following that general pattern, a class discussion about a text might begin with the teacher asking simple comprehension questions to gauge students' understanding about what they read (literal meaning); following that, a discussion about metaphors, figures of speech, and symbolism in the text would help learners discover meaning beyond concrete ones (figurative meaning); finally, a partnered or other activity could help students grasp the underlying cultural



implications of the text (analytical meaning). A critical-thinking approach seems natural during those stages of exploring a text because a rigorous analysis of cultural issues present in a text would necessarily include identifying one's own assumptions relating to the topic(s) of the text, checking the validity of those assumptions, and examining the text from multiple different viewpoints—in other words, following the steps of critical thinking.

As an example of how this might work in a foreign language class, consider a cultural artifact that is traditionally studied in intermediate or advanced college German courses, German fairy tales such as the Grimm Brothers' *Das Rotkäppchen* (Little Red Riding Hood) (Grimm & Grimm, 2016). Class activities designed to help students understand the text might include reviewing important vocabulary terms, discussing selected grammatical points from the story, and assessing the students' general understanding of the plot through simple comprehension questions. Next, a discussion or other class activity might follow about symbolism found in the story. In *Rotkäppchen*, these include the lead character's red cape (as a sign of youthful, vital life force), the forest through which she travels (a perilous, unknown place of transformation), the wolf (representing the dangers of the world), the hunter (as the protective male benefactor), and the girl being rescued and emerging from the wolf's excised stomach (as a symbol of regeneration as a wiser, stronger being).

At this point in the lesson, students are likely ready to analyze cultural aspects of the text, such as the respective roles of women and men in the nineteenth century and parallels to modern society. In order to make a comparative cultural analysis, learners would follow a critical-thinking approach by seeking first to identify the assumptions that they bring to the text as well as the authors' likely assumptions as a product of their time. In the case of *Rotkäppchen* this would include the students pondering their view of the role of fathers or father figures and comparing that view or assumption with beliefs about the role of fathers that were commonly held in a different time and culture.

After uncovering the beliefs that guide assumptions about the role of fathers, the learners would then seek to check the validity of those assumptions. This requires exploring the experiential, authoritative, and empirical sources of the assumptions (Brookfield, 2012, p. 12) or beliefs that they, the learners, hold as well as those of the authors.

As the final step in a critical-thinking approach, the learners would examine the various assumptions and actions in the text from multiple perspectives. This involves trying to see oneself and one's assumptions as others might see them. The intent of all of this is for the learner to become more aware of assumptions and how well they stand up to logical examination. The awareness gained can serve learners well by helping them develop their own life philosophy and make future life-impacting decisions.

A formalized critical-thinking approach to the foreign language and culture curriculum such as the one described previously and illustrated above can benefit both the students and the instructor. It helps emphasize the connection between academic activities and real life. As Beaumont (2010) concludes, critical thinking should center on conscious “awareness of what one encounters both in the classroom and in the outside world” (p. 430). To that end, critical thinking should function as more than just an academic exercise. It should be an engaged, self-aware approach to cognitive tasks that is interwoven with real-world encounters. This orientation toward real-life tasks aligns with the purposes of general education and is an important focus in foreign language instruction (American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages, 2015).

Illustrating the real-world application of critical thinking concomitant with language learning activities, Beaumont describes a sequence of critical-thinking tasks that can be used in English as a second language classes and, presumably, foreign language classes. The critical-thinking tasks range from identifying assumptions (when, for example, practicing language-related skills such as expressing opinions or clarifying one’s beliefs) to critically analyzing or evaluating (such as critiquing something or articulating the solution to a problem).

In the model that Beaumont describes, the use of critical-thinking skills follows three stages that are typical in a language and culture class: (1) the focus on the learner’s environment, (2) the focus on the text, and (3) the focus on the world beyond the text. Thus, in teaching foreign language skills it is best to scaffold class activities around critical-thinking tasks that relate to these three stages. That is to say, lower-order cognitive skills, such as gaining knowledge and basic comprehension, center on the setting that is most immediate and familiar to the students (meaning the learners’ environment, such as classes, friendship circles, family, etc.). Higher-order cognitive skills, such as application and analysis, are needed for the learner to be able to engage with the source of the language and cultural input (meaning the “text” or written or oral source of the foreign language being learned). Finally, the highest-order cognitive skills, synthesis and evaluation, are activated when the learner must analyze and draw parallels between the world as expressed in the text and the real world (meaning that the learner must explore “beyond the text”).

The latter of the three stages requires critiquing and synthesizing new knowledge to make informed decisions and engages the highest order of cognitive skills. In this model the learner progresses in the use of thinking skills from the simple acquisition of knowledge and facts to the synthesizing of new knowledge. While learners are striving to increase in language proficiency, they are also focusing on the increasingly complex contexts in which the language is used—from the learners’ immediate environment to the world beyond the “text.” Scaffolding the language learning curriculum in

this way parallels how cognitive tasks increase in complexity from gaining basic knowledge about a topic to synthesizing new ways of thinking about that knowledge.

## **Benefits to Foreign Language Learners**

One benefit of studying foreign language and culture is that it has been associated with increased skills in critical thinking. Liaw (2007), for example, tested nonnative speakers of English who had been taught reading and writing skills using critical thinking as a framework and found that fostering critical-thinking skills in the language classroom helped learners in their acquisition of foreign language skills. Supporting that result, a comprehensive study of data from the Higher Education Research Institute at the University of California, Los Angeles (Tsui, 1999) concluded that foreign language courses are positively correlated with student self-reported increases in critical-thinking capacity. In particular, the act of completing writing assignments after receiving instructor feedback had the strongest correlation with the increase in students' perceived critical-thinking skills. Further activities that correlate with perceived increases in critical-thinking skills are conducting independent or group research projects, giving a class presentation, and taking essay exams (Tsui, 1999, p. 197). These types of assignments are typical in foreign language classes and require students to think beyond their work in mastering basic language structures to engage in higher-order cognitive skills such as those required when conceiving a solution to a question or problem.

There are a number of ways that incorporating critical thinking into the foreign language and culture curriculum would serve students well and be an advantage in their language learning. I will mention a few here. First, a foreign language course that integrates critical thinking in the curriculum helps learners not only strengthen their ability to function at higher cognitive levels but to do so while using the foreign language. This cognitive exercise may help take the primary focus off of the production of grammatically correct language and shift it in part to thinking about the topic at hand. The often paralyzing moment experienced by students when concentrating on producing grammatically correct language could be eased somewhat, and the distraction from the logistics of language production may help learners negotiate the language with less self-consciousness.

Second, since critical thinking is linked to social interaction (Atkinson, 1997), such as when one interacts with peers to discover their point of view about a topic, and because so much of language production is dependent upon the social context in which it is produced, critical thinking and communicative interaction are intertwined. Critical-thinking activities focusing on examining others'

viewpoints require social interactions among speakers, and in a foreign language and culture classroom that requires communication in the foreign language.

Third, discussing topics in a critical-thinking context allows language learners to practice speaking about complex topics in the foreign language, thus presumably expanding their competence for engaging academic topics in the language. That skill serves students particularly well as they move into upper-division foreign language courses because they will likely become familiar with the kind of Socratic dialogue that is often present in discussions in foreign language courses about literature, film, and culture (Koshi, 1996). Further, a critical-thinking focus in foreign language courses links the foreign language curriculum to concepts of philosophy, ethics, and aesthetics. In that sense, it facilitates scaffolding to higher-level cognitive activity by integrating the knowledge bases and methodological approaches of diverse disciplines that are ancillary to language and culture learning. Disciplines approach the acquisition of knowledge in disparate ways, and the student who can negotiate a variety of disparate disciplinary approaches and synthesize new types of understanding is surely well on the way to becoming a sophisticated, mature thinker.

Fourth, a critical-thinking-based curriculum can strengthen abilities that are central to foreign language study, such as discussion and writing skills. In foreign language classes, discussion and writing activities are prevalent since language teachers often view writing and speaking as skills that learners need to practice in order to improve their overall communicative competence. The ability to write well has long been viewed as deriving from cogent thinking skills (see Bean, 2011; Çavdar & Doe, 2012) and correlates well with critical thinking. Similarly, the practice of in-class discussion not only is a familiar technique in language instruction but has also been found effective for strengthening critical thinking (Hayes & Devitt, 2008). Perhaps unsurprisingly, Tsui's (2002) metastudy concluded that students at institutions with a strong emphasis on critical-thinking-oriented writing and in-class discussions perceived the greatest growth in their critical-thinking skills.

Critical thinking can be built into a number of related or ancillary language learning activities that may be used less frequently in foreign language courses than traditional essay writing, question-and-answer sessions, or free discussion. These may include variations of writing and discussion activities such as a formal classroom debate on a subject, the preparation of a film review, in-class presentations such as PowerPoints, peer critiques of outlines to be used in writing, making presentations or leading discussions, and cross-cultural comparisons such as contrasting U.S. and non-U.S. values about education. Such activities engage interpretive and self-presentational skills and lend themselves well to following the steps of critical thinking. Table 1 offers some examples of foreign language learning activities organized within a critical-thinking model.

Table 1 | Sample Critical-Thinking-Related Language Learning Activities.

Activity	Examine Assumptions	Validate Assumptions	See Different Viewpoints	Plan Actions
Writing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Write an essay and share it with a peer who reads it focusing only on assumptions that seem based mostly on your background or beliefs.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Prepare a critique of a political or persuasive speech commenting on why assertions that the speaker makes are (not) believable.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Write a letter from one fictional character to another explaining why the first character has acted as she or he has.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Draft a business plan based on market data about demand for a given product or service; include the rationale for any action plans.</li></ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Write a review of a foreign film trying to account for behaviors from the film's characters that you do not understand.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>List stereotypes of a cultural or ethnic group; then prepare a summary describing evidence that both confirms and discredits the stereotypes.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>As a group, create a bullet list of facts supporting the side of an issue with which the majority of the group does not agree.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Write a summary of a news story that describes the plans of a government, company, or individual to handle a problem; then evaluate the logic of the plans.</li></ul>
Discussion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>In small-group discussion about a cultural topic, note any cultural biases expressed; afterward, discuss the biases as a group.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>As a group, brainstorm a list of things the members take for granted about a given discussion topic; then brainstorm alternatives that contradict those assumptions; discuss as a group.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Hold a brief debate on an assigned topic; then reverse sides and debate the topic again from the other perspective.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Deliver a persuasive speech with evidence to support what you are trying to persuade listeners to do.</li></ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Share with a partner your views on a given topic; then with another team, compare your conversations focusing on aspects of your background that led each of you to hold the opinion(s) that you do.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Give a PowerPoint presentation intended to persuade, while half the class looks for weaknesses in the arguments; discuss together.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>With a partner, discuss the motives of a film or television character.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Select a character from history whose actions were widely criticized; discuss the actions, focusing on factors that may have made the actions justifiable.</li></ul>

## Future Research

The possible connections between critical thinking and foreign language learning provide interesting possibilities for future research. One area for exploration is the extent to which practicing critical-thinking techniques does or does not directly contribute to the language acquisition process itself. An appropriate experimental research design could help clarify whether any observed links between critical-thinking ability and language proficiency are correlational or causative and to what degrees. Relatedly, future research might also investigate how beneficial critical-thinking techniques can be in the achievement of standardized foreign language learning outcomes (National Standards in Foreign Language Education Project, 2015), since engagement with critical thinking may strengthen different language and culture competencies to differing extents. Another possible research direction is the applied aspect of how critical-thinking techniques can be engaged in different areas of the foreign language curriculum (such as literature or film) and in various skills (writing, speaking, reading). Also important for future consideration is how assessment ought to be approached, since some linguistic or cultural proficiencies may overlap with critical-thinking abilities, making it a delicate matter to target each separately for evaluation.

## Conclusion

Foreign language learning endures as a traditional part of liberal education, as reflected by the fact that general education programs typically include it as either a requirement or an option for students in fulfilling graduation requirements. Critical thinking is an integral, if somewhat misunderstood, component of a college education.

The demand in the work world for employees with critical-thinking skills and the related focus on higher-order cognitive skills in general education and other postsecondary curricula are not likely to decrease. Perhaps for that reason the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages urges in its *World-Readiness Standards for Learning Languages* that programs give students “ample opportunity to explore, develop and use communication strategies, learning strategies [and] critical thinking skills” (National Standards in Foreign Language Education Project, 2015, p. 28). The curricular design of foreign language programs as articulated in the national standards can contribute to the mission and general education outcomes of universities and colleges by increasing the focus on critical-thinking techniques in the language and culture curriculum. The explicit teaching of critical-thinking skills in foreign language

courses is one way of strengthening language and cultural proficiency while also building students' higher-order thinking skills.

**DAREN SNIDER** is a professor of world languages and cultures and dean of the school of humanities and social sciences at Indiana University East. His research interests are foreign language pedagogy, second language acquisition, and critical thinking.

## NOTES

1. As applied to an academic field, the term *foreign language* encompasses the study and teaching not only of language itself but also of the cultures of which the language is a part. This includes such aspects as history, society, and artistic and literary production. In this article, whenever the term *foreign language* is used it is meant in that broader sense.

2. Foreign language teachers may understandably object that critical thinking is already inherent in their lessons and activities, and that may be true in many cases (Stroupe, 2006, pp. 51–53). But it is not uncommon to hear of students who are confused by the focus and procedures undertaken in upper-division foreign language courses. As already noted, many faculty members find it difficult to define critical thinking, so they may not have a clear process for teaching it.

## WORKS CITED

- Alnofaie, H. (2013). A framework for implementing critical thinking as a language pedagogy in EFL preparatory programmes. *Thinking Skills and Creativity*, 10, 154–58.
- American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages. (2015). NCSSTL-ACTFL can-do statements. Alexandria, Va. Retrieved from <https://www.actfl.org>.
- Association of American Colleges and Universities. (2013). *It takes more than a major: Employer priorities for college learning and student success*. Washington, DC: Hart Research Associates.
- Atkinson, D. (1997). A critical approach to critical thinking in TESOL. *TESOL Quarterly*, 31, 71–94.
- Bean, J. C. (2011). *Engaging ideas: The professor's guide to integrating writing, critical thinking, and active learning in the classroom* (2nd ed.). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Beaumont, J. (2010). A sequence of critical thinking tasks. *TESOL Journal*, 1, 427–48.
- Bloom, B. S. (Ed.). (1956). *Taxonomy of educational objectives: The classification of educational goals*. New York: McKay.
- Braun, N. M. (2004). Critical thinking in the business curriculum. *Journal of Education for Business*, 79, 232–36.
- Brookfield, S. D. (2012). *Teaching for critical thinking: Tools and techniques to help students question their assumptions*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Byram, M. (1997). *Teaching and assessing intercultural communicative competence*. Clevedon, U.K.: Multilingual Matters.
- Canale, M. (1983). From communicative competence to communicative language pedagogy. In J. C. Richards & R. Schmidt (Eds.), *Language and communication* (pp. 2–27). London: Longman.
- Canale, M., & Swain, M. (1980). Theoretical bases of communicative approaches to second language teaching and testing. *Applied Linguistics*, 1, 1–47.

- Çavdar, G., & Doe, S. (2012). Learning through writing: Teaching critical thinking skills in writing assignments. *PS: Political Science and Politics*, 45, 298–306.
- Celce-Murcia, M., Dörnyei, Z., & Thurrell, S. (1995). Communicative competence: A pedagogically motivated model with content specifications. *Applied Linguistics*, 6(2), 5–35.
- Chaffee, J. (1992). Teaching critical thinking across the curriculum. In C. A. Barnes, *Critical thinking: Educational imperative. New directions for community colleges* (Vol. 77; pp. 25–35). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Dressel, P., & Mayhew, L. (1954). *General education: Explorations in evaluation*. Westport: Greenwood Press.
- Gambrill, E. (2005). *Critical thinking in clinical practice: Improving the quality of judgments and decisions*. Hoboken: John Wiley and Sons.
- Grimm, J., & Grimm, W. (2016). *Kinder- und Hausmärchen (1818–1815)* (4th ed.). Berlin: Holzinger.
- Haas, P. F., & Keeley, S. M. (1998). Coping with faculty resistance to teaching critical thinking. *College Teaching*, 46, 63–67.
- Halpern, D. F. (1993). Assessing the effectiveness of critical-thinking instruction. *Journal of General Education*, 42, 238–54.
- Halpern, D. F. (1999). Teaching for critical thinking: Helping college students develop the skills and dispositions of a critical thinker. *New Directions for Teaching and Learning*, 80, 69–74.
- Hayes, K. D., & Devitt, A. A. (2008). Classroom discussions with student-led feedback: A useful activity to enhance development of critical thinking skills. *Journal of Food Science Education*, 7, 65–68.
- Huang, G. C., Newman, L. R., & Schwartzstein, R. M. (2014). Critical thinking in health professions education: Summary and consensus statements of the Millennium Conference 2011. *Teaching and Learning in Medicine*, 26, 95–102.
- Hymes, D. (1972). On communicative competence. In J. B. Pride & J. Holmes (Eds.), *Sociolinguistics* (pp. 269–93). Baltimore: Penguin Books.
- Koshi, A. K. (1996). Holistic grammar through Socratic questioning. *Foreign Language Annals*, 29, 401–14.
- Lampert, N. (2007). Critical thinking dispositions as an outcome of undergraduate education. *Journal of General Education*, 56, 17–33.
- Liaw, M.-L. (2007). Content-based reading and writing for critical thinking skills in an EFL context. *English Teaching and Learning*, 31, 45–87.
- McCrae, N. (2011). Nurturing critical thinking and academic freedom in the twenty-first century university. *International Journal of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education*, 23, 128–34.
- Mulnix, J. W. (2010). Thinking critically about critical thinking. *Educational Philosophy and Theory*, 44, 464–79.
- National Standards in Foreign Language Education Project. (2015). *World-readiness standards for learning languages*. Alexandria, Va.: American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages.
- Paul, R., & Elder, L. (2009). *The miniature guide to critical thinking: Concepts and tools*. Tomales, Calif.: Foundation for Critical Thinking.
- Paul, R., Elder, L., & Bartell, T. (1995). *Study of 38 public universities and 28 private universities to determine faculty emphasis on critical thinking in instruction*. Retrieved July 23, 2014, from <http://www.criticalthinking.org/pages/study-of-38-public-universities-and-28-private-universities-to-determine-faculty-emphasis-on-critical-thinking-in-instruction/598>.



- Paul, R. W., Elder, L., & Bartell, T. (1997). *California teacher preparation for instruction in critical thinking: Research findings and policy recommendations*. Sacramento: California Commission on Teacher Credentialing.
- Stroupe, R. R. (2006). Integrating critical thinking throughout ESL curricula. *TESL Reporter*, 39, 42-60.
- Tsui, L. (1999). Courses and instruction affecting critical thinking. *Research in Higher Education*, 40, 185-200.
- Tsui, L. (2002). Fostering critical thinking through effective pedagogy: Evidence from four institutional case studies. *Journal of Higher Education*, 73, 740-63.
- Walker, P. B. (1985). A descriptive study of the relationship of teaching level and subject area assignment to teachers' attitudes toward critical thinking. *Dissertation Abstracts International*, 47, 3302.
- Warner, D. B., & Koeppel, K. (2009). General education requirements: A comparative analysis. *Journal of General Education*, 58, 241-58.
- Williams, M., Lively, M., & Harper, J. (1994). Higher order thinking skills: Tools for bridging the gap. *Foreign Language Annals*, 27, 405-13.