An Analysis on Students’ Thinking Complexity through Their Writing in a General Education Course

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Abstract

“In Dialogue with Nature” is a compulsory General Education Foundation (GEF) course of The Chinese University of Hong Kong (CUHK), with a goal to enhance students’ academic preparedness and to improve their thinking capabilities through reading classics. In order to understand and evaluate students’ thinking habits and abilities, as well as to assess the effectiveness of the course, a research project based on Narrative Qualitative Analysis (NQA) was initiated in the GEF Programme. Based on the Wolcott-Lynch (WL) model, students’ written assignments in this course were analyzed, from which their overall thinking patterns and characteristics have been studied. It is found that around 80% of the students are clustered within the lowest two thinking performance patterns of the WL model, namely, Confused Fact-Finder and Biased Jumper. Moreover, the students’ representative thinking components were extracted to reveal their general thinking habits and to describe their thinking patterns. Furthermore, it is also found that although the overall thinking performance patterns of the students always stay the same within one term, improvement can still be observed by analyzing individual thinking components in a supportive learning environment.

Keywords: Narrative Qualitative Analysis, Reflective thinking, thinking components, thinking performance patterns, Wolcott-Lynch Model