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Fransson: Teaching strategies in motion – Tibetan teachers' work with  
argumentation technique in different school subjects*

## **Teaching strategies in motion – Tibetan teachers' work with argumentation technique in different school subjects**

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## **Abstract**

The democratic mission of school includes for students to develop a critical and reflexive approach to texts. In this article, we start out from a critical literacy perspective to highlight how such a critical approach can be understood in relation to a feature of Tibetan schools – Tibetan argumentation technique. This technique was developed in a religious and philosophical context, but has now been implemented in secular schools with the ambition to strengthen students' self-confidence and thinking skills. The aim of the present article is to develop in-depth knowledge of how Tibetan argumentation technique is applied in teaching in exile Tibetan schools in Dharamsala, India. A specific focus is how the argumentation technique can be understood from a perspective which considers the development of critical reflection a necessary part of the educational mission. The empirical material used for the article includes observations from school visits and interviews with teachers. Our results indicate that teachers, when they use the argumentation technique as part of their teaching, report that the students develop their language skills and understanding of the subject and also boost their self-confidence. Access to this tool seems to offer students forms of language and knowledge that develop their ability to think logically and express themselves independently, which in turn gives them more power to influence their own future opportunities. The results also suggest that the argumentation technique is particularly suitable for certain subjects and specific types of subject content.

## **Keywords**

argumentation technique, literacy event, teaching, critical literacy, Tibetan

## **Introduction**

An important part of democracy is that students develop a critical and reflexive approach to texts. In an earlier study, we have touched upon aspects of this critical approach, often called critical literacy, in relation to a feature of Tibetan schools – Tibetan argumentation technique (Duek et al., 2018). Enabling students to examine and critically understand different texts is also included in the democratic mission of the Swedish school system (National Agency for Education, 2011; Andersson, Hydén & Obbel, 2014; Winqvist & Nilsson, 2014; Westlund, 2015). However, it has turned out to be challenging to organise teaching focused on this objective in Swedish classrooms (see for instance Lyngfelt & Olin-Scheller, 2016; Lyngfelt, Olin-Scheller & Tengberg, 2016). The challenge is partly about finding forms of teaching that can also promote the students' understanding and ability to respond critically to the rhetoric of today's heterogeneous textual landscape. An ambition of our article is therefore to go beyond a Swedish and Western perspective on rhetorical education to study if - and if yes, how - exercises in Tibetan argumentation technique, seen as literacy events (Barton, 2007; Barton & Lee, 2011; Street, 2003) in relation to critical literacy (Janks, 2010; Gee, 2002; Street, 2003 and others), can be understood as contributing to the development of students' ability to engage in critical reflection.

Tibetan argumentation technique has been developed over centuries by Tibetan monks (Perdue, 1992). Its purpose is to practice logical reasoning in the form of debate, but also to enhance and cultivate thought. The starting point for the Tibetan monks is the foundational religious texts of Tibetan Buddhism, and ultimately the argumentation technique involves identifying misunderstandings and exploring truth through careful analysis (Dundruk, 2018). Through questioning the obvious, more dimensions of a phenomenon can be investigated. The monks engage in daily argumentation practice sessions, but the technique is also a frequent feature of teaching in secular schools where most of the students are Tibetan children and teenagers. For this reason, the argumentation technique can also be seen as a way to perpetuate Tibetan traditions of culture and language.

We have described earlier how Tibetan debate is implemented in different educational contexts and demonstrated that the same philosophy underpins the curriculum used in the Tibetan school system and the principles of Tibetan

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argumentation technique (Duek et. al., 2018). We also contend that Tibetan argumentation technique could contribute new dimensions to a Swedish educational context which is currently dominated by the rhetorical tradition of antiquity. During recurring visits over several years to Tibetan schools in Dharamsala, we have studied the use of argumentation technique in general and how it is applied by teachers in different subjects in particular. What we can learn from this is, for instance, that a significant difference between the Tibetan argumentation technique and the rhetorical tradition from Antiquity is that the former is a method that can promote logical thinking and knowledge, while the latter focuses on the way in which different arguments are presented (Duek et al., 2018).

The actual debating sessions can be organised in pairs or groups and are structured around challengers and defenders. The standing challenger conducts the argumentation by means of specific questions that the sitting defender is supposed to answer. To introduce the debate, the challenger delivers the question that is the topic of debate, augmented with gestures and hand movements, and signals that the formulation of the question is completed through clapping hands. The defender then has a certain amount of time at her disposal to hone her arguments and answer the question. In this type of argumentation, both parties develop not only logical reasoning skills but also in-depth subject knowledge (Duek et. al., 2018; Dundruk, 2018).



Image 1. Tibetan argumentation illustrated in a picture of a stage at a TCV school.

In order to enable an understanding of the teaching context, we will now describe the historical background of the founding of Tibetan schools in Dharamsala. As a consequence of unrest in Tibet in the late 1950s, many Tibetans, including the Tibetan Parliament and the religious leader Dalai Lama, have escaped and found a sanctuary in India. The Tibetan exile government is run by the Central Tibetan Administration (CTA), which is organised in seven main departments, including the Department of Education. It was established in 1960 when the Dalai Lama, the most prominent religious leader, had issued a directive to give precedence to education for exile Tibetans and make sure that Tibetan children have access to separate schools (see the Central Tibetan Administration homepage)<sup>1</sup>. In India, especially in the northern regions, there are around 70 Tibetan schools today (Central Tibetan Administration, 2020) which are categorised as Tibetan Children's Villages or so-called TCV schools. These schools are run both as day schools and as boarding schools with students from the local community as well as students from other countries whose parents have a background in Tibetan society. The schools play an important part in the maintenance of the Tibetan language,

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<sup>1</sup> The Tibetan exile government has been based in Dharamsala, in northern India, since 1957. This is also the place where the most prominent Buddhist leader, the Dalai Lama, works in exile.

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traditional values, and culture, not least through transmitting those traditions to children growing up in exile. The TCV schools heed the Indian curriculum, but with the addition of Basic Education Policy for Tibetans (2004).

Teaching for students who follow the Tibetan curriculum is dependent to a great extent on steering documents and guidelines from CTA and the Department of Education. Some of the core functions are to initiate and manage changes in teaching methods in the Tibetan schools and to organise teacher education and training. A main purpose, based on the Dalai Lama's vision, is "to nurture Tibetan students who are not only sharp intellectually, but also responsible community members and world citizens" (Central Tibetan Administration, 2020). On the initiative of the Dalai Lama, those responsible for education in the Tibetan exile government have therefore over the last few years worked to spread and implement Tibetan argumentation technique in school teaching (see Duek, et al, 2018). Using Ball's (1993) concept, these guidelines can be described as a policy.

Not only formal and national steering documents constitute policy, but also local regulations and informal notions can be included. Policies influence practice without providing direct and concrete suggestions for what teachers should do. Individual teachers therefore have to interpret and adapt policy to their own classroom practice, and this process differs from one classroom to the other. Investigating how policy is realised in school – in this case, how Tibetan teachers implement Tibetan argumentation technique in their teaching – is a way of trying to understand how political governance can be translated into effective classroom practice. The fact that the Dalai Lama has expressed an explicit request for teachers to use argumentation technique in their teaching equals significant pressure from above on schools, school heads, and individual teachers. The purpose of implementing Tibetan argumentation technique, which is based on Buddhist philosophy and Buddhist religious practice, in Tibetan schools is related to aspects of power and the ambition to give students access to language and a way of thinking which will enhance their logical reasoning skills, their subject knowledge, and their self-esteem (Duek et al., 2018). When one of the schools that we have visited decides to provide teachers with training in Tibetan argumentation technique, this can be seen as a way for principals to turn the Dalai Lama's decree into policy. When teachers in turn organise teaching in which the argumentation technique is adapted to different subjects and different students, they are making

policy at the local level. When teachers respond to the demands from above, their pedagogical choices constitute policy actions which can be placed on a scale between adaptation and resistance and which form various patterns. Different patterns emerge in these acts. The focus of the present article is to distinguish parts of patterns when teachers describe and stage their teaching in argumentation technique in different subjects. The aim is to develop in-depth knowledge of how Tibetan argumentation technique is applied in teaching practice. Our research questions are the following:

- What aspects of the argumentation technique do Tibetan teachers in various subjects foreground as central to their teaching practice?
- How can the Tibetan argumentation technique be understood from a critical literacy perspective?

We would like to emphasise that our understanding of the contexts and phenomena that we study is based on a Western point of view. Above all, we suggest that the intertwining of religion, culture, and society that characterise the lives of exile Tibetans in Dharamsala is difficult for us to identify and understand.

### **Theoretical background**

New Literacy Studies (Street, 2003; Barton, 2007; Barton & Lee, 2011 and others) employ the concepts of literacy events and literacy practices. A literacy event is constituted by one or more language acts, such as for instance to read a text or to make an oral utterance. Literacy practices as a concept allows us to group and define types of literacy events, for instance in a society or in an educational context. Literacy practices are formed in and by different social and cultural contexts (Barton, 2007). The Tibetan argumentation technique can be considered a literacy practice, and the argumentation exercises and debates that take place both during and after school hours can be seen as literacy events.

Even though Tibetan argumentation is based on written text, it is augmented by means of multimodal forms of expression such as oral idiomatic expressions, oral subject-specific utterances, movements and hand-clapping, all of which are employed in the literacy event (Duek et al., 2018). In all conversations, speakers assume the role of participant in an exchange of information, but there are also given rules for how a speaker's chosen discourse acts demand something from the

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recipient (Halliday, 2014). Tibetan argumentation technique follows a strict pattern and protocol and is also closely associated with Tibetan religion and philosophy, aspects that we are unable to understand and analyse here. Thus, we do not intend to go into detail regarding the specific discourse acts of the argumentation technique that we have studied. Instead we have chosen to focus on the teachers' statements regarding the value of the technique from the perspective of learning.

Critical literacy (Janks, 2010; Gee, 2002; Street, 2003 m.fl.) concerns the relationship between language and power and is based on a sociocultural view on learning and conditions for learning. A basic premise for literacy research is that literacy varies in relation to the socioeconomic background of students. A majority of students in the Tibetan schools that we have visited belong to a group of exile Tibetans who are allowed to reside in India, but who are stateless, cannot become citizens, and lack the right to own land, for instance. Many students are boarding schools residents who live simply and far away from their parents but who are closely connected to the Tibetan community.

The framework of critical literacy foregrounds four aspects for conceptualising the relationship between language and power: *power*, *access*, *diversity*, and *design* (Janks, 2010). The first aspect, Janks' concept of *power*, draws on neo-Marxist theories of power as something that dominant groups in society possess, and also on Foucault's theory of power which illuminates how power can shift when people become acting subjects. The second aspect, the concept of *access*, highlights the importance of students' knowledge about and thus access to the dominant language and dominant genres in the society where they are supposed to live and work. If minority students do not have access to the dominant language, they lack the resources required to participate actively in the literacy practices (Barton, 2007) that are expected in society and their chances of having access to power are reduced. The concept of access is related to the third aspect, *diversity*. Diversity involves the question of how different languages and cultures are valued in society. According to for instance Janks (2010) and Kress (1995), if diversity is visible and highly valued in a society or in a specific school, it will not cause conflict and difficulty but instead be a driving force for learning and the use of language skills. The fourth concept, *design*, is a more inclusive expression for text production which includes other modalities as well apart from verbal text. Design can for instance also denote speech and bodily movement as in the present study. The



concept of design also involves an understanding of the power inherent in the ability to produce utterances of one's own based on a critical approach. In our article, all four aspects are relevant but we will focus specifically on access and design, since an underlying objective of introducing Tibetan argumentation technique in schools is to promote students' knowledge and self-esteem through their participation in a literacy practice which is centrally important in Tibetan exile society.

## **Method and material**

The material for this article was collected in Dharamsala in October 2018 and October 2019. Our empirical material consists of an individual interview with a teacher of English working at a TCV school (2018) and a group interview with five teachers at a TCV school where the teacher who was interviewed in 2018 participated again (2019). The material also contains a film sequence from the group interview in which the teachers perform an imagined teaching situation which includes Tibetan argumentation technique (2019). The teachers are referred to in the text as teachers 1-5, and teacher 3 is the teacher who has also been interviewed individually. In conjunction with the collection of material, we gave the participants information about the purpose of the study and the research ethical principles applied, and received their informed consent to participate. The interviews were recorded and later transcribed. The interviews with teachers were conducted in English. The teaching sequence which was filmed was performed in Tibetan, which means that our analysis of the film sequence primarily concerns patterns of movement and performance that are also important parts of the argumentation itself. The material moreover comprises field notes from informal conversations with the teachers in connection with an exercise in argumentation technique carried out by students at the TCV. This exercise as well was conducted in Tibetan, and the teachers acted as informal interpreters both in relation to what was said in the debate and in relation to descriptions of the context.

The interviews were unstructured, which means that we started out from themes that we had identified as interesting, and allowed the conversation to develop in relation to those themes (Robson & McCartan, 2016). The themes in focus in the interviews were 1) the teachers' answers to the question if the Tibetan argumentation technique is implemented in their own teaching, and if yes, how, 2)

the teachers' views on the role of the argumentation technique in their own teaching, 3) what opportunities and impediments the teachers were able to identify in relation to the implementation of the technique in their own teaching, and 4) the teachers' thoughts about the contribution of the argumentation technique in terms of developing students' critical reflection skills.

The method for analysing interviews and field notes was content analysis, guided by the themes that were in focus in interviews, but also by other themes that emerged on the basis of the material (Robson & McCartan, 2016).

## **Results**

According to the interviewed teachers, the reason why Tibetan argumentation technique has been introduced in school teaching is that the Dalai Lama has observed examples of teaching where this method of enhancing argumentation skills and subject knowledge has been implemented with positive results.

According to the teachers, the Dalai Lama has described the technique as an effective way for students to learn subject content and develop their logical thinking.

At the school that we have studied, all students practice Tibetan argumentation technique in regular weekly sessions led by a visiting Buddhist monk. In the group interview with the teachers, we found that they had been training for a month (June 2019) to practice this technique as preparation for implementing it in teaching. In a skills development course focused specifically on Tibetan argumentation technique, teachers were taught by a Buddhist monk for an hour each afternoon. This was during the summer when students are on summer break and schools arrange a range of specific skills development courses for TCV teachers every year. These courses are run by CTA and the Department of Education.

The interviewed teachers said that they could decide for themselves later if, and to what extent, they wanted to use the argumentation technique in their own teaching. They did not see it as an external requirement to implement the technique in their own teaching, but rather that it is up to each individual teacher to decide. Teacher 3 pointed out that "riglam has become very important in Tibetan schools not because we must learn it but because when teachers understand its

benefits [...] . How it is being used and applied in the academic subjects depends on the subject teachers [...]. Teachers mostly work or use riglam according to their wish, so basically, it is not a compulsion.” The group interview showed that the argumentation technique had been implemented to varying degrees. One of them said: “I don’t use this, I just go with the normal debate like “should homework be abolished” so the children can share their ideas” (teacher 2). However, another teacher (3) said that she uses the method regularly when teaching English. In the individual interview, the same teacher explained that the teaching team had discussed whether or not the method is possible to use in English, or if it is only suitable for “subjects with mind like science and maths” (teacher 3). The teacher said that she had assumed that it must be possible to use the method in the English subject as well, and that the discussions had led up to a number of “topics that we can discuss on”. In the group interview, teacher 3 also explicitly stated that she uses the technique when teaching English. Both teacher 3 and some of the other teachers participating in the group interview said that it is used primarily for teaching *grammar* in the English language classroom.

When we visited the school, we had the opportunity to observe parts of the training that students receive in Tibetan argumentation technique. Guided by a Buddhist monk, a group of around 30 middle school students were engaged in outdoor education. On another occasion, we were able to watch a debating contest after school where students in the same grade debated each other. The students were grouped in teams of four and competed against each other supervised by a Buddhist monk. Other students and teachers made up the audience (see image 2). The debate was not connected to a specific school subject, but to the training in argumentation technique that the students had received from monks.



Image 2. Debating contest at a TCV school.

According to one of the interviewed teachers (teacher 3), who also acted as our interpreter when we visited, the challenger team (to the right in the picture) first formulated the topic of debate through asking a question with support from gestures and the clapping of hands. On this particular occasion, the main question was: “What is the difference between a living being and a nonliving?” It was followed by these questions:

- Is a human being a living being?
- Are all living beings human?
- What is a living being?

The debate was concluded with a reiteration of the original question: “What is the difference between a living being and a nonliving?”

### **Implementing Tibetan argumentation technique in the English subject**

In the individual interview, the teacher of English gave an example of how she uses argumentation technique when teaching English grammar, which illustrates a

difference between the types of topics that are used for argumentation in Western and Tibetan contexts. The teacher begins by preparing the students through teaching the grammatical concepts that they are expected to learn. An example of a question formulated about this could be: “What is the simple present?” The teacher said that the students are encouraged to acquire the new knowledge primarily through memorising it: She said: “the children memorize the whole explanation a lot first [...] if they repeat again and again it stays in their brains” (teacher 3, group interview). She also mentioned that other methods can be used in this phase, such as explaining concepts on the whiteboard. The students are then given a homework assignment to identify three or four arguments about what defines or does not define the concept. In this form of argumentation technique, the rule is always to have three or four arguments. When the time comes for debating in class, she does not have to give the students instructions about procedure, since they receive regular training in the argumentation technique from a monk. Before presenting arguments on the topic of the debate, in this example the simple present, the students are divided into two groups who take turns standing up and debating or sitting down and responding. There are always two groups, but the size of groups can vary. When the debate has been concluded, the teacher gives the students feedback through telling them how their arguments can be “sharpened” further and if the conclusion that has been drawn is logical.

### **Advantages for teaching**

In interviews, we found out that the argumentation technique is called “riglam” in Tibetan, and that this can be translated in a literal sense as “the brain method”. One of the advantages of the technique, according to the teachers, is that students concentrate on different aspects of a given subject in a focused way. The teachers view the technique primarily as a beneficial method for learning and understanding concepts related to different types of subject content. They underlined that the method is therefore particularly suitable for mathematics and the natural sciences, “it goes very well with math and sciences to learn terminology and concepts” (teacher 3, group interview). At the same time, the teachers also pointed out that the students acquire an in-depth understanding of concepts through the argumentation technique, and that their analytical skills are developed as well. The teachers stated that the students are generally very adept at articulating strong arguments but also at responding objectively to the arguments of others, and

connected this ability to a key principle of the technique which is not to build argumentation on baseless arguments.

In the group interview, the teachers described how the students respond to arguments through “scrutinising” the arguments of their opponents in order to detect contradictions. When contradictions are identified in the argumentation of the opponent, this is signalled both through hand movements and through set phrases that can be translated as “this is not debatable” (teacher 3, group interview). The teachers gave examples of contradictions such as the argument presented only pertaining to a synonym of the concept under debate, or to something so entirely unconnected that it cannot even be included in debate about this concept. In other words, the students are trained not only to articulate their own arguments, but also to respond to the arguments of others in a critical and analytical manner.

In addition, the teachers claimed that Tibetan argumentation technique (riglam) is beneficial not only for the students' “school studies, but it will help in their life to become a logical, reasonable person” (teacher 3, group interview). One of the teachers said that the students were assigned the task of writing a letter to their parents to tell them their opinion about “riglam” and how it helps them in their studies. According to the teachers, almost all students expressed the opinion that it is helpful when studying mathematics and the natural sciences, and that “it helps to sharpen the brain, so that they can think fast” (teacher 4).

### **Challenges for teaching**

The connection to Tibetan philosophy, religion, and language is a central aspect of Tibetan argumentation technique. This was obvious in the interviews and observations that we conducted. The teachers emphasised that knowledge of the Tibetan language is required to take part in a debate. One of the teachers said that it is about “the terminology and the concepts, everything should be in Tibetan” (teacher 3, group interview). The connection to the Tibetan language was clarified by one of the interviewed teachers (teacher 2) who did not use the argumentation technique. The reason for this was that she herself had never learnt Tibetan as a child since she went to an Indian school, and hindi was therefore her “school language”.

In order to show us how a debate is carried out, the teachers performed a debate on the topic “What is a noun”, and debated the topic in teams of two members (see image 3). The entire debate was conducted in Tibetan, plus certain English words such as “noun” and “chair”. Both this debate and other debates that we observed seemed to follow a set pattern of “give and take” among the team members, and certain phrases and specific movements were repeated frequently (see also Duek et al, 2018). It was evident that both phrases and movements were key parts of the argumentation technique itself. The participants standing up (the challengers) would always present their arguments in the same way, which included arm movements, hand clapping, and foot stomping.



Image 3. Teachers at a TCV school show how a debate is executed.

As mentioned above, not all the interviewed teachers had implemented the technique yet in their own teaching. The interviewed teachers of English did not consider the argumentation technique suitable for all types of English language teaching. One teacher said that using the technique to teach different grammatical “concepts” works well, but it is less useful for teaching “stories/narratives/storytelling/literature” what word was used in the interview? (teacher 3). This teacher had used the technique precisely to teach grammar, and found that the students acquired more knowledge through this method compared

to regular grammar teaching. However, many of the teachers called attention to the fact that the English subject does not include a great many key concepts that the students have to learn.<sup>2</sup>

The teachers we interviewed noted several times that they were beginners in relation to using this type of argumentation in teaching. The teachers felt that the students mastered the technique much better than they themselves did. According to the teachers, this could be seen both as an advantage and as a disadvantage. One of the advantages was that the teacher did not have to spend time instructing the students in relation to the technique itself. A disadvantage mentioned by the teachers was that they themselves did not feel proficient enough in the technique to be able to conduct teaching in a good way. For instance, the teacher who told us that she went to an Indian school as a child (teacher 2) said that, despite one month of skills development training, she did not feel that she had mastered the technique sufficiently to use it in her own teaching. She said: "I am the weakest [in this technique] because I have no background". The primary reason why teachers did not use the argumentation technique as a teaching method, however, was that they did not find the technique itself suitable for the subject content that they teach.

## **Discussion**

In this article, we have investigated how Tibetan argumentation technique can be implemented in teaching practice and how it can be understood in terms of critical literacy. Tibetan argumentation technique can be seen as a literacy practice which is largely context-bound, and the fact that the Tibetan language is closely associated with religion and religious philosophy must be kept in mind. The technique has been developed in a religious and philosophical context, and even though it is now implemented in secular schools there are many aspects that we cannot understand or even notice from our outsider perspective. We also contend that the implementation of this argumentation technique in schools is an act of policy (Ball, 1993) on part of teachers and school heads in relation to significant pressure from the Tibetan political and religious exile government. Using a Swedish (and Western) filter to analyse a phenomenon so firmly based in a very

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<sup>2</sup> We see this as yet another aspect that pinpoints differences in cultural traditions of thought between Western and Tibetan contexts.



different context is risky. Nevertheless, our results include aspects that we think may be relevant for argumentation-oriented teaching of different subjects in Swedish classrooms.

Our results show that the purpose of the teachers' use of argumentation technique is to provide students with a tool to express themselves independently and improve their analytical skills. The interviewed teachers say that the argumentation technique helps students develop in terms of language skills, understanding of the subject, and self-confidence. Access to this tool seems to entail access to forms of language and knowledge which increase the students' ability to express themselves independently, which in turn bestows them with greater power to influence their own future opportunities. Through this process, then, the students get *access* (Janks) to a language and to knowledge. When they practice their language ability in argumentation, they get access to tools which can be used to realise thinking through words and actions (*design*). Access to language and knowledge results in power which is connected in turn to social inclusion (Janks, 2010).

Through the various teaching practices that the teachers describe as related to Tibetan argumentation technique, students learn to critically examine and test different approaches, which means an opportunity for empowerment. They can boost their self-esteem, courage, and confidence, and this is also the Dalai Lama's main argument for incorporating the argumentation technique as a regular feature of Tibetan school. The students' identity as part of a minority is highlighted as significant. Tibetan as a minority language is not an obstacle in this context, but in fact a requirement.

Our results also show, however, that the teachers think that different types of subject content are more or less suitable for implementing the argumentation technique. There is a consensus among the teachers that it works well primarily for teaching focused on concepts, and for mathematics and the natural sciences. For teaching in English, the debate is useful for content related to grammar, but not for content focused on stories and literature. A possible conclusion might be that teaching which allows for a considerable level of interpretation cannot easily incorporate the argumentation technique which assumes the existence of a "correct" answer in its very form. At the same time, one of the teachers (teacher 3) pointed out that, since using the technique is optional in all school subjects, there is

also room for teachers who are interested to explore how it works. In this way, the technique will develop and be expanded into new subjects.

Thus, the teachers participating in the study see it as a challenge to implement the national policy that CTA and the Tibetan political and religious exile government have promoted. The teachers repeatedly state that they find it difficult to apply the argumentation technique in relation to “secular” areas. We contend that the teachers, despite what seems like significant external pressure when viewed from a Swedish perspective, assume an autonomous and pragmatic approach in relation to the policy, and our interpretation is that they are free to orchestrate their own teaching.

The thoughts about the Tibetan argumentation technique among the interviewed teachers, as well as their stagings of it in the classroom, can in many ways inspire teaching practices in the Swedish/Western context. We claim that the Tibetan argumentation technique can be seen as a literacy practice related to critical literacy – not least for teaching practices aimed to enhance thinking and understanding in relation to concepts and word comprehension. In a secular teaching context, it is possible to deviate from the strictly formalised debating format and extend the technique and topics of argumentation to encompass the understanding and interpretation of texts. The focus can be different types of texts from different contexts, for instance web-based texts like blogs and tweets or multi-modal representations that also include sound and images. From a critical literacy perspective, we can see the potential of developing students' knowledge of how to reflect upon the meaning of concepts and statements, and how to analyse the structure of arguments. We think it would be interesting in future research to explore how the technique could be developed in a Swedish teaching context. The argumentation technique could then be turned into a tool for in-depth analysis, a critical examination of claims, and an enhanced understanding of facts. This could also be a way to handle key issues related to values and democracy in teaching. We welcome future research on this topic.

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