

Developing Critical Thinking Skills for Effective Communication — Citizenship Education and an Experimental English Lesson —

Yuko KATO*

(Received February 3, 2009)

Promoting critical thinking skills is one of several important learning skills necessary for effective communication in English. These abilities are crucial in developing the students' wider views of the world, working with others, and finding out better ideas and solutions. This study describes some key characteristics of these skills and how they are introduced in Citizenship Education in England and in Scandinavian countries. In addition, an experimental English lesson aiming at developing critical thinking skills will be described briefly, followed by arguments for further development.

Key Words : Critical Thinking Skills, Effective Communication Skills, Citizenship Education, England, Scandinavian Countries, English Language Education

1. The Aim of Critical Thinking Skills

1.1 Critical Thinking and Its Background

Critical thinking is often used in a problem-solving process. It employs curious, skeptical, rational, logical, open-minded, fair, and intellectually flexible thinking^[1]. It helps us to look at various aspects of issues more objectively. The following table shows a model of critical thinking based on the idea of Suzuki^[2] :

Table 1 Critical thinking model

Steps	Contents
Step 1	Assessment: Finding and examining a problem
Step 2	Diagnosis: Collecting qualitative and quantitative data for problem-solving
Step 3	Planning: Considering solutions by brainstorming, discussion, critical observation. Sufficient reasoning and examples should be given.
Step 4:	Implementation: Implementing the plan developed in step 3
Step 5:	Evaluation: Examining step 4 and correcting it if needed.

* Human and Artificial Intelligent Systems Course, Graduate School of Engineering

Nowadays studies for developing critical thinking skills have become increasingly popular. Since critical thinking covers academic and non-academic areas such as personal, social, political and economic issues, critical thinking skills are broadly studied because of emerging world-wide issues such as war and peace, poverty and development, population growth and environmental issues. These issues should be considered beyond the concerns of nation states because if we are to solve these problems which affect the entire planet, international cooperation is needed. An increase of people moving around the world is creating a more multicultural society. Those current situations require us to look at various aspects of issues by putting ourselves in others' places.

In the following sub-sections, critical thinking skills in education are described in detail.

1.2 Education for Developing Critical Thinking Skills

One of the origins of critical thinking skills education is stated by American educator, J. Dewey (1859-1952). According to the philosophy of Dewey, known as "instrumentalism" or "pragmatism", the truth is used as a tool to solve problems. This concept had great influence amongst philosophers, psychologists and educationists at that time. In his educational theory, he emphasized the significance of a close relationship between schools and democratic

society^[3]. He stated that teachers should provide with experiences preparing students for a better contribution to society^[4].

He also stressed problem-solving-learning rather than traditional route-learning. In his learning style, teachers do not teach certain issues written in textbooks. Instead, they provide issues which pupils learn by themselves actively through various activities. Within those activities, pupils follow some steps: defining the problem; making a hypothesis; and selecting the best solution. This learning style is one of the origins of critical thinking skills. His experiential education, which became the basis of progressive education movement at that time, always stressed the need for preparing pupils to live in society.

Education which aims at developing critical thinking skills and promoting students to participate in social issues is also started in England in 2002. In the following sub-section the new Citizenship Education in England will be described briefly.

1.3 Citizenship Education

What pupils learn in elementary and secondary school education is not so different between England and Japan, but there are significant differences in teaching and learning styles. First, teachers can freely select teaching materials in England. Secondly, teaching styles are basically student-centered. Instead of traditional route-learning, studies through discussion, debate, group works are popular in most lessons. Students are always encouraged to express their opinions and participate in various activities. As a logical consequence, students' critical thinking skills are always employed and developed in the process of learning.

For instance, in the new subject of Citizenship Education, three main aims are noted in the National Curriculum guidance^[5] as shown in the following table:

Table 2 Aims of citizenship education

Developing students' knowledge and understanding about becoming informed citizens
Pupils should be taught about a number of areas including social, political and community issues.

Developing skills of enquiry and communication

Pupils should be taught to:

- think about topical political, spiritual, moral, social and cultural issues, problems and events by analysing information and its sources, including ICT based sources
- justify orally and in writing a personal opinion about such issues, problems or events
- contribute to group and to exploratory class discussions, and take part in debates

Developing skills of participation and responsible action

Pupils should be taught to:

- use their imagination to consider other people's experiences and be able to think about, express and explain views that are not their own
- negotiate, decide and take part responsibly in both school and community based activities
- reflect on the process of participating.

In order to follow the above aims, Citizenship Education highlights some key skills concerning critical thinking:

- Communication*, through researching, discussing and sharing information and ideas about a wide variety of social, political and community issues
- Problem solving*, through becoming involved in political and community issues
- Thinking skills*, through helping pupils to engage in social issues that require the use of reasoning, understanding and action through enquiry and evaluation^[6]

As shown in the above table, pupils' critical thinking skills are promoted throughout Citizenship Education in England. Currently Citizenship Education is introduced in schools with three approaches: 1) as a whole school approach, in which the entire school participates in events with local community; 2) with partial introduction in core subjects, such as Geography and English, and 3) as an independent subject.

There is another point worth noting that English and Citizenship Education are felt to have strong links. Since Citizenship Education believes there are strong

connection between power and language, a very close link in the learning skills between them is always found^[7]. Thus in practice of effective communication, both English and Citizenship Education emphasize developing critical thinking skills.

1.4 Education in Scandinavian Countries

Promoting critical thinking skills is also emphasized in education in Scandinavian countries. Education in these countries is currently researched by many educators, since they mark the higher scores in the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA).

In Finland, where students' mark are the highest scores in PISA, developing critical thinking as one of the key skills is implemented and it is now called the "Finland Method"^[8]. In this method, each pupil tries to summarize their opinions through communication with teachers. Teachers always promote pupils reasoning by encouraging them to express their opinions by questioning, thus it helps to expose the pupils' to wider ideas, logical thinking, expressions, critical thinking skills and effective communication skills in writing and speaking.

In Sweden, citizenship education is taught through developing knowledge about democracy; collecting and analyzing data; and evaluating the data comprehensively. Lessons employ a student-centered learning style, so pupils are always asked to have and show their opinions critically, and deepen their thoughts through discussion^[9].

Denmark implements lifelong learning aiming at understanding and living together with different people through more effective communication. They emphasize that more effective communication needs more critical thinking skills^[10].

Lastly, Consumer Education in Nordic countries also emphasizes developing critical thinking skills through collecting data, research through interviews, observation, and analyzing data and making a reports^[11]. As we can see here, participation in social issues is promoted through developing critical thinking skills in those countries.

We have looked at Citizenship Education in England and Scandinavian countries, and found that developing critical thinking skills is one of the key priorities. Since critical thinking skills can be found in many areas as already mentioned in the above, it is

easy to assume that it can be applied to English lessons as well. In fact, as already mentioned, English and Citizenship Education are felt to have strong links. In the following sections, the aims of English language education and a relationship between critical thinking and effective communication skills are described.

2 English Language Education and Critical Thinking

2.1 What Are Effective Communication Skills?

One of the most predominant aims of English education is to develop effective communication skills. In general, the aim of communication is an exchange of information, thoughts, feelings and inferences. Effective communication skills refer to a good communication with others delivered smoothly, skillfully, and confidently. They basically embrace all four skills necessary for competence in the English language: writing; speaking; reading and listening.

However, in effective communication, there are other important benefits besides merely acquiring the above four skills that allow us to communicate with other people. In terms of global communication, one preferable goal of effective communication is to discuss world-wide issues with people from other cultures in order to live together peacefully. Effective communication should greatly help us to understand each other more, and consequently avoid conflicts, especially with those who have different social, political and cultural backgrounds.

In terms of communication styles, there are mainly two styles: verbal and non-verbal communication styles. For those who have all good four skills of English language, there shouldn't be a problem in oral communication. However, it is said that around 66 to 93% of communication is delivered through non-verbal communication style^[12]. Non-verbal communication style varies in different languages, and it has a close link to cultural backgrounds^[13]. This suggests that profound cultural understanding of different communication styles and cultural backgrounds is surely beneficial in effective communication. For example, the way one moves their hand can mean good-bye in one country and hello in another country. In some countries, it is rude to burp in public, in others it is a

sign of contentment after a fine meal. However, it is quite difficult to always have sufficient knowledge of different countries since most people have few opportunities to know these different cultures deeply. This causes a communication gap, which can result in problems in communication with people of different cultural backgrounds, even though they have mastered all four of the skills, necessary for oral communication.

2.2 A Communication Gap among Different Cultures

As already mentioned, we should note that there exists a communication gap is concerned with understanding of differences in communication styles and the cultural background of the language in student learning. In various ways to divide communication styles, there is a method to categorize them according to each country or culture. The definition of high- and low- context cultures will be interesting to note.

Table 3 Characteristics of high- and low-context cultures^[14]

High-Context
Less verbally explicit communication, less written/formal information
More internalized understandings of what is communicated
Multiple cross-cutting ties and intersections with others
Long term relationships
Strong boundaries- who is accepted as belonging vs who is considered an "outsider"
Knowledge is situational, relational.
Decisions and activities focus around personal face-to-face relationships, often around a central person who has authority.
Low-Context
Rule oriented. More knowledge is codified, public, external, and accessible.
Sequencing, separation--of time, of space, of activities, of relationships
More interpersonal connections of shorter duration
Knowledge is more often transferable
Decisions and activities focus around what needs to be done, division of responsibilities.

As shown in table 3, communication is centered on the receiver of the message in high-context cultures. In communication, the sender of message does not send a lot of information, so the receiver has to presume and imagine the content of message they are interpreting. Since there is a lack of information being sent, the receiver needs to observe tiny difference in facial expression, tones of voice, and the intervals in the conversation. In this style, people must have a lot of knowledge of the manner of communication and the meaning of ulterior expressions other than words and their grammatical expressions. On the other hand, in low-context cultures, people send messages directly as much as possible. Receivers do not need to presume the content of messages, since enough information is delivered verbally and non-verbally. Some researchers try to categorize nations and ethnic groups according to the above theory, as shown in table 4.

Table 4 High-and low-context cultures^[15]

Ranking of Context Cultures from High to Low
Japan
Arab Countries
Greece
Spain
Italy
England
France
North America
Scandinavian Countries
German-speaking Countries

In the case of Japan, the communication style ranks among the highest of context cultures. According to this table, it is assumed that there is a high risk of a communication gap when Japanese communicate with Germanic-speaking countries.

Due to the prevalence of interpretative communications styles among different cultures, the consideration of effective communication skills, not only all four skills of language but also differences in communication styles should be understood in language education.

2.3 Critical Thinking Skills for Effective Communication

Nevertheless, it is important that the definition cited in the above is not always applied to every person. The hypothesis of high- and low-context cultures is based on a comparative and relative concept; and it does not always represent each person in each culture. It is possible that they are Japanese people who lack of internal understanding, and Germans who respect long term relationships. Believing that “Japanese are less talkative” is not a real understanding of each personality, but a prejudice.

When we talk with different people having different cultural backgrounds, cultural knowledge might be helpful in effective communication. However, we should observe and analyze each person critically in individual cases. Each person has a different personality, even though it might to a degree be influenced by cultural background.

In order to live together in a multicultural society, effective communication skills are important. Although we have some tips to overcome communication gaps as shown in the previous section, they are just a shallow reflection of one’s personality. For effective communication, therefore, critical thinking skills will be greatly helpful to understand each other more objectively and accurately.

In summary, effective communication skills require proficiency not only in all four language skills. They allow us to imagine ourselves in other people’s places and to understand different opinions. Moreover, critical analysis of the situation and skills to reach compromises and new agreements are required. Therefore, critical thinking skills are a prerequisite in language learning.

3 An Experimental Lesson for Developing Critical Thinking Skills

3.1 Aims and Methodology of an Experimental Lesson

Critical thinking skills are studied in many academic and non-academic areas. They are already introduced in English learning in higher education in Japan. There is a research society called Critical Thinking Across the Curriculum, and various experimental lessons are reported^[17]. In this section, an experimental lesson by the researcher will be

described and analyzed briefly.

The researcher teaches English to graduate students at the University of Fukui, and the aim of lesson is basically to develop students’ speaking skills. Students read engineering studies. Normally, they do not have a good opportunity to speak English in their daily lives. Nevertheless, their academic command of good English skills is quite high, since they have to go abroad and present their studies at international academic conferences. At the conferences, they need to speak fluently and answer questions skillfully.

However, speaking about their research topics in a lesson seems to be not within the capacity of most of the students. Since they are doing specialized research make a special study in various areas of engineering and use technical terms, the students in class cannot understand very well what the other students study. Therefore, in this lesson, a critical debate on general topics is promoted.

There are various textbooks aiming at developing speaking skills with debate. In this lesson, *Taking Sides*^[18] is chosen as a teaching material. It highlights sensitive but important issue in each unit, and readers can learn opposite opinions at the same time. In the lesson, students read background information of the topic, do some comprehensive exercises, and debate with partners by putting themselves in favor of or against an issue. In a debate, students often need to take a stand on the position which can be against their own opinion. This is a good opportunity to develop their critical thinking skills, since they must collect and understand opinions of which they are unaware.

For additional materials, the researcher provided three types of materials. First, lists of useful phrases to allow a deliver debate to run smoothly and tips for effective presentations of their opinions are prepared (see table 5). Secondly, additional reading materials on each topic are provided for a more effective debate. Those materials are obtained mainly from the Internet in order to supply the latest events about the topic (see table 6). Third, a practice paper for debate is distributed, as shown in table 7. This is to let students have some time for the preparation of the debate and summarizing their own opinions.

Table 5 Additional material 1:
useful expressions (Extracts)

討論の言い回し第1回・自分の主張を明確にする
 討論の際、最初に重要なのは「自分の主張は何なのか」ということです。ある議題について、自分はこう思う、としっかりとした意見を持った上で、英語の言い回しを身に付けましょう。
 ☆自分の主張に関する言い回し
I think ...
In my opinion, ...
I suppose
I believe
I would say, ...

討論の言い回し第3回・質問する・聞き返す
 相手の主張に対して賛否を述べる前に、相手の言っていることがわからなければ文字通り話になりません。今回は、相手の言っている内容を確認するための言い回しを紹介しましょう。
 ☆理解できなかった時
I am sorry, but I can't follow you.
Excuse me, I don't understand.
I don't understand what you mean by ~.

討論の言い回し第5回・新しい意見の提案をする
 相手の主張の弱点を追究し、自分の主張を通すことは、討論の勝敗に重要なことです。しかし討論の本来の目的は、相反する意見を出し合うことによって議題について深く考察し、新たな案を導き出すことにあるといつてよいでしょう。議論の後、提案を示すための言い回しは以下の通りです。
 ☆提案を出す
What about ...
I suggest ...
May I suggest ...?
I say we ...

Table 6 Additional material 2:
 reading materials for more information (an extract)

Japan gains key whaling victory
 Pro-whaling nations have won their first vote towards the resumption of commercial whaling for 20 years.
 The International Whaling Commission meeting backed a resolution calling for the eventual return of commercial whaling by a majority of just one vote.
 Japan said the outcome was "historic", but it does not mean a lifting of the 1986 ban - that would need support from three-quarters of the commission. Anti-whaling countries say they will challenge the decision.
 Conservation groups have expressed dismay, with the International Fund for Animal Welfare (Ifaw) saying anti-whaling nations needed to work harder to prevent the ban eventually being overturned.
 (source: <http://www.bbc.co.uk>)

Table 7 Additional material 3:
 preparation sheet for debate

<PROS and CONS>
Should Criminal Law be applied to juvenile murderers?

Yes	No

Using the above opinions, practice discussion with your partner.
Do you think Criminal Law should be applied to juvenile murderers?
 - Yes/No, because...
 - Well, I am not convinced by your argument, because ... Besides, what about the question of ...?
 - I am afraid but your opinion doesn't make sense to me. The important point is...
 - I think you are carrying your argument too far. Don't you think...?

<YOUR OPINION>
Do you think Criminal Law should be applied to juvenile murders? Give two reasons for your opinion, or write your own idea for this issue.

For assessment, a couple of students are required to debate a topic in front of the researcher. They are asked to debate on a chosen topic from the textbook for 10 minutes, and show their own opinions in 5 minutes. In addition to English speaking skills, students should use English phrases learnt during the lessons and show their critical debating skills. During the debate, the examiner marks an examination sheet which checks students' skills shown in table 8. For the assessment of critical thinking skills, the researcher rates them according to a scale from one to five, as shown in table 8. This rating takes into consideration of how well students express their opinions; how well they can justify their opinion about the issue; how well their opinions refer to quantitative data such as statistics; how well they reach their solutions for problems. However, in terms of validity and reliability of the evaluation, this assessment method can be rather subjective. In order to remove biased evaluation, the researcher rechecks the students' debate performance on recorded video tapes (see figure 1). If needed a script in English of each pair is dictated and their English levels and debating skills are examined.

Table 8 Examination sheet

200×年度 前期試験判定						
200×年×月 ×日・×日						
学科	時間 1 2 3 4 5 6					
名前						
points	5	4	3	2	1	
1. 発音						
2. 文法						
3. 語彙						
4. 言いまわしの適切さ						
5. 積極性・意見の内容						
6. サポート	有・ 回 / 無					

※ポイントを×4で計算。100点満点。
 ※サポート1回されるごとに4点減点。

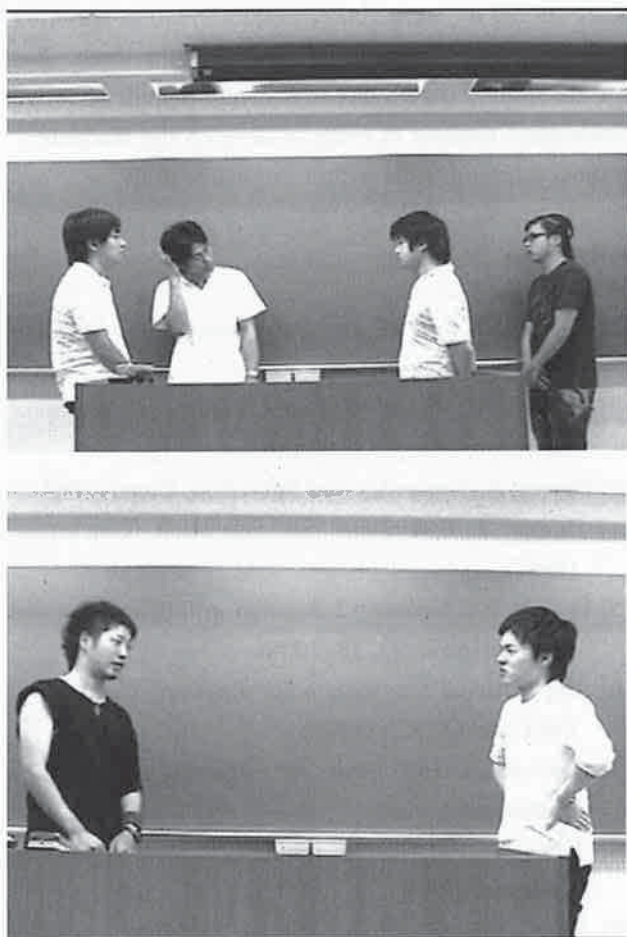


Figure 1 Recorded resources

3.2 Analysis of Experimental Lesson: Materials

A questionnaire was given to the students asking about their opinion concerning the content of the

lesson. The textbook used for this lesson seemed fine for most students. In addition, additional material shown in figure 3 seemed helpful to them.

For a few students, the English level in the materials seemed to be very easy. However, the researcher personally felt that the content of the topic in each unit requires a lot of knowledge, background information and consideration to argue even in native tongue. If the students level in English is not high enough, it will be difficult for them to deliver a debate because of a lack in speaking skills and vocabulary. Moreover, the gap between each student's English levels is quite large. Some students learnt English abroad; others came from technical high schools where they had less time for learning English. For some students to debate is easy, for others it is not. In this sense, it will be helpful for a teacher if he / she has some time to evaluate each person's English level carefully before choosing a textbook. According to the level of the class, teacher may choose the reading material from either the Internet or the textbook.

3.3 Evaluation

First of all, a double check by watching a video-recording of the lesson and reading an examination sheet should greatly support the validity and reliability of the evaluation. The first aim of this lesson is to develop speaking skills, so basically there should be no problem for this assessment method.

However, it is true that it is difficult to evaluate critical thinking skills with such an assessment method. For example, in the trial lesson, as students were told about their debating topic in advance, there were some who tried to make a script of the debate and memorize all the sentences. Although preparing a good debating script would be a good practice for developing critical thinking skills, the researcher feels the assessment method of such skills done in this manner needs more revision.

In a debate, the participant is meant to spontaneously create an argument and win the debate by force of reasoning and logic. Therefore, the scripts prepared by the students lack this essential element. Furthermore, such scripts fail to take into account of what their opponent might say, and consequently cannot counter attack their opponent's logic.

In order to evaluate students' critical thinking

skills, there should be more effective assessment methods. For instance, distributing a questionnaire about the topic in every lesson, the evaluation by a portfolio, the result from project work will be useful.

There is an example of assessment methods and what is being assessed in the following table 9. Since the aim of this lesson is to develop students' English speaking skills, all of the following assessment methods would not be used. There should be more arrangement for assessment methods for a more effective evaluation.

Table 9 Assessment examples of critical thinking in Citizenship Education in England^[18]

Assessment opportunities
<p>Peer-assessment Pupils take the role of 'critical friend', observing and recording contributions to a group activity</p>
<p>Self-assessment Pupils reflect on what they have learnt</p>
<p>Teacher assessment The teacher uses a written task to assess pupils' knowledge and understanding</p>
<p>Teacher observations The teacher can observe small group discussions.</p>
<p>Assessment activities aim to assess: Pupils' knowledge and understanding of the basic aspects of the issue Pupils' skills of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - using information to think critically about a topical issue - considering a range of opinions about the issue - expressing and explaining views about the issue - justifying their opinions about the issue, orally and in writing - working together in activities to make decisions and resolve disagreements - evaluating their participation and learning from activities.

In summary, teaching and learning styles based on developing critical thinking skills should be introduced more often in English language education. It is especially important to develop effective communication skills for young people who are going

to live in a multicultural society. In order to overcome the communication gap caused by different cultural backgrounds our students must have critical thinking skills. Nonetheless, the findings from this experimental lesson indicate that the teaching and assessment methods for developing critical thinking and speaking skills at the same time need more consideration.

4. Conclusion

In this paper, the background information of critical thinking skills and their implementation in Citizenship Education in England and Scandinavia countries are briefly shown. Introducing critical thinking for English education is significant because it could be the basis for effective communication in English. Nevertheless, an experimental English lesson shows there should be more consideration to assess speaking and critical thinking skills at the same time. For further study, I would like to consider a more effective assessment method in order to develop the students' critical thinking skills within English lessons.

References

- [1] Suzuki, K. et al: *Critical Thinking to Kyouiku*, Sekaishiso-sha, 7 (2006).
- [2] Suzuki, K. et al: *Critical Thinking to Kyouiku*, Sekaishiso-sha, 17-18 (2006).
- [3] Dewey, J: *Democracy and Education*, Dover (2004).
- [4] Dewey, J: *Experience and Education*, Touchstone (1997).
- [5] Davies, I: *Citizenship Education in England*, *Sagami Eibei Bungaku*, 23, 35 (2005).
- [6] The National Curriculum for England: *Citizenship*, DfEE and QCA, 7 (1999).
- [7] Davies, I: *100 ideas for Teaching Citizenship*, Continuum (2005).
- [8] Kitagawa, T: *Zusetu Finland Method Nyuumon*, Keizaikai (2006).
- [9] Arne Lindquist och Jan Wester: *Ditt Eget samhälle SAMS2*, Stockholm, Almqvist & Wiksell (1991).
- [10] Shimiz, M: *School for Life: Sei no tameno Gakko*, Shinhyoron (2002).
- [11] Kaija Kärpjoki: *The Objectives and Contents of and the Working Methods in Consumer Education for Teacher Training*, Nordic Council of Ministers, (2000).

- [12] Mehrabian, A: *Silent Messages*, Wadsworth (1971).
- [13] Lewis, R: *When Cultures Collide*, Nicholas Brealey International, (2006).
- [14] Culture at Work: *Communicating across Cultures: High and Low Context*: [http:// www. culture- at-work.com/highlow.html](http://www.culture-at-work.com/highlow.html), (2008)
- [15] Charles, P: Evidence-based Intercultural Communication, *Nakanishiya*, 56 (2006).
- [16] Suzuki, K. et al: *Critical Thinking to Kyouiku*, Sekaishiso-sha, (2006).
- [17] Motegi, H. et al: *Taking Sides: Critical Thinking for Speech, Discussion and Debate*, Kinsedo (2007).
- [18] Qualifications and Curriculum Authority: *Assessing Citizenship*, QCA, 44 (2006).

