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Assessing and Teaching Argumentation Literacy in Tertiary Education

Mika Hietanen

According to the Higher Education Ordinance in Sweden (HEO 1993:100), argument literacy is a general skill that university studies should strengthen (cf. §5). We understand argument literacy broadly as the ability to analyse and evaluate authentic argumentation in different contexts. Such skills are more or less useful in all academic disciplines as well as in societal life in general. Unfortunately, many people are bad arguers. For instance, people often do not know when they are expressing a standpoint based on arguments or when they are merely expressing an opinion.

Curricula often mention learning goals related to argument literacy. The rationale is laudable: university educated citizens should be prepared for democratic deliberative participation, which entails abilities regarding real-world arguments. However, such skills are not always clearly integrated into learning goals, nor do lecturers always know how to foster such skills.

The field of Rhetoric offers a broad set of instruments related to argumentation. These instruments span descriptive, evaluative, and productive aspects of argumentation and are a staple within studies in academic Rhetoric. I believe that some of these instruments can be put to use for university students in general, and their teachers. I have generated two tools for teachers in higher education: the *Argument Literacy in Context Test (ALCT)*, and the *Argument Literacy in Context Toolkit*. The former is used to indicate the starting level of the students' argumentation literacy, and the latter is intended for lecturers and instructors to use as an aid in order to integrate argument literacy supporting activities and demonstrations into their courses.

My approach to argument literacy builds on basics of argument theory relevant to the academic study of Rhetoric, namely: standpoints, arguments, the enthymeme, the epicheirema, and fallacies. These relate to some of the basics in current argument theory.