

Critical Thinking in Teacher Education

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Long before there was an Institute for Critical Thinking, faculty at Montclair State College worked with public school teachers for the development of critical thinking. The work of the Institute for the Advancement of Philosophy for Children, under the direction of Matthew Lipman, and Project THISTLE: Thinking Skills in Teaching and Learning, under the direction of Wendy Oxman, have demonstrated empirically that student success can be dramatically improved when their teachers involve students in critical thinking in the classroom. It is imperative that we incorporate instruction in the teaching of critical thinking in a comprehensive, systematic way in our undergraduate teacher education program. Now a number of factors have come together to make that goal a reality, including the funding provided through the Institute for Critical Thinking, responses of school districts to the recommendations of national panels, especially the Carnegie Forum on Education and the Economy, and less prescriptive requirements for teacher certification dictated by the State of New Jersey.

Beginning last fall my colleagues, Bob Pines and John Barell, and I began to plan the process by which the changes in the teacher education program could be accomplished. Last January we expanded the planning group to include representation from every School at MSC, as well as students in the program. At the center of the plan is a fundamental change in the way we select and prepare cooperating teachers, those teachers who work with our students in their own classrooms in the field experiences that are part of the program. Historically, the public schools have had primary responsibility for the selection of their teachers to work in these roles. Those choices have not always been made on the basis of the best criteria. This problem, and the very important role of the professional semester of student teaching in the shaping of future teachers, was identified by the Carnegie Forum on Education and the Economy and reported in "A Nation Prepared: Teachers for the Twenty-first Century," a report that Governor

Kean played a key role in shaping. Key recommendations in that report were that cooperating teachers be viewed as clinical adjunct faculty of the College and treated as partners in the decisions to be made about the preparation of teachers and that "clinical schools" be developed, schools that represent the best practice in the field and that are analogous to teaching hospitals. Working through the fall semester, Bob Pines identified a number of school districts that had the potential for providing the kinds of schools in which we wanted our students to work. Extensive meetings were held with school administrators, on and off campus, and invitations were extended to selected districts. After negotiating the conditions of participation, we invited the school districts of Cedar Grove, Hasbrouck Heights, Montclair, Morristown, and Wayne to join with us in this project as clinical school districts, and they have accepted the invitation. Teachers from the schools in these districts will be selected and invited to serve as clinical adjunct faculty and, beginning next year, will work with a pilot group of students. These clinical adjunct faculty will be distinguished from traditional cooperating teachers in several ways. They will be jointly selected by MSC and the school district, they will be paid \$300 for their services rather than the usual \$50, they will undergo several days of intensive in-service education on campus this summer, and they will participate in policy decisions regarding the program. During the next year, workshops will be provided for all teachers in the clinical school districts to develop general awareness of the concept of teaching for critical thinking and support for the project.

A second major element of the project, of course, is the way in which we prepare our own students. Critical thinking involves both dispositions and abilities. Every concept suggested by it—reason, reflection, inquiry, creativity, context, criteria—is full of implications for teaching and learning. For two days in late May, faculty who work in the teacher education program throughout MSC will meet at the Marlboro Inn
(*cont. on p. 8*)

(Teacher Education, from p. 7)

to consider the definition, a proposed philosophy for critical thinking in our program, and a set of goals. Out of that meeting will emerge the structure of a revised course for teacher education students and the beginning of plans to infuse critical thinking in all courses in our teacher education sequence. Our students will consider both the generic aspects of critical thinking and the discipline-specific aspects that will guide their conceptions of their academic work and their teaching. Later this spring a follow-up workshop will also be provided for faculty. The retreat itself is funded primarily by the School of Professional Studies. The follow-up workshop and the other work of the project is funded by the Institute for Critical Thinking.

Beginning next fall a pilot group of students will take the newly revised course to observe and assist in the classrooms of our clinical adjunct faculty. Next spring, these students will complete their student teaching during their professional semester under the guidance of the same clinical adjunct faculty. Thus, our students who have experienced classroom instruction in the teaching of critical thinking will be working with classroom teachers who have familiarity with critical thinking in school settings in which the faculty are aware of our goals.

Students in the teacher education program come from nearly every major at MSC. They are *your* students; only about 10% of their course work provides specific instruction in teaching. Over time, as the educational ideal of critical thinking is made a part of instruction in more courses across campus, the need to focus specifically on critical thinking in the teacher education program may well diminish. Until that is the case, we have an obligation to be certain that our students are prepared to think critically themselves and to pursue that goal with their future students.

In my role over the past two years as President of the New Jersey Association of Colleges for Teacher Education, and now as a member of the Board of Directors of the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education, I have become familiar with teacher education programs across the country. At Montclair State College, a plan is emerging that has already begun to attract national attention. As it is implemented, the plan promises to make our program even more distinctive and distinguished. We ask for your support and suggestions, and we look forward to reporting further on our progress.

(Mission, from p. 4)

first engage in their own inquiry. They must become more reflective about their own disciplines within the curriculum, and more knowledgeable about the nature of critical thinking, about the needs of students, and about the ways in which critical inquiry can be developed through collegiate instruction.

Faculty members currently engaged in the work of the Institute for Critical Thinking at

Montclair State College have begun this inquiry, critically examining our own work. Throughout the period of the Challenge Grant and beyond, additional faculty members will become involved in this process. We believe that it is only through this engagement as a faculty community that we will learn how to help our students become persons of "inquiring, creative, and disciplined" intelligence.