

Letters to the Editor

December 3, 1988

MONTCLAIR STATE COLLEGE
Institute for Critical Thinking
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Editor, March Issue of
INQUIRY: Critical Thinking
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To The Editor:

From: Henry Dmochowski

While contributions to *Inquiry* generally focus upon aspects of critical thinking within various academic contexts, these techniques can, of course, be utilized outside academe. At a Philadelphia area substance abuse rehabilitation facility, I had the opportunity to develop and implement critical thinking strategies tailored to the specific needs of patients whose drug and/or alcohol dependence had rendered their lives unmanageable. Patient histories at times revealed involvement with the criminal justice system, sexual and domestic abuse, suicidal ideation and health issues, among others.

Primary therapeutic intervention consisted of group and individual therapy with clients being referred to specialized adjunct groups. Each specialty group addressed a specific treatment area such as grief, sexuality, assertiveness, and stress management. Staff were assigned to facilitate these groups according to their professional interests and competencies. Although my staff position dealt with the coordination of vocational rehabilitation services, my philosophy background had prepared me to offer a new specialty group called 'Straight Thinking and Thinking Straight.' It was created using components taken from informal logic, the elements of Albert Ellis' 'Rational-Emotive Therapy,' and the everyday behaviors experienced in a therapeutic community.

Addiction is largely a disease of denial, but it also often sprouts hydra-like heads in the form of other defense mechanisms. While honesty and truthfulness are essential to the therapeutic process, it was hoped that exposure to critical thinking strategies would minimize the disease's tendency to distort or withhold the truth. One's honesty is influenced by the defenses one has and the degree of distortion one imposes on the universe by denial, projection, rationalization and the like. How much honesty a person is able to express is influenced by the level of self-esteem and security a person has. This enables one to be honest in varying degrees in seeing a situation as it really is. Dishonesty, conversely, is a defensive tactic that supports a fragile ego structure. By the use of non-threatening hypothetical episodes, informal fallacies were used to show cases of non-sequiters that might easily exemplify typical patterns within the therapeutic milieu.

While focusing upon the patients' own experiences and values and employing the distinctive jargon of the group, "Straight Thinking and Thinking Straight" avoided the pitfall of appearing overly academic and pedantic. Standard roadblocks to critical thinking that might appear on a syllabus such as 'resistance to

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Critical Thinking: Some Differences of Approach

Matthew Lipman

A casual survey of the contemporary scene, with regard to the critical thinking movement, is likely to turn up a number of differences—or even dichotomies—with regard to emphasis or approach. Here are some of them:

1. Disagreements over the nature of thinking

a. Those who see thinking as primarily *problem-solving* (sciences), *vs.* those who see thinking as primarily *problem-seeking* (philosophy), with stress on the problematic *vs.* the settled aspects of knowledge.

b. Approaches which see the *objective* of critical thinking as involving the *attainment of better-founded beliefs* (Ennis), *vs.* approaches which stress the *process* of critical inquiry, and hold that beliefs are *merely temporary terminations of inquiry*.

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change', 'hasty generalization', 'false cause', 'unwarranted assumptions', 'stereotyping' and 'face-saving' emphasized the patients' ability to create and direct their own lives. Non-threatening hypothetical cases demonstrated that humans were fallible. Fallacious reasoning is simply one of the foibles of the human condition. Manifesting them does not result in being subhuman and eliminating them does not result in being superhuman.

The seminar attempted to show that humans often kick up the dust around them and then complain that they cannot see. The clinical application of this was to internalize the truth that humans sometimes cause their own problems while at the same time possess the ability to cease doing so in the present and future. By applying critical thinking strategies to common psychological defense mechanisms, clients were led to realize that thinking uncritically was self-defeating. It kept them stuck where they wanted to be. Maintaining a repertoire of uncritical thinking supported defense mechanisms. As such they functioned more like bars imprisoning them than a wall keeping the enemy at a distance. Many patients left the seminar with the realization that they could live better by acquiring and practicing more critical thinking in their lives.

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c. Approaches which contend that critical and creative thinking are opposed, *vs.* approaches which see critical and creative thinking as merely two sides of the same coin.

d. Those who conceive the problem to be getting students to think, *vs.* those who concede that students already think, but need to think *better*.

e. Those who attempt to rank various thinking operations hierarchically (Bloom) *vs.* those who argue that emphasis on one operation rather than another can only be determined by a given context or situation.

f. Those who argue that the concrete must always be given priority over the abstract in teaching or thinking, *vs.* those who argue that thinking at any age involves the interpenetration of abstract and concrete, theory and practice, so that deferring the introduction of ideas to stimulate thinking can only lead to disastrous consequences.

2. Differences over the proper psychological approach

a. Those who attempt to understand childrens' cognitive development by studying what children *can't do without intervention* (Piagetians), *vs.* those who attempt to understand such development by studying what children *can do with intervention*

b. Those who stress the varieties of varieties of human intelligence (mathematical, musical, linguistic, etc.) and want to cultivate all varieties, *vs.* those who see language as central to education, and as indispensable even to development of such proficiencies as calculation. The stress here is therefore on linguistic thinking.

3. Disagreements over the role of philosophy

a. Those who emphasize *either* formal logic *or* informal logic *or* rhetoric, *vs.* those who try to achieve a balance among these.

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