

MONTCLAIR AT SONOMA

Wendy Oxman and Mark Weinstein

Montclair State was well-represented at the Twelfth Annual Conference on Critical Thinking and Educational Reform at Sonoma State University. Institute for Critical Thinking staff, Wendy Oxman and Mark Weinstein, were joined by Greg Waters, Deputy Provost, Elisa de la Roche, newly appointed in the Department of Curriculum and Teaching, Clinical Adjunct Faculty members Princess Towe, Raymond Dandridge, and Robert Davis, and Lourdes Zaragoza Mitchel, Principal, Harold A. Wilson Middle School for Professional Development, Newark.

The nine presentations offered by the Montclair team reflected many of the themes that have been at the focus of critical thinking at the Institute in recent years. Most noteworthy among these themes is our emphasis on collaboration with area schools and the renewal of teacher education.

Montclair State has for many years collaborated with the Newark Board of Education and the Newark Teachers' Union in an effort to improve the critical thinking abilities of Newark students by working with their teachers toward that end. Among the programs that have emphasized critical thinking are Project THISTLE: Thinking Skills in Teaching and Learning, which has involved more than 500 Newark teachers in an 18 graduate credit program over the past 12 years. Another program is the Critical Thinking in the Schools/Teacher Education project of the Institute for Critical Thinking; Newark teachers along with teachers from several other local school districts participate in workshop experiences to help them teach for critical thinking.

During 1991-92, a new partnership involving Montclair State, the Newark Board of Education and the Newark Teachers' Union began; this new venture was reported in *Inquiry* in September, 1991. The new Harold A. Wilson Middle School for Professional Development was to emphasize critical thinking in its classroom work with middle school youngsters and in its workshops for visiting teachers from other Newark schools.

As in many such programs, it took some time to get this project, including full staffing, off the ground. However, several series of critical thinking workshop sessions were given for visiting and resident teachers, who also had the opportunity to enroll in Project THISTLE, if they had not already done so. It was clear to teachers, from their responses at the end of the year, that critical thinking had been established as an educational goal at the school; however, it remains much less clear as to how to accomplish this formidable task, especially with students from this especially troubled urban neighborhood.

Critical Thinking and Madelyn Hunter's Instructional Theory into Practice

Prior to the opening of the new Professional Development school, Newark, like many other school districts, had involved their teachers in in-service training following Madelyn Hunter's Instructional Theory into Practice (ITIP). ITIP is drawn primarily from behavioral educational psychology. Reconciling the principles and practices of critical thinking with those of ITIP seemed to be needed before teachers could really begin to involve their students in critical thinking. Toward that end, a session was organized at the Conference at Sonoma involving a conversation among Drs. Lourdes Mitchel, Mark Weinstein and Wendy Oxman. This session addressed such issues as the goals and purposes of ITIP and critical thinking and the frames of reference, assumptions, units of analysis, and central ideas and concepts of each of these approaches to teaching. In principle, the two approaches did not seem irreconcilable; in principle, they addressed different aspects of classroom practice. Lively discussion following this session among members of the audience raised concern about ITIP implementation in various other districts that were seen as possible impediments to teaching for critical thinking, such as checklists used by supervisors to insure that all ITIP components are present during an observation. A continuation of this valuable conversation is planned.

Developing Case Studies in Teaching for Critical Thinking

It may not be possible to observe teaching for critical thinking by sitting in on a single class. Moreover, even if it were possible, it may not be possible to describe what one has seen in such a way that it helps another teacher learn to teach for critical thinking, integrating it in all its complexity within on-going units of instruction rather than presenting discrete, fragmented lessons. In a search for better ways to prepare teachers to teach for critical thinking, Wendy Oxman observed a connected curricular unit developed by one teacher, Elaine Lane, over a two week period. Each day, the overall goals, plans and adjustments, and the infusion of critical thinking principles into the unit—on the topic of prejudice—were discussed toward preparation of a case study for use by others.

At the Sonoma Conference, new models and research on the preparation of case studies in teaching for the purpose of teacher education were presented. Oxman and Lane discussed case studies as compelling narratives, and as individual "cases" of particular dilemmas of importance for teachers and prospective teachers to consider. The description of this particular case study developed jointly by the teacher and the faculty member from the Montclair Partnership at Harold A. Wilson was of special interest to members of the audience.

Critical Thinking and Developmental Theater in Education

As a special project within Project THISTLE: Thinking Skills in Teaching and Learning, former "THISTLERS," all Newark teachers, applied for the opportunity to participate during late spring and early summer, 1992, in a program designed to explore the curricular potential of creative dramatics in teaching for critical thinking, as well as to work on the preparation of an original theatrical production about a recent community event. Teachers were engaged, during this period, in both the analysis of social issues surrounding the event and in the creative process of developing, refining, and editing an original script about the event. Montclair State faculty from several departments and schools participated in this complex project. The Sonoma presentation, by Wendy Oxman, Elisa de la Roche, Robert Davis, Princess Towe, Ray Dandridge and Elaine Lane described the process. The audience also viewed a segment of a videotape of an improvised city council meeting that constituted a part of the overall preparation of the dramatic script. The ways in which the creative dramatics techniques function in teaching for critical thinking were explained. Further elaboration of this approach is described in the article by Elisa de la Roche, Critical Thinking and Improvisation, in this issue of *Inquiry*.

Multi-Culturalism, Stereotypes, and Critical Thinking: Breaking Down Barriers Among Urban and Rural High School Students

Another result of our work with teachers was a workshop with Robert Davis and Princess Towe that reported on the organization, implementation, and results of a student exchange program involving Malcolm X Shabazz High School, an urban school in Newark NJ, and Hunterdon Central Regional High School, a rural New Jersey school. This interactive workshop asked participants to share their own ideas and experiences with similar exchanges. It featured an audio-visual presentation that showed student activities and include students' reactions to the exchange program.

Goodlad's Teacher Education in a Democracy Project: Report From the Field

Montclair's work with teacher preparation has included our selection as one of eight sites, nation-wide to participate in John Goodlad's Center of Educational Renewal (see *Inquiry*, October 1991 for descriptions of this program). Greg Waters joined Wendy Oxman and Mark Weinstein in presenting the result of our first year's efforts in this network, and its connection with critical thinking. The presentation was focused around the following questions: What does it mean to prepare teachers who can in turn prepare students for life in a social and political democracy, to join the human conversation, and to be stewards of the schools? How can relations between colleges and schools be strengthened?

Critical Thinking and the Goals of Science Education

This presentation reflected Mark Weinstein's work with the New Jersey Department of Higher Education and six New Jersey colleges to renew teacher preparation in mathematics and sciences. He offered a model for general science literacy based on the analysis of critical thinking developed by Matthew Lipman (see *Inquiry*, February, 1991).

Rationalistic Hopes and Utopian Visions

This talk examined the possibility of rational political change and progressive educational reform in light of recent critiques of enlightenment rationalism. It explored recent developments in critical thinking in the hope of identifying and justifying a modest rationalism that includes social, historical and economic perspectives. The model strives to accommodate the need to increase access to political, social and economic power, common in post-Marxist critical thought, with the requirements of anti-relativist epistemology. This talk reflects work soon to be published in *Studies in Philosophy and Education* and Weinstein's review of Stanley Aronowitz and Henry Giroux's work published in *Inquiry*, December 1991.

Critical Thinking: The Great Debate

This talk reflected one of the central issues in critical thinking: general versus domain-specific thinking skills. Weinstein developed Richard Paul's model of critical thinking and subjected it to a deeper version of John McPeck's challenge to the field. It is an attempt to reconfigure the debate and expose it to fundamental philosophical issues that connect critical thinking with perennial issues in the philosophy of language and the recent anti-rationalist, post-modernist debate. This presentation reflected papers soon to be published in *Argumentation*, and *Educational Theory*.

Critical Thinking Across the College Curriculum: What Faculty Wants and Needs

This workshop offered the model for college faculty development that has been developed over the years at the Institute. Weinstein suggested that critical thinking advocates should focus more on the epistemological assumptions of the various fields, argumentation within disciplines, the construction of appropriate academic tasks, educational objectives within particular fields, issues of the canon, and the motivational aspects of learning that inhibit students' accepting critical thinking as an appropriate educational objective, and less on conceptions of critical thinking extrapolated from introductory level logic courses.

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