



NEWSLETTER

Foundation for Critical Thinking
www.criticalthinking.org

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For all of you who were able to attend this year's conference, we hope you found it rewarding and that you came away with deeper insights into how critical thinking can be cultivated in your classes and in your lives. Almost 400 people joined us this year from 11 countries. Every major department was represented from almost every teaching level. Plans are already underway for our spring workshops and next year's conference. Look for details in future newsletters and emails...

30th

International Conference
on Critical Thinking

Register now for the fall online course...

Fall Semester Registration is Open for the Online Critical Thinking Course for Those Who Teach - (CT700)

In affiliation with Sonoma State University, the Foundation for Critical Thinking is again offering an online educational experience where instructors can develop their skills in teaching students to think critically. Participants engage in critical dialogue with each other in the analysis and evaluation of current teaching practices and theory. At the end of the course, each participant has created, applied and tested various critical thinking lessons. This is an excellent learning opportunity for those interested in practical methods for facilitating the development of critical thinking skills and abilities in their classrooms. The course is taught by Foundation for Critical Thinking Fellow Dr. Enoch Hale. **The semester begins August 25th.** [See our website for further details.](#)

Critical Thinking in the News

Dr. Enoch Hale recently conducted a three-day professional development workshop at Aiken Technical College entitled *An Introduction to Critical Thinking Concepts, Instructional Strategies, and Assessment*. This workshop kicks off a long-term professional development program at Aiken Technical College.



According to the *Aiken Standard* (4/29/10), "Business and community leaders in Aiken County and surrounding areas have stressed the need for critical thinking skills in their new employees, and Aiken Technical College has responded. The college is embarking on a five-year plan to train faculty and introduce such skills to the classroom in all disciplines and technical fields. Faculty members Steve White, Bruce McCord and Jay Pitzer are serving as co-chairs on the project, which is headed by Dr. Gemma Frock, vice

president for academic affairs.

'We can teach the theory,' White said. 'But we did focus groups with students. Many lack the ability to apply the knowledge we're teaching to everyday situations in the work environment they will be going into. We want them to have the critical-thinking skills to take to the workplace, taking the theory and making it a real-world experience.'

This week ATC brought in Dr. Enoch Hale with the California-based Foundation for Critical Thinking for a series of professional development workshops for some administrators and faculty members. Over the next four years, said McCord, all instructors will go through a faculty academy devoted to critical thinking in the classroom."

Aiken Technical College is one of several institutions using our framework for critical thinking.

News from the Archives...by Linda Elder

In 1994, *The Long Term View: A Journal of Informed Opinion* (v.2, #1), focused its summer issue on the question: "Has American Education Forsaken Critical Thinking?" In the introduction to this volume, the Editor-in-Chief Lawrence R. Velvel, Dean of the Massachusetts School of Law says that his 34 years in the legal profession have lead him to believe "that legal training too often causes people to think of all the reasons why something should not be done, but of few or none of the reasons why something *should* be done." He goes on to say:

"I have begun to believe that much or all of higher education causes people to think critically in a *destructive* way only, to lose sight of the big picture because of assailed details, and to lack *well rounded* critical thinking...if truly internalized, current academic or legal training is deeply crippling to the ability to build and to the ability to think critically in a way that allows one to *construct* instead of merely intellectually destroy."

Velvel's concern dovetails with our view, at the Center and Foundation for Critical Thinking, that critical thinking is often used in the weak or sophistic sense, rather than the strong or fair-minded sense. Indeed the history of critical thinking reveals primarily the history of "good thinking" used to serve selfish or vested interests (rather than the good of all).

THE LONG TERM VIEW

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HAS AMERICAN EDUCATION FORSAKEN CRITICAL THINKING?

Richard Paul,
of California

Hugh Aaron,
of Maine

Diane F. Halpern,
of California

Adam Sweeting,
of Massachusetts

Teresa Brady,
of Pennsylvania

J. David Singer,
of Michigan

William A. Dorman,
of California

Matthew Lipman,
of New Jersey

Eleanor White,
of Tennessee

Edward N. Aquas,
of Massachusetts

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California State University

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Montclair State College

People Systems,
Saturn Corporation, Inc.

Director of The Gordon Institute,
Tufts University

MASSACHUSETTS SCHOOL OF LAW

at Andover

This volume of *The Long Term View* included articles from a number of critical thinking theoreticians in critical thinking in the early 1990s. In one article, Adam Sweeting addresses this issue: *Critical Warnings: Some Dangers Facing the Critical Thinking Movement*. Sweeting's fundamental argument is that establishing individual programs in critical thinking, rather than fostering it within the disciplines, will force it into the "academic margins." He says:

"If we are not careful, the teaching of critical thinking skills will become the responsibility of one university department, a prospect that is at odds with the very idea of a university. Rather than making complex thought the defining experience of an undergraduate's collegiate experience, courses in critical thinking could very well have the exact opposite effect. They could compartmentalize the very things that we should encourage from all the disciplines (p. 18)."

Sweeting discusses the importance of all courses and subjects cultivating critical thinking. But he goes further: For critical thinking to succeed, as I believe it can, contributions will have to come from all the established disciplines. Thinking, after all, transcends departmental divisions: one can think just as critically in a literature class as in an art history class. In the long run, it makes little difference if a student majors in biology, philosophy, or Egyptology. Very few people make a career out of their undergraduate major. What matters is that students learn how to confront complex questions...professors will have to direct their classes so that students do not become passive consumers of information. They must challenge students to defend their assertions, to question their assumptions, and to probe the weaknesses of conventional wisdom...Critical thinking is central to modern life. Let us make it central and not the province of but one part of the university (p. 21).

This same edition of *The Long Term View* includes an interview with Richard Paul, in which this overarching question is addressed: "What is Critical Thinking and Why is it Essential to Education?" In this interview Paul says:

...critical thinking is generally not being taught at all, in any form. When it is taught, it is taught generally in critical thinking classes that vary considerably in the manner in which they are taught...Students need to grasp the goals and objectives of critical thinking, just like any other subject. They need to identify and solve problems in it, gather and analyze information in it, engage themselves in making reasoned judgments with

respect to that information...All of this requires a great deal of effort. We live in a world of flagrant dogmatism and relativism, both radically lacking in intellectual discipline. It is hard to make a commitment to critical thinking, when so many around us are routinely ignoring it. And unfortunately, we have the problem of trying to do with critical thinking what we do with every important change; we try to make it simple, painless, instantaneous. As long as we treat reform in this way, we will continue to produce superficial changes.

The issues elaborated by Velvel, Sweeting and Paul overlap, and they are issues that have yet to be addressed in any significant way in education at any level. Schooling still too often encourages students to think in a destructive rather than constructive way, courses in critical thinking are still too often used as a substitute for bringing critical thinking into the life of educational institutions in a substantive way, and we are still too often taking a superficial approach to critical thinking in our "reform" efforts. All of this almost three decades later...

Laws to punish differences of opinion are as useless as they are monstrous. Differences of opinion on politics are denounced and punished as seditious, on religious topics as blasphemous, and on social questions as immoral and obscene. Yet the sedition, blasphemy, and immorality punished in one age are often found to be the accepted, and sometimes admired, political, religious, and social teaching of a more educated period. Heresies are the evidence of some attempt on the part of men to find opinions for themselves.

Charles Bradlaugh, circa 1866

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