Developing Critical Thinkers

Bob McCartney

Vancouver Community College
Developing Critical Thinkers

Developing a Professional Field of Practice – Quote 2 of 5

The final quote I have chosen to reflect upon is (Merriam and Brockett, 2007, p. 255) from the “Developing a Professional Field of Practice” (item 2 of 5). They state, “adult learning should be about developing critical thinkers who examine assumptions and the world in which they live.” (p. 255)

**Objective:** This quote implies educators should [must] develop critical thinkers when involved in adult learning. What caught my attention when I read the quote was some questions that came to my mind. “Do I really know what critical thinking is?” “Are all aspects of critical thinking desirable?” Later in this post, I will discuss these questions and investigate conflicts regarding critical thinking. First of all let us discuss this term. Dictionary.com defines critical thinking as: “the mental process of actively and skillfully conceptualizing, applying, analyzing, synthesizing, and evaluating information to reach an answer or conclusion.” A second meaning is “disciplined thinking that is clear, rational, open minded, and informed by evidence.” The Urban Dictionary defines critical thinking as: “To be able to think outside of the box. To understand both sides of the argument fully, regardless of which side you [believe correct], to give you a full perspective of the whole dispute, hence enabling intelligent thinking.” Based on the above definitions, it appears that critical thinking is a desirable attribute to learn, not only for yourself but also to help develop in others.

**Reflective:** After reading the quote (Merriam and Brockett, 2007 p. 255) and with further research, I realized that most educators believe we should instruct adults in critical
Developing critical thinkers. The reason that I asked myself the question, “Do I really know what critical thinking is,” was based on conflicts in discussions I observed regarding faith verses skepticism, or believer verses atheist and agnostic. There are numerous discussions about if there is a God or no God. Some of these conversations have been quite emotional. After reflecting on some of the dialogues I have been exposed to on this subject, I have concluded that sometimes an individual’s own personal biases (including my own) can overtake a discussion. These deliberations become filled with intense emotion and begin to show critical thinking may no longer be a part of the process.

Interpretive: The Foundation for Critical Thinking (FCT) is supported by a number of University consortia. The FCT promotes essential change in education and society through the cultivation of fair-minded critical thinking. The term “fair-minded” is what jumped out at me. I have sensed that some people criticize believers (like me) because they feel we do not use critical thinking skills. They assume critical thinkers cannot believe in God, so if believers are really critical thinkers then something is wrong. They think so highly of the process of critical thinking and since they themselves do not believe, they conclude believers are not using the skills properly. I disagree with their assumption. My belief and thought process about God is based on personal experiences that are clear, rational, fair-minded and informed by evidence.

I did not believe in God. I thought I was a product of evolution and was responsible to live out my life as best I could. It is very hard for human beings to offer unconditional love. I came across a group of people at the University of British Columbia (UBC), who seemed to have a genuine love for people. They told me the source of their love came from Jesus. I did not believe them, but wanted to find out what it really was about them that I found so compelling. Eventually, I tried an experiment that I did not tell anyone else about. If God existed then maybe
he would communicate with us. Words attributed to him said, “You will seek me and find me; when you seek me with all your heart,” (Jeremiah 29:13 Revised Standard Version). At the time I was pretty hard hearted, however late one night I talked to God. Even though I felt silly reaching out to a God I did not believe existed, I really did seek with all my heart. Nothing happened. The experiment was finished and I concluded “There is no God”! As it turns out this was not the end of the story. Twenty four hours later, God answered in a supernatural way, even when I was no longer looking for him. He grabbed my attention while I was watching TV. It felt like a surge of electrical energy knocking me down in a university dorm room. Three huge surges jolted me three times in less than a minute. About twenty minutes later I found out that two of the people from the Christian group were praying for me, at the exact same moment, that God would show me he was alive. I knew these people were praying for me because of their body language and one of them was still seated with a Bible on his lap. There was no medical explanations for the surges. There did not appear to be any new electrical equipment in the near vicinity. I considered the fact that I was not looking for God at the time, so I was not using my mind to create something that did not really happen. Looking at all of this evidence I concluded “God is alive”. Since that day I have seen hundreds of demonstrations of his love, answers to prayer and even some creative miracles effecting people right before my eyes. All of these experiences are evidence to me, in understanding that God and the supernatural exist.

**Decisional:** At the beginning of this journal entry, I asked two questions; “Do I really know what critical thinking is?” “Are all aspects of critical thinking desirable?” I now understand through definitions and examples what critical thinking is. I need to pay special attention to the aspect of being fair-mined, to counteract my own biases, when critical thinking skills are being exercised. I have concluded that all aspects of critical thinking are desirable,
especially with regard to being open-minded. I will use John Bean’s 2011 book called, “Engaging Ideas: The Professor's Guide to Integrating Writing, Critical Thinking, and Active Learning in the Classroom” for inspiration on activities and exercises to help my learners to develop critical thinking skills. I plan to look for new critical thinking resources every few months for my future classes and workshops. I have decided I will join many of my fellow educators, who are committed to help develop critical thinking skills in adult learners.
References


