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from the editors

We believe that our readers will be interested to learn that the California State University System has recently approved a critical thinking component as a requirement for graduation. We reproduce here the relevant portion of Executive Order No. 338:

Instruction in critical thinking is to be designed to achieve an understanding of the relationship of logic to language, which should lead to the ability to analyze, criticize, and advocate ideas, to reason inductively and deductively, to reach factual or judgemental conclusions based on sound inferences drawn from unambiguous statements of knowledge or belief. The minimal competence to be expected at the successful completion of instruction in critical thinking should be the ability to distinguish fact from judgment, belief from knowledge, and skills in elementary inductive and deductive processes, including an understanding of the formal and informal fallacies of language and thought.

For our part, we applaud this initiative. First, it is a concerted attempt to address a real need. The reasoning

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ability of undergraduates in at least the U.S. and Canada is generally alarmingly deficient. Whatever the causes—television, insufficient reading, poor primary or high school curricula or teaching, (heaven forbid, poor university teaching!), etcetera, etcetera—the phenomenon is notable. Second, we see it as a potentially valuable boost to democratic involvement in public affairs. The ideal of democracy requires a critical, reasoning citizenry, and the requisite abilities and dispositions have to be learned. A third possible benefit is related: teaching critical thinking may cultivate the practice of argumentation—a flower that seems to be wilting these days. Fourth, separate critical thinking courses provide a fine opportunity for teaching students to integrate and apply what they are learning in specialized disciplines.

In addition, the California directive holds out hope for incidental benefits for informal logic. Under its constraint, the concept of critical thinking and its cognates may be more likely to come under critical scrutiny themselves. Also, we can hope, the teaching of critical thinking will result in more thinking about the teaching of critical thinking. (We realize this may be a case of hope springing eternal against all odds: does teaching philosophy lead to thinking about teaching philosophy? All too rarely.

Our first reaction to Executive Order No. 338 is thus one of pretty enthusiastic welcome. We do intend to monitor its execution, and reserve the right to comment on that in the future.

Right away we want to register reservations about some of the specific details of the Executive Order. For instance, we are not altogether enthusiastic about its suggestion that inductive and deductive argument exhaust the domain of argumentative reasoning. More generally, we believe that its authors seem to have missed out on what has been happening in informal logic for over a dozen years. The wording of the Executive Order seems to come from what we dubbed elsewhere (cf., **Informal Logic**, Ch. 1) the “global approach”: a bit of philosophy of language and fallacy to start, a section of deductive logic, and then a section on inductive logic and scientific method (Copi’s **Introduction to Logic** is the paradigm). Still, the wording of the Executive Order does not preclude the more recently-introduced practices of analyzing arguments in a natural language, tree diagramming for logical structure, the use of richer critical principles than deductive validity and truth of premises, and so on.

In sum, we suggest to our readers that what is happening in California is well worth watching (what else is new?). In turn, we invite our California readers to tell their colleagues involved in teaching critical thinking courses about ILN and to pass along our invitation to use ILN as one medium for exchanging ideas and information. We all stand to benefit from the discussion of the many issues involved in teaching critical thinking that are found to arise in the wake of this development.

In this issue

We are happy to welcome four new contributors to this issue of ILN: Richard Paul, J.E. Bickenbach, Mark Weinstein and Jonathan Adler.



Teaching Critical Thinking in the “Strong” Sense: A Focus On Self-Deception, World Views, and a Dialectical Mode of Analysis

Richard Paul
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“...no abstract or analytic point exists out of all connection with historical, personal thought: ...every thought belongs, not just somewhere, but to someone, and is at home in a context of other thoughts, a context which is not purely formally prescribed. Thoughts...are something to be known and understood in these concrete terms.”

Isaiah Berlin, *Concepts and Categories*, xii.

I. The “Weak” Sense: Dangers and Pitfalls.

To teach a course in critical thinking is to make important, and for most of us frustrating, decisions about what to include and exclude, what to conceive as one’s fundamental goals and what secondary, and how to tie all of what one includes into a coherent relationship to one’s goals. There has been considerable and important debate on the value of a “symbolic” versus a “non-symbolic” approach, as well as debate on the appropriate definition and classification of fallacies, appropriate analysis of extended and non-extended arguments, and so forth. There has been little discussion, and as far as I know, virtually no debate, on how to avoid the fundamental “dangers” in teaching such a course: that of “sophistry”, on the one hand (the student unwittingly learns to use critical concepts and techniques to maintain his most deep-seated prejudices and irrational habits of thought by