

Critical Thinking According to the Scholars

Eileen Gambriel, Professor of Social Welfare at the University of California at Berkeley, has invested a significant amount of her career writing about critical thinking and teaching critical thinking skills to social workers and others in the helping professions. She describes critical thinking as, quite simply, the careful examination and evaluation of beliefs and actions, and emphasizes that it focuses as much on the process of reasoning as on the product of that reasoning.

Diane Halpern, Professor of Psychology at Claremont McKenna College, has published widely on how best to infuse critical thinking across all curricular areas, and her working definition of critical thinking stresses the use of cognitive skills or strategies that result in a process that is purposeful, reasoned, and goal directed and considers not only conclusions and decisions but the factors that were included in drawing conclusion or making decisions.

Robert Ennis, Professor of Philosophy of Education at the University of Illinois, has long been interested in the conceptualization and assessment of critical thinking, and he has concluded that critical thinking involves reasonable reflective thinking that is focused on deciding what to believe and do and, on some level, includes the correct assessing of statements – and by implication, we might add, actions and beliefs.

John McPeck, Professor of Education at the University of Western Ontario, in his book *Critical Thinking and Education*, noted rather succinctly that critical thinking required, “reflective skepticism.”

Peter Facione, a former college professor and administrator who currently consults on strategic planning and leadership decision making, in his 2011 monograph, *Think Critically*, defines critical thinking as a kind of purposeful, reflective judgment that results in a reasoned and fair consideration of evidence, conceptualizations, methods, and standards that ultimately frame beliefs and actions.

Richard Paul and **Linda Elder** of the Center for Critical Thinking in their book, *The Miniature Guide to Critical Thinking: Concepts and Tools*, note that critical thinkers must be, “clear as to the purpose at hand and the question at issue...question information, conclusions, and points, of view...strive to be clear, accurate, precise, and relevant...seek to think beneath the surface, to be logical and fair...[and] apply these skills to their reading and writing as well as to their speaking and listening.”

Daniel Willingham, Professor of Psychology at the University of Virginia, in his interestingly titled essay, “Critical Thinking: Why Is It So Hard to Teach?”, offers this definition of the critical thinkers as, “seeing both sides of an issue, being open to new evidence that disconfirms young ideas, reasoning dispassionately, demanding that claims be backed by evidence, deducing and inferring conclusions from available facts, [and] solving problems.”