12.9: The Critical Thinking Process

In the critical thinking process, many factors are taken into consideration before a decision is made. Critical thinking involves using logical, emotional, and ethical criteria as one strives to make up his or her mind. Decisions are reached only after a careful examination of all available data, and are made as a result of considering all of the alternatives and their various consequences.

Can critical thinking be taught? From the work of Dr. Edward de Bono and others like Richard Paul the answer appears to be yes.

Professor of Social Ecology, Peter Scharf, is concerned about the lack of a school curriculum that teaches thinking. Scharf says,

“To be a professional of any kind in the next 20 years, or even an enlightened citizen, will require a complicated set of thinking skills, more than reading and writing. The world isn’t as filtered as it once was. Kids are thinking. What we’re trying to do is have them do it well.”

No one approach is the best, and no one approach works well all of the time. Different presidents have been different types of thinkers. In 1962, when President Kennedy was faced with Soviet missiles in Cuba, he brought together all of his personal advisors, cabinet members, and military personnel to advise him on what course of action ought to be taken by the United States. Kennedy solicited suggestions from numerous advisors who advocated many different positions, from doing nothing to eliminating the missiles with a nuclear strike.

Patterson and Zarefsky write in their book, CONTEMPORARY DEBATE,

“President Kennedy recognized the invaluable benefits derived from a clash of ideas in reaching a decision. Faced with the Cuban missile crisis, Kennedy rejected the decision-making methods of chance, impulse, or
authoritarian action. Instead, he insisted in a high-level debate among experts before making a final decision about the action to take.”

The term we use for examining our thinking is metacognition or the metacognitive process, which simply means “thinking about our thinking.” By stepping back and looking at our level of intellectual and emotional intelligence and seeing how we think, we can improve our thinking.

The good news is that we can become smarter and smarter. We can improve our critical thinking ability and our argumentative skills. This allows us to be in better control of our lives.

Reference

1. J. W. Patterson, and David Zarefsky. Contemporary Debate