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Engaging Critical Thinking: Teaching Christian University Students How To Improve Their Thinking

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GEORGE FOX UNIVERSITY

ENGAGING CRITICAL THINKING:
TEACHING CHRISTIAN UNIVERSITY STUDENTS
HOW TO IMPROVE THEIR THINKING

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO
THE FACULTY OF GEORGE FOX UNIVERSITY
IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

BY

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PORTLAND, OREGON

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CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

DMin Dissertation

This is to certify that the DMin Dissertation of

Cedrick Valrie

has been approved by
the Dissertation Committee on February 17, 2016
for the degree of Doctor of Ministry in Leadership and Global Perspectives.

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The Scripture quotations contained herein are taken from the NIV Version of the Bible unless otherwise noted.

For my grandmother, Elnora

“Son, use your head for more than a hat rack.”

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS ix

ABSTRACT..... xi

INTRODUCTION 1

 Story 1

 Argument and Problem 1

CHAPTER ONE 4

A FRAMEWORK FOR CRITICAL THINKING 4

 A Brief History of Critical Thinking..... 4

 Critical Thinking in Twenty-First Century USA 8

 Leading Experts Define Critical Thinking..... 13

 Incorrect Assumptions about Critical Thinking..... 16

 Stephen Brookfield’s Steps for Thinking Critically..... 17

 Identifying Types of Assumptions 18

 Conclusion..... 22

CHAPTER TWO 24

CRITICAL THINKING AND THE BIBLE 24

 Introduction 24

 Old Testament Emphasis..... 25

 Critical Thinking from Scripture’s Wisest Earthly King 25

 New Testament Emphasis 29

The Careful Examination of the Bereans	29
Paul’s Admonishment to Timothy to Think Critically.....	31
Critical Thinking through the Lens of Hermeneutics	37
The Role of the Holy Spirit in Interpretation	39
General Principles for Interpreting the Scriptures	41
Step One: Gain the Biblical Writer’s Perspective	41
Step Two: Interpret in the Historical Context of the Passage	42
Step Three: Distinguish Plain Speech from Figurative Language	43
Step Four: Use Other Scriptures to Help Interpret.....	44
Step Five: Separate Interpretation from Application	46
Step Six: Distinguish between the Old and New Covenants	47
Step Seven: Consider the Type of Literature	49
Correcting a Misunderstanding of <i>Critical</i> Using the Greek Language	50
An Example from Ephesians.....	52
Assumptions about Biblical Submission.....	52
Conclusion.....	56
CHAPTER THREE	57
AWARENESS OF THE PRESENT STATE & INSPIRATION FOR THE FUTURE	
.....	57
Introduction	57
Academic Pursuit versus Social Interest.....	57
Barriers that Prevent Critical Thinking.....	61
Encouraging Student Buy-in	63
The Value of Vision.....	64
The Big Picture: Stages of Development as a Thinker	68

Thinking Deeply about the Academic Calling.....	70
Inspiration from Martin Luther on the Value of Deciphering Truth.....	73
Advantages of Critical Thinking.....	78
The Educated Christian.....	81
Expectations for Academic Challenge.....	83
Bloom’s Taxonomy and the Sequencing of Christian Higher Education Courses.....	84
Conclusion.....	88
CHAPTER FOUR.....	90
APPLYING CRITICAL THINKING IN THE CLASSROOM.....	90
Introduction.....	90
Increasing Student Engagement through Educationally Purposeful Activities.....	90
Learning Styles.....	92
A Framework for Making Applications.....	95
Critical Thinking Examples and Activities for the Classroom.....	96
Linking Information.....	96
Thinking Critically Using Photography.....	97
Removing Imaginary Limitations and Utilizing Available Resources.....	98
A Visual Exercise.....	99
Force Field Analysis.....	100
Integrating Technology into Critical Thinking.....	101
Brookfield’s Scenario Analysis Exercise.....	102
The MBTI and the Zig Zag Process for Problem Solving.....	103
The Importance of Questions.....	105
An Example of Poor Thinking.....	106
Considering Multiple Causes.....	106
Studying Abroad.....	108
Hearing Their Stories.....	108
Brain Teasers: Stories with Holes.....	109

Conclusion.....	111
CHAPTER FIVE	113
CRITICAL THINKING AT WORK IN SOCIETY	113
Introduction.....	113
The Critical Thinking Process Applied to Social Change	114
Leading Social Change during the Civil Rights Movement	116
Critical Thinking and the Long Road to Resolve.....	120
Promoting Dignity and the Hope of Jesus in a Depressing Ghetto.....	122
Social Challenges Currently Plaguing Urban American Youth At Large	126
Fatherlessness in Urban America.....	128
The Lack of Education in Urban Black Churches and Their Communities	129
A Paradigm for Leading Modern Day Social Change	129
Analyzing Urban Public Education Today	132
Challenge One: Addressing Underachievers and Dropouts.....	134
Challenge Two: Updating Urban School Facilities.....	135
Challenge Three: Understanding Life Outside of the Urban Classroom	137
Challenge Four: Developing Culturally Relevant Teaching Methods.....	139
A Proposal for Enhanced Urban Education Experiences.....	141
Reversing the Cycle through Improved Thinking and Action.....	142
The Message for University Students	144
CONCLUSION	146
Bibliography	151

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ABSTRACT

Students in Christian university classrooms across North America largely lack the valuable skill of critical thinking. Such a skill can often appear as a daunting and lofty task that is reserved for scholars or those with a high IQ. Both faculty and students may feel uncertain of what it is, thereby avoiding it altogether. The primary intent of this dissertation study is to explore and explain critical thinking concepts that faculty can use to help their students improve their thinking about academics and about life. This study is secondarily designed to address the institution's role in encouraging this process. It presents a workable definition of critical thinking that is useful in the undergraduate classroom and across the disciplines for enhancing student and faculty engagement during their time of dialogue and interaction as a learning community. It explains the process of critical thinking and seeks to awaken the desire to practice it regularly, both inside and outside of the classroom. Ultimately, critical thinking is intended to be a learned life skill that students will implement for a lifetime.

Chapter one provides a survey of some of the primary historical influences of the critical thinking movement in higher education in the United States. It features Stephen Brookfield's process of critical thinking and targets the initial step and life skill of identifying one's assumptions in order to examine their validity. Chapter two explains critical thinking in light of interpreting ideas, particularly those found in Scripture. It employs the use of layered thinking through the hermeneutical process and discusses a select number of biblical passages. Chapter three moves on to identify barriers that prevent students from thinking critically and expresses the value of university professors working to create buy-in by communicating a vision for its use and exploring

its advantages. Chapter four then offers examples of critical thinking exercises for students to use in the classroom so that they can engage in both learning and doing. Lastly, chapter five reveals critical thinking at work in society by exploring past and present efforts toward social change. It sheds light on the challenging variables that can be involved when seeking to implement an informed action plan.

INTRODUCTION

Story

Twelve weeks removed from being a high school senior, a young man named Alex mentally rehearses the importance his parents place on earning a college diploma. He is entering his second week as a freshman at a Christian liberal arts university and is uncertain about which major he should choose. During the class introductions in his College Life course, Alex expresses his desire to do better in college than he did in high school, noting that he was often guilty of daydreaming and not investing much effort beyond trying to recall basic information needed for exams. He notes that his parents mandated that he attend a Christian university, especially since they were paying. After asking around on social media and speaking with friends about good options for Christian colleges, Alex chose to apply to this school and was accepted. He closes his remarks by stating that he is looking forward to the professor, Dr. Huey, teaching him something new this semester, especially since he has learned that Dr. Huey is a favorite on campus.

Argument and Problem

It is imperative that undergraduate students in Christian higher education embrace the shift toward being taught *how* to think rather than relying on being told *what* to think.¹ This requires a better understanding of the progression from lower level thinking skills to higher level thinking skills, as explained in measurement tools such as Bloom's

¹ Jason Braithwaite, "Critical Thinking, Logic and Reason: A Practical Guide for Students and Academics," accessed November 8, 2015, http://www.academia.edu/316239/Critical_Thinking_Logic_and_Reason_A_Practical_Guide_for_Students_and_Academics.

Taxonomy.² (This will be discussed in more detail in chapter three). Both students and faculty can benefit from this understanding. Students demonstrate a general use of their lower level thinking skills through actions such as readily regurgitating in class what they have heard in passing, whether on social media or around the restaurant table, and attempting to contribute information about a matter without actually investigating it or reading about it for themselves. Additionally, when presented with a difficult topic in class, rather than taking the time and investing the required effort to weigh the many angles or layers of the issue(s) at hand, students may simply prefer to have the professor do the thinking for them by supplying the various how's and why's. They may struggle with higher levels of thinking that engage in synthesis and evaluation.

This practice of thinking at lower levels can also carry over into their faith, as students may thoughtlessly adopt the belief of their parents without having a personal encounter or experience with Jesus Christ. They risk developing a second-hand theology that may or may not be based on Scripture or a true relationship with God. Many students appear to fall into the trap of tolerance and acceptance of their own assumptions and the assumptions of others without questioning the validity of those assumptions.

However, when students learn how to think, and more specifically, when they develop the skills necessary for critical thinking, they will be better prepared to consider multiple perspectives within and beyond the university setting, making them stronger

² See <https://www.teachervision.com/teaching-methods/curriculum-planning/2171.html?detoured=1>.

theorists and practitioners.³ Critical thinking can also help them to be more grounded in their faith, as they are challenged to consider why they believe what they believe.

³ Linda Elder and Richard Paul, "Critical Thinking: Teaching Students How to Study and Learn (Part I)," *Journal of Developmental Education* 26, no. 1 (Fall 2003): 36.

CHAPTER ONE

A FRAMEWORK FOR CRITICAL THINKING

A Brief History of Critical Thinking

In the last thirty years, critical thinking has undergone a major reintroduction throughout higher education and has become a featured topic within the context of Christianity.⁴ It may appear to be a new trend for some, but as history would have it, critical thinking dates back to the fourth and fifth centuries. Much, if not all, of the formation of critical thinking was developed by Greek philosophers. For instance, Socrates famously argued that “[T]he unexamined life is not worth living.”⁵ This compulsion toward self-examination “reflected a philosophical framework that was ready to question the assumptions that undergird one’s life.”⁶ Exploring one’s assumptions is a vital element to critical thinking; these notions are the kinetic energy behind the words and deeds of an individual towards others. However, one must keep in mind that assumptions are typically wrong and can have damaging effects.

Building on the work of Socrates, Aristotle then addressed the need for behavior based on high moral standards and virtues, noting that this would stem out of the process

⁴ Ben Witherington, “Critical Thinking—What Is It and Why Is It Important to Believers?” *The Bible and Culture*, accessed November 8, 2015, <http://www.patheos.com/blogs/bibleandculture/2012/04/29/critical-thinking-what-is-it-and-why-is-it-important-to-believers/>.

⁵ David Leibowitz, *The Ironic Defense of Socrates Plato’s Apology* (Cambridge, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2010), <http://www.dawsonera.com/depp/reader/protected/external/AbstractView/S9780511912733>.

⁶ D. Christopher Florence, “A History of Critical Thinking as an Educational Goal in Graduate Theological Schools,” *Christian Higher Education* 13, no. 5 (October 20, 2014): 353, doi:10.1080/15363759.2014.949164.

of learning and education. He maintained the profound conviction that a state or a country was responsible for educating its people. The goal of such education should have a rational principle that included action, aim, and the act of becoming a better thinker.⁷ This would serve to develop both quality individuals and a stronger culture at large. Much of Aristotle's thought process would be disseminated during the culture of the medieval period.

During the thirteenth century, theologian and philosopher, Thomas Aquinas set out on uncharted territory by fusing together the disciplines of faith and reason that had been cultivated by his extensive training in Paris.⁸ It has been said the Dominican Monk's most highlighted contribution to the framework and movement of critical thinking is the *Summa Theologica*. In this work, Aquinas boldly voices why the work of philosophy is significant to the process of general knowledge, as well as to the Christian faith.

In addition to learning how to further proclaim their faith, some of his readers claim that they attained basic critical thinking skills by simply reading and studying the structure of the *Summa Theologica*. Within this structure they identified the many skills he demonstrated, such as "asking questions, listing objections, and carefully replying to those objections."⁹ Through building on Aristotle's philosophy, Aquinas helped his students to develop reasoning skills that enabled them to think critically as they identified and refuted false teachings against their faith. Aquinas' influence carries over to today as philosophers and theologians invoke Aquinas' work for apologetic purposes as they

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Michael J. Anthony and Warren S. Benson, *Exploring the History and Philosophy of Christian Education: Principles for the 21st Century* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2011), 98.

⁹ Florence, 354.

defend their faith in Jesus Christ. Numerous tributes to his teachings can be found in the marketplace, local churches, the arts, classrooms, courtrooms and in the science of faith at large.

The sixteenth century English philosopher Francis Bacon also contributed to the area of critical thinking. His aim was to challenge people to “base their understanding of information on knowledge and truth, not on the unquestioned instructions of others, but on the unbiased surveillance of facts and nature.”¹⁰ Bacon explains that when people are left to rely on their own senses about a situation, failure is impendent. Such thinking is often faulty. In an effort to combat this defective approach of merely using the personal attitudes and natural senses to resolve matters, Bacon appealed to the educators of his time. It was his hope that they would cultivate and teach their students to impact the masses by embracing and embodying “the doctrine of a more pure reason, and the true helps of the intellectual faculties, so as to raise and enlarge the powers of the mind; and, as far as the condition as humanity allows, to fit it to conquer the difficulties and obscurities of nature.”¹¹ Bacon is remembered for coining the famous phrase *scientia potenyia est*, which is translated to mean “knowledge is power.”¹² He sought to develop better thought processes, known as “pure reason”, and these efforts would become the groundwork for the great philosophers who came after him.¹³

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Kevin L. Flores et al., “Deficient Critical Thinking Skills among College Graduates: Implications for Leadership,” *Educational Philosophy & Theory* 44, no. 2 (March 2012): 212, doi:10.1111/j.1469-5812.2010.00672.x.

¹³ Florence; Ibid.

In the seventeenth century, the French philosopher Rene Descartes explained in his writings that he had come to recognize that his conduct and life had become a mere representation of others' instructions that he valued. He proposed that people have some sort of inbuilt personal compass that speaks to reason and that guides them into an understanding of truth.¹⁴ Driven by the emboldened thought that people should be able to tell the difference between truth and error, Descartes expressed the idea that individuals had the right to choose who or what would instruct them in the discriminatory process of deciphering right and wrong, truth and error. Furthermore, he encouraged people to be careful in accepting words as truth when they personally knew nothing about the matter or had not witnessed anything relating to the issue. Still in the same vein, Descartes was adamant that people should think critically about everything, without bias and prejudice.¹⁵

It should also be noted that as the influence of critical thinking gained the attention of English philosophers, theologians also wrestled with it. They challenged both the leadership and the lay people to analyze and think critically about truth, behavior, and personal preferences. Martin Luther's impact by way of the Protestant Reformation during the sixteenth century will be elaborated upon in a later chapter of this thesis. Luther clearly sought to help the Church exercise critical thinking in an effort to empower the minds of the people and to speak the truth to those in power.

At this point, the explosive story of critical thinking in the late twentieth century must be told. In the early nineteen-eighties, a special task force was commissioned by the

¹⁴ Renee Descartes, *Discourse on Method*, 3rd ed. (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 1998), 6.

¹⁵ Florence; *Ibid.*

United States Secretary of Education to report on the quality of education in America. Less than three years later, the National Commission on Excellence in Education presented its report to the secretary with grim findings that are often discussed today. The report stated that numerous high school and college age students did not possess the necessary skills to draw conclusions from written material and that the majority of this group were ineffective at writing persuasive essays.¹⁶ Of course, educators throughout the country then made it their priority to help their students attain critical thinking skills in order to reverse ignorance and to ignite a generation to become less passive and more passionate about their education. Given the emphasis on the need to challenge, teach, and thrust students into critical thinking during that period, it is now time to weigh in on the current state of affairs regarding critical thinking among college age students in the United States of America (USA) in the twenty-first century.

Critical Thinking in Twenty-First Century USA

As a whole, it is believed that the majority of Americans, regardless of education, race, wealth, economic status, religion, or political party, are devoid of critical thinking. The problem is that “much of [their] thinking, left to itself, is biased, distorted, partial, uninformed, down-right prejudiced or simply shoddy.”¹⁷ Even so, one author argues that “never has there been a time in history requiring that an individual be equipped with critical thinking skills more than now. The biggest problem that America is facing today

¹⁶ “A Nation at Risk,” Evaluative Reports; Policy Guidance, accessed January 15, 2016, <https://www2.ed.gov/pubs/NatAtRisk/risk.html>.

¹⁷ Richard Paul, *Miniature Guide to Critical Thinking Concepts & Tools*, 7th ed. (Foundation for Critical Thinking, 2014), 2.

is the inability of the vast majority of the citizenry to think critically.”¹⁸ Yet, it has been said that the United States has more educated people today than at any time in the past.¹⁹ If this is the case, then it appears that the critical thinking challenge facing America is even grimmer than the 1983 education report revealed. Furthermore, it demonstrates that the lack of critical thinking is not just a higher education issue; it is an epidemic running rampant throughout the populace. Higher education is simply the recipient of the majority of the spotlight in this instance.

According to Richard Paul, a recognized authority on critical thinking, “Research demonstrates that, contrary to popular faculty belief, critical thinking is not fostered in the typical²⁰ college classroom.”²¹ In his article, “The State of Critical Thinking Today: The Need for a Substantive Concept of Critical Thinking,” he states verbatim that the primary challenges and foci for why critical thinking is not happening in classrooms are that “[m]ost college faculty don’t realize that they lack a substantive concept of critical thinking, believe that they sufficiently understand it, and assume they are already

¹⁸ Patricia Dixon, “Articles: Americans Are Void of Critical Thinking Skills,” accessed November 10, 2015, http://www.americanthinker.com/articles/2015/10/americans_are_void_of_critical_thinking_skills.html.

¹⁹ “Digest of Education Statistics, 2007-2008,” Table 8, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, accessed November 11, 2015, http://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d07/tables/dt07_008.asp?referrer=list

²⁰ “In a meta-analysis of the literature on teaching effectiveness in higher education, Lion Gardiner, in conjunction with ERIC Clearinghouse on Higher Education (1995) documented the following disturbing patterns: “Faculty aspire to develop students’ thinking skills, but research consistently shows that in practice we tend to aim at facts and concepts in the disciplines, at the lowest cognitive levels, rather than development of intellect or values.” Numerous studies of college classrooms reveal that, rather than actively involving our students in learning, we lecture, even though lectures are not nearly as effective as other means for developing cognitive skills... Gardiner’s summary of the research coincides with the results of a large study [by Richard Paul] of 38 public colleges and universities and 28 private ones.” Richard Paul, “The State of Critical Thinking Today,” accessed November 9, 2015, <http://www.criticalthinking.org/pages/the-state-of-critical-thinking-today/523>.

²¹ Ibid.

teaching students it.”²² In addition, “Lecture, rote memorization, and (largely ineffective) short-term study habits are still the norm in college instruction and learning today.”²³ Paul is basically saying that faculty often teach content that is not necessarily aligned with the type of thinking that will engage students to be active participants who take ownership of the information at hand. This is not to say that the lack of critical thinking that students demonstrate is the sole responsibility of the instructors. Students have a role to play as well. Karl Bailey reports that “many students [60%, 30 out of 50 students]²⁴ perceive faith-learning integration to be the work of teachers and institution, suggesting that for learners, integration is a passive experience.”²⁵ Particularly in a Christian higher education institution, as students gain valuable knowledge from their studies, they should seek to take it a step further in determining how it fits into their worldview as a Christ follower.

[Arthur] Holmes (1994) takes the view that students already have a worldview as a framework that carries whatever conceptions, beliefs, and values they have when they enter college, but it becomes the responsibility of the Christian school and of Christian educators to help to shape that worldview Christianly. With a Christian-shaped worldview, students are able to unify thought and find meaning for their lives, and it provides guidance as they set priorities and take action.²⁶

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Terry Anne Lawrence, Larry D. Burton, and Constance C. Nwosu, “Refocusing on the Learning in ‘Integration of Faith and Learning,’” *Journal of Research on Christian Education* 14, no. 1 (March 1, 2005): 42, doi:10.1080/10656210509484979.

²⁵ Karl G. D. Bailey, “Faith-Learning Integration, Critical Thinking Skills, and Student Development in Christian Education,” *Journal of Research on Christian Education* 21, no. 2 (May 2012): 153, doi:10.1080/10656219.2012.698831.

²⁶ Lawrence, et al, *ibid.*, 30-31.

Thus speaking, critical thinking should take place on multiple levels, thus causing the student to think from different angles.

Critical thinking is also vital as a life skill for students today as they need to be able to distinguish truth from error in society at large. Mass media is often on trial for “abandoning its responsibility of reporting the facts in exchange for distracting, distorting, propagandizing, and protecting.”²⁷ When students engage critical thinking, they refuse to accept everything at face value. They are able to practice in-depth thinking and better decipher the truth so that they can make knowledgeable decisions. Such in-depth thinking can benefit them in multiple areas of life, including their academic studies and course assignments. One blogger put it in these terms,

As students develop their critical-thinking skills through completion of their coursework, they’ll also be better prepared to evaluate the information (or misinformation) presented in the television programs they watch and the publications that they read on a regular basis. However, learning to discern the meaning behind the message can take practice, especially if they’re used to viewing this material simply as *entertainment*.²⁸

In other words, the benefits of engaging in critical thinking spill over into multiple areas of life. As they develop and practice this skill and intentionally engage in higher levels of thinking, they move in the direction of learning to analyze what they hear and see on a regular basis. (See Bloom’s Taxonomy.) It remains the responsibility of the

²⁷ Dixon, *ibid.*

²⁸ Tami Strang, “Critical Thinking and Mass Media,” *The Cengage Learning Blog*, accessed November 10, 2015, <http://blog.cengage.com/critical-thinking-and-mass-media/>.

student to develop an attitude to improve upon his or her thinking skills to assist them in college and beyond.

A student's attitude about critical thinking makes the difference in how seriously he or she pursues it and this attitude impacts the level of depth that will be acquired. Vincent Ruggiero notes four empowering attitudes that can help anyone become a better critical thinker. The four attitudes are as follows:

- 1) There is always room for improvement.
- 2) Criticism, including self-criticism, has value.
- 3) Effort is the key to success.
- 4) Other people are as important as I am.²⁹

With the first attitude, the student must keep in mind that humanity is imperfect, including himself or herself, and that no matter how good one is at something, improvement is possible. It requires that the student be honest in admitting that there is always more to be understood about the issue at hand. For this to happen, particularly in today's culture, Ruggiero points out that it is imperative that students do not confuse *improving* with *approving*, as such a distortion drifts the student away from becoming a critical thinker and towards closed mindedness, egocentrism, and sociocentrism.³⁰

In the second attitude, Ruggiero speaks to the unrealistic nature of students who think that everyone should agree with them and simply praise them for whatever they do and say. Opportunities abound for receiving suggestions on how to do something better or even the right way. Accepting and receiving criticism, in a sense, leads to easier

²⁹ Vincent Ruggiero, *Becoming a Critical Thinker*, 6th ed.(Boston: Cengage Learning, 2008), 78–80.

³⁰ Paul, 3.

learning. He suggests that individuals who are unable to handle criticism will have difficulty when learning in general. Yet, there are times when a student is overly tough on himself or herself about a sports event, an assignment, or a missed opportunity, rehearsing what he or she could have done better. No matter the type of criticism, whether generated by others or self, students benefit from acknowledging what is valid and discarding the exaggerations.

In the third attitude, Ruggiero speaks frankly about students of critical thinking possessing a desire and an effort. Talent may afford students various opportunities, but it will not necessarily keep opportunities alive. In other words, students should set and meet goals and take initiative when no one else is looking. No matter the task or the challenge, seeing the impossible become a reality requires hard work.

In the fourth and final attitude, he presents the notion that critical thinkers cannot be self-serving. In the midst of society insisting on rights and responsibilities of people, there is a sense of entitlement, leaving some blind to the fact that they do not treat others the way they expect to be treated. Within the realm of critical thinking, there is something to be said for people who realize that others are just as important as they are, even in the midst of profound difference. The connecting point begins by acknowledging another's humanity.

Given the current state of critical thinking in higher education classrooms across America, it is helpful to now clearly define critical thinking.

Leading Experts Define Critical Thinking

It is imperative that Christian university students take an active role in their faith and learning as they progress in their collegiate experience. Choosing to engage in critical

thinking implies a decision to intentionally improve upon the way they think.³¹ This is critical thinking in the simplest of terms. As students work to improve their thoughts, they learn to embrace knowledge in more practical and complex ways.³² For a more in-depth examination of critical thinking, it is appropriate to explore what some leading philosophers in education have to say.

Critical thinking and its development process are constantly evolving. A precise definition of critical thinking depends on the context and varies among philosophers, and there are many differences in thought among the leading experts.

Mark Mason, an associate professor in philosophy and educational studies, believes that critical thinking is driven by moral imperatives which lead to a more human world. “As moral values are introduced into the milieu of critical thinking, one is forced to be reflective through introspection.”³³ Robert Ennis, a professor of education, teaches that the gist of critical thinking is fashioned around a particular set of skills, as well as what to believe and do.³⁴ Founder of the Foundation for Critical Thinking, Richard Paul speaks to critical thinking as “the ability and disposition to critically evaluate beliefs, their underlying assumptions, and the worldviews in which they are embedded.”³⁵ Educator John McPeck stands firm on the fact that critical thinking is “domain specific”³⁶

³¹ Ruggiero, 78–80.

³² Flores et al., 214.

³³ Ibid., 215.

³⁴ Mark Mason, *Critical Thinking and Learning* (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 2, <http://site.ebrary.com/lib/alltitles/docDetail.action?docID=10300958>.

³⁵ Bessie Mitsikopoulou, *Rethinking Online Education: Media, Ideologies, and Identities* (Routledge, 2015), 4.

³⁶ Flores et al., 215.

and is directly related to a particular discipline and knowing it inside and out, mastering the craft of the vocation at hand.³⁷ Martin Davis, an associate professor and principal research fellow in the Melbourne Graduate School of Education, highlights the dichotomous approach of generalists and specifists. “Generalists hold that critical thinking is a universal skill, while specifists believe that in order to think critically one must possess deep knowledge of a specific subject area.”³⁸ Nicholas Burbules, a philosopher and professor, drives critical thinking with dialogue and more of a pedagogical approach by encouraging his students to think differently and to be open to the unexpected. Dialogue is key so that learners can connect personally to the new ideas or alternative perspectives that are introduced to them by way of conversational knowledge.³⁹ Professor of philosophy, Jane Roland Martin “emphasizes the dispositions associated with critical thinking [and] suggests that it is motivated by and founded in moral perspectives and particular values.”⁴⁰ Placing emphasis on the Delphi Method, Senior Researcher, Peter Facione “understands critical thinking to be purposeful, self-regulatory judgement which results in interpretation, analysis, evaluation, and inference, as well as explanation of the evidential, conceptual, methodological, criteriological, or contextual considerations upon which that judgement is based.”⁴¹

³⁷ Mason; Ibid.

³⁸ Flores et al.; Ibid.

³⁹ Nicholas C. Burbules, *Dialogue in Teaching: Theory and Practice* (New York: Teachers College Pr, 1993), 8.

⁴⁰ Mason, 2.

⁴¹ Peter A. Facione, *Critical Thinking: What It Is and Why It Counts* (Millbrae, CA: California Academic Press, 2006), 21.

Critical thinking experts Linda Elder and Richard Paul say that ultimately, the goal of critical thinking “is to foster lifelong learning and the traditional ideal of a liberally educated mind: a mind that questions, probes, and masters a variety of forms of knowledge through command of itself, intellectual perseverance, and the tools of learning.”⁴²

Although critical thinking may appear to be an insurmountable feat in the midst of all of these diverse and well-informed opinions, each philosophy makes a valuable contribution. To better appreciate what they bring to the field of academics, one must also understand some of the misrepresented underpinnings that make critical thinking seem more abstract, unattainable or too lofty for Christian college students to grasp and utilize during their collegiate experience and beyond.

Incorrect Assumptions about Critical Thinking

Stephen Brookfield provides a helpful list of what critical thinking is not:

1. Critical thinking is not equated to or solely suited for individuals with status in society or college degrees.
2. It is not so much about logic, solving problems, or being creative although one or all aspects are sometimes present when thinking critically.
3. It is not specific to those who have studied philosophy.
4. It is not thinking negatively about something or someone.

⁴² Paul, 36.

5. Critical thinking is not gained at a certain age, nor is it correlated to measures of intelligence through assessments.⁴³

How, then, can critical thinking be effectively explained to Christian college students? Is there a meaningful process that can be transferred and understood in a traditional or online classroom, as well as in daily life? Brookfield, an expert known both internationally and domestically for encouraging and motivating students and professors to invest in the critical thinking process, offers a four-step process for understanding the layers of complexity that encompass critical thinking. His work will be used in this document to develop a learning outcome model for making the concept of critical thinking approachable for both professors and students who may feel uneasy about the topic and are unsure of where to begin.

Stephen Brookfield's Steps for Thinking Critically

“Critical thinking is a process of hunting assumptions – discovering what assumptions [individuals and groups] hold, and then checking to see how much sense those assumptions make,” claims Brookfield.⁴⁴ It is motivated by values and prizes evidence. He explains that the best way to understand critical thinking is to engage in four primary steps.

1. Identify the assumptions that frame [one's] thinking and determine [his or her] actions.
2. Check out the degree to which these assumptions are accurate and valid.

⁴³ Stephen Brookfield, *Teaching for Critical Thinking: Tools and Techniques to Help Students Question Their Assumptions*, 1st edition (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2011), 11.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 24.

3. Look at [one's] ideas and decisions (intellectual, organizational, and personal) from several different perspectives.
4. On the basis of all of this, take informed action.⁴⁵

These informed actions constitute “actions that are grounded in evidence, can be explained to others, and stand a good chance of achieving the results [one] desire[s].⁴⁶

Identifying Types of Assumptions

In all critical thinking, students are seeking to discover the assumptions they lean toward, whether they were told to believe a specific thing or perhaps ideas they concluded on their own. Filtering assumptions is the core process of thinking critically, allowing the students to further discern and judge those assumptions for accuracy and validity. They can then weigh how those ideas are incorporated into their life.⁴⁷ By intentionally reflecting on their assumptions, students can be assured that they are engaging in the process of critical thinking.

What are assumptions? “Assumptions are guides to truth embedded in our mental outlooks. They are the daily rules that frame how we make decisions and take action ... Assumptions inform our judgments about whether or not someone is telling the truth, or how to recognize when [one is] being manipulated.”⁴⁸ Each day can bring about a new twist or turn in the way that people understand and enter into life with others. Both verbal and non-verbal communication can stimulate an assumption. For instance, harsh tones of

⁴⁵ Ibid., 1.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 24.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 7.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

voice and questionable glances can fill the recipient's mind with negative assumptions about that person and cause them to quickly become defensive. People tend to think about what might be meant through such communication from one to another. While there are times when experience and routine can give direction concerning an assumption, one must recognize that assumptions are not a guarantee that a situation is being correctly handled or that an outcome will occur exactly as one assumed. On the other hand, people can also naively assume the best, being quick to trust others as a result of an internal judgment that society is generally filled with good people. This can play out in good and bad ways. Awareness and understanding of personal assumptions about a given situation or context is extremely important to pinpoint and uncover.

Brookfield has assigned categories for the various types of assumptions that people make: paradigmatic, prescriptive, and causal. Reflecting on these specific types of assumptions makes student better critical thinkers.

To begin with, *paradigmatic assumptions* are the deeply held assumptions that frame the whole way one looks at the world, which, often times, is layered. Brookfield goes on to say that these are the hardest to identify as they directly relate to how people categorically arrange the world, calling them the “facts as [one knows] them to be true.”⁴⁹ They are often perceived as reality rather than as assumptions. They encompass one's worldview. Recognizing paradigmatic assumptions often requires life to be proven otherwise to both expose and allow the individual to deal with these deep influences. When the truth is finally revealed, the results can be life changing. For example, Brookfield relates this level of assumptions to a personal excerpt from his own life by

⁴⁹ Ibid., 17.

sharing about a time where he was gripped by depression. He had formed numerous opinions about depression and how to treat it and was confident in his thoughts about the matter, unwilling to second guess them. He shares that for a long time he was unable to pinpoint why such an episode of depression was living within him when, after all, depression is not synonymous with maleness. He subconsciously believed that depression was not something a strong, intelligent man should struggle with. At best, depression in his eyes was a sign of weakness and was only granted allowance for people enduring grave external circumstance such a divorce or the death of a family member.⁵⁰ Why then would he be experiencing this abnormal emotion? After many questions about his own assumptions, doctor visits, and a failed attempt at reasoning his condition away, Brookfield learned that he had a chemical imbalance in his brain. An internal physical circumstance was causing his heavy bout of depression. Once he understood the cause of his depression, it opened him up to the treatment options and to psychiatric help that he had denied for years. His decisions changed when his paradigmatic assumptions were challenged and altered.

Second, there are *prescriptive assumptions*. They are one's ideas about what "ought to be happening."⁵¹ These are notions people have about the "desirable ways of thinking or acting [and] can usually be recognized by their inclusion of the word *should*."⁵² Students enter their professors' classrooms with prescriptive assumptions about what they should gain from taking their courses. Professors also have prescriptive

⁵⁰ Ibid., 3.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Ibid.

assumptions about their students and what the students ought to be investing to gain the most out of their courses. Prescriptive assumptions can also apply to relationships between husbands and wives, voters and elections, and parents and children. They entertain supposed obligations and impose expectations on behavior, whether realistic or unrealistic. They flow out of one's paradigmatic assumptions. Brookfield offers this example to professors: "If you believe that adults are self-directed learners then you assume that the best teaching is that which encourages students to take control over designing, conducting, and evaluating their own learning."⁵³

Thirdly, there are *causal assumptions* which directly relate to one's understanding of cause and effect. "If [one does] A, then B will happen."⁵⁴ These are assumptions one makes about why something happened in the past and what potential outcomes might happen in the future. Generally speaking, causal assumptions are the easiest to identify of the three mentioned in this section. Brookfield estimates that "maybe 80% of assumptions covered in any one conversation, class, course, or workshop will be causal ones."⁵⁵ A classroom example of a causal assumption would be a professor's prediction that if he or she models a specific behavior, then his or her students will be more inclined to replicate it. For instance, should conflict arise between a teacher and student, how that teacher handles the conversation and actions towards the student will project a model for students to use in similar settings when trying to work through a conflict. An incorrect causal assumption that students might have is that if they invest good effort into an

⁵³ Ibid., 18.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 19.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

assignment, then they should receive a good grade. However, this causal assumption is not always true. Students will also learn that they need to master the material to gain the best grade in a course.

Conclusion

Assumptions abound and are part of the human nature. However, while assumptions seem reasonable in the moment, they are often inaccurate and feed into the native egocentrism and sociocentrism common to humanity.⁵⁶ Being able to identify these assumptions is a first step in the process of learning to think critically. In a time when college students enter the Christian higher education setting with the paradigmatic or prescriptive assumption that they should be taught what to think instead of how to think, Stephen Brookfield's process of critical thinking is vital for transforming this understanding.

The development of critical thinking skills among learners and primarily students in Christian higher education should be a common educational goal across both the graduate and especially undergraduate attendees. Critical thinking is a valuable skill for students to develop so that they can move beyond a passive learning experience and start thinking in layers that are based on experience, research, and the craft or occupation that they are seeking to better understand. By becoming this type of critical thinker and improving upon what they currently know, students can provide for others, as well as themselves, a better quality of life and a more meaningful interaction inside and outside of the classroom.

⁵⁶ Paul, 2.

CHAPTER TWO

CRITICAL THINKING AND THE BIBLE

Introduction

Both skeptics of the Christian faith and committed disciples of Jesus Christ make assumptions about the meaning of Scripture. Those who question the existence of a solid, correct interpretation of Scripture, Christian or non-Christian, have been known to make the following comments: “That is just your interpretation.’ ‘The Bible can be made to say anything you want.’ ‘You can’t really understand the Bible. It is full of contradictions.’... ‘This is what the Bible means to me.’”⁵⁷ Generally speaking, the level of accuracy for assumed meanings of Scripture varies greatly. The task of correctly interpreting Scripture can be complex, even for mature Christians. Critical thinking skills can aid the interpreter in “rightly dividing the word of truth” (2 Timothy 2:15 KJV).

This chapter features Scriptures from the Old and New Testaments that emphasize the value of critical thinking and encourage its use. This chapter also highlights methods for Christian university students to employ critical thinking when interpreting the Bible in order to avoid proof texting in favor of grasping the timeless truth(s) presented in a passage. They can then more accurately apply it to their context. An example from Ephesians is provided at the end of the chapter.

⁵⁷ James Davis, “Lesson 6: Principles of Biblical Interpretation,” *Bible.org*, accessed December 27, 2015, <https://bible.org/seriespage/lesson-6-principles-biblical-interpretation>.

Old Testament Emphasis

Critical Thinking from Scripture's Wisest Earthly King

King Solomon, the wisest man of his times, has valuable insight to contribute to the area of critical thinking. The book of First Kings specifies his qualifications.

God gave Solomon wisdom and very great insight, and a breadth of understanding as measureless as the sand on the seashore. Solomon's wisdom was greater than the wisdom of all the people of the East, and greater than all the wisdom of Egypt...From all nations people came to listen to Solomon's wisdom, sent by all the kings of the world, who had heard of his wisdom (1 Kings 4:29, 30, 34).

Solomon was known for his many proverbs: over three thousand of his saying are recorded in the Bible.⁵⁸ His wisdom has often been used as a teaching tool for incorporating “catchy” sentences full of wisdom for quick recollection.⁵⁹ Traditionally, the authorship of the book of Proverbs is credited to this wise king, though he had help compiling the book.⁶⁰ Warren Wiersbe attributes most of the proverbs to Solomon but acknowledges that a portion were penned by either a writing secretary, someone else within his inner circle, or other kings.⁶¹ According to Duvall and Hays, “[Proverbs] addresses such topics as work, friends, child-rearing, husbands and wives, sexual immorality, honesty, gossip, anger, patience, poverty, wealth, and the need for understanding.”⁶² He was clearly gifted by God with the ability to intelligently address a

⁵⁸ “Proverbs Overview - The Expositor's Bible Commentary,” *StudyLight.org*, accessed December 29, 2015, <http://www.studylight.org/commentaries/teb/view.cgi?bk=19&ch=0>.

⁵⁹ Warren W Wiersbe, *Wiersbe's Expository Outlines on the Old Testament* (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1993), 460.

⁶⁰ Samuel J Schultz, *The Old Testament Speaks* (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 2000), 289.

⁶¹ Wiersbe, 460.

⁶² J. Scott Duvall and J. Daniel Hays, *Grasping God's Word: A Hands-on Approach to Reading, Interpreting, and Applying the Bible*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012), 91.

vast number of topics. Solomon was known across the world for his wisdom and his keen understanding of situations. He was often consulted for his critical insight about life, God, and people in general. For instance, during the early years of his reign as king, he demonstrated impeccable discernment as he judged one particular case brought before him about two babies and their mothers. His ability to weigh information and to consider a scenario from otherwise overlooked angles quickly let the people know that they had a king who was a strong thinker. Michael Harbin discusses more about the situation:

First Kings gives us one example of Solomon's wisdom in the account of the two prostitutes who lived together. Both had borne sons at about the same time. One woman's child died in the night, and she switched infants. The other mother recognized the switch in the morning, and a ruckus arose with each claiming the living son. Solomon told his guard to cut the living child in half and give half to each. The real mother protested, and Solomon thus discerned the truth of the matter.⁶³

As the wisest and wealthiest biblical king, Solomon's example can contribute toward our understanding of the use of critical thinking and provide insight to help us maneuver throughout life. It started for him at an early age when beginning his kingship. It should be noted that the depth of his wisdom was showcased after a pivotal conversation that young Solomon had with the Lord during a dream. God told him, "Ask for whatever you want me to give you" (1 Kings 3:5 NIV). Solomon, in turn, acknowledged his youthfulness and humbly asked the Lord for wisdom and discernment in leading the people of Israel and God responded accordingly (See 1 Kings 3:6-14). Hence, God, the omniscient one, provided uncommon wisdom through Solomon. One then sees the fruit of it recorded in Scripture. The reader can read other books of

⁶³ Michael A. Harbin, *The Promise and the Blessing: A Historical Survey of the Old and New Testaments* (Zondervan, 2010), 247.

Solomon's writings to note how he applied the wisdom to his own life through various stages and then discern if he took advantage of what he had at his disposal in his personal life.

It is believed that many of Solomon's proverbs sprang forth in the prime of his "manhood."⁶⁴ Life experience taught him a great deal as he continued to think deeply and reflect on the way things worked. He often asked questions about choices and behavior in general to then reach additional and more refined conclusions. Critical thinking authors Linda Elder and Richard Paul claim:

Thinking is not driven by answers but by questions. To think through or rethink anything, one must ask questions that stimulate thought. Questions define tasks, express problems, and delineate issues. Answers, on the other hand, often signal a full stop in thought. Only when an answer generates a further question does thought continue its life. This is why you are thinking and learning only when you have questions.⁶⁵

One of Solomon's sayings that urges students to explore critical thinking is "A simple man believes anything, but a prudent man gives thoughts to his steps" (Proverbs 14:15 NASB). Here the king is encouraging his audience to take time to understand the details of a scenario in order to gain a good grasp on what it is that he or she is seeking to know or accomplish. He discourages his audience from making flighty assumptions about what they hear, as those conclusions are often misinformed. Solomon is also offering a forewarning of the possibility that another party could take advantage of them or manipulate them. In other words, when students do not ask questions and investigate both their assumptions and the assumptions of the communicator, their quick-natured

⁶⁴ "Proverbs Overview - Keil and Delitzsch Commentary on the Old Testament," *StudyLight.org*, accessed December 30, 2015, <http://www.studylight.org/commentaries/kdo/view.cgi?bk=19&ch=0>.

⁶⁵ Linda Elder and Richard Paul, "Critical Thinking: Teaching Students How to Study and Learn (Part IV)," *Journal of Developmental Education* 27, no. 1 (Fall 2003): 36.

responses can be self-defeating. It is vital that they do the necessary, upfront thinking so that they can be confident they are working with good information.

Wisdom is considered good information. Proverbs “[depicts it] as a lovely woman who calls people to follow her into a life of blessing and success.”⁶⁶ Now, this woman of wisdom is not an actual, literal woman that the author knows but an abstract thought in his mind. She is contrasted with another woman who is described as folly. Sadly, the author may actually know the woman representing folly fairly well, as he may be considering a real woman with whom he has had an intimate interaction. It is as if the author is thinking to himself about the pros and cons of both scenarios, and the readers gain an inside look at his experiences. It becomes a teaching moment for the students at the expense of their teacher, Solomon. *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary* offers this viewpoint:

[Chapters 7 through 9] present a lively and picturesque contrast between Folly and Wisdom-Folly more especially in the form of vice; Wisdom more generally in her highest and most universal intention. Folly is throughout concrete, an actual woman portrayed with such correctness of detail that she is felt as a personal force. Wisdom, on the other hand, is only personified: she is an abstract conception: she speaks with human lips in order to carry out the parallel, but she is not a human being, known to the writer...Folly is a piece of vigorous realism, while the account of Wisdom is a piece of delicate idealism. Folly is historical. Wisdom is prophetic.⁶⁷

Speaking from personal experience of how not to get entangled with folly, Solomon seems to be having a mental conversation about what he should do differently in the future that would produce different results and become beneficial for him and those

⁶⁶ Wiersbe, 460.

⁶⁷ “Proverbs Overview - The Expositor’s Bible Commentary.”

affected by his leadership. He extracts wisdom from a bad situation by speaking to what the future could and should look like when better choices are made.

Michael A. Harbin notes that the overarching purpose of Proverbs is “to teach wisdom,” which is “skill in living” that leads to a successful life.⁶⁸

[T]he book of Proverbs is based on two principles. The first is that the basic foundation of a successful life is reverence for God, or “the fear of the Lord.” As we read through the book of Proverbs, we soon discover that the writer sees this high reverence for the Lord expressed in obedience to the law of God, that is, the Torah. In fact, the Old Testament law is an assumed cultural foundation to the book of Proverbs.⁶⁹

People are not born wise. Proverbs exists to point people toward the importance of instruction to be able to become wise and make good decisions. Living off of one’s assumptions and feelings and displaying a disregard for both God’s law and for instruction in general lends itself to a simple life that is bound to embrace folly. Students are strongly cautioned against this. Solomon is encouraging his readers to embrace the filter of critically thinking about whether or not they are heeding sound advice and following the path of wisdom in the choices they make. He is just one of several voices in the Old Testament that emphasizes understanding, deflating the potential waywardness of personal assumptions.

New Testament Emphasis

The Careful Examination of the Bereans

The book of Acts mentions an open-minded community of people who were known for eagerly taking time to validate messages they heard about God and Jesus. The

⁶⁸ Harbin, 248.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

inhabitants of Berea were known to be fairly wealthy and diligent in their studies. Once under the heavy influence of Hellenism, which was known for its sophisticated culture and education, the Bereans later became a Jewish colony under Roman rule.⁷⁰ It was during this time that the Apostle Paul and Silas traveled to preach and teach to them. In their excitement about hearing the message of Jesus, the Bereans were careful to compare and contrast their passionate words with the teachings of Scripture, thus demonstrating acute attention to critical thinking. This idea of comparing information is based on the Greek word used in Acts 17:11 for open-minded or noble-minded, *eugenesteroi* (*eugenes*), meaning “comparative”.⁷¹ The Bereans did not automatically assume that the knowledge being presented to them was correct. However, after examining and confirming its accuracy, they were fully open to embracing it. Luke records it this way:

That very night the believers sent Paul and Silas to Berea. When they arrived there, they went to the Jewish synagogue. And the people of Berea were more open-minded than those in Thessalonica, and they listened eagerly to Paul’s message. They searched the Scriptures day after day to see if Paul and Silas were teaching the truth. As a result, many Jews believed, as did many of the prominent Greek women and men (Acts 17:10-12 NLT).

The Bereans are also remembered for their hospitable treatment of Paul and Silas after they dealt with an unruly group in Thessalonica.⁷²

We can learn from the Bereans’ positive response to biblical teaching. “No matter who the teacher is, [we can learn] to investigate new teaching in comparison with the

⁷⁰ Charles Pfeiffer, *Wycliffe Bible Dictionary* (Peabody, MA: Hendrick Publishers, Inc., 2000), 219.

⁷¹ “2104 Eugenes,” Bible Hub, accessed February 15, 2016, <http://biblehub.com/greek/2104.htm>.

⁷² J. D. Douglas, Merrill C. Tenney, and Moisés Silva, *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Dictionary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011), 136.

Bible. The practice of the ancient Bereans is a model for all who desire to grow spiritually today.”⁷³

Paul’s Admonishment to Timothy to Think Critically

The New Testament also offers directives and insight in recommending critical thinking while opposing shoddy thinking. Two different New Testament scenarios will be discussed. The first demonstrates critical thinking within a profession and the second demonstrates critical thinking in light of a cultural/social issue.

There are examples in life where, although an individual is not blood related, the person is deeply treasured and becomes like family. The bond they share and the insightful exchanges they have about life, serve to make the relationship a lifelong constant. In the same way, the Apostle Paul had a strong father-son type of relationship with his protégé, Timothy. “Many of Paul’s appeals to Timothy in the epistles reflect the uniquely close bond between the older apostle and his younger ‘son’ in the ministry.”⁷⁴ Thomas Lea and Hayne Griffin, Jr. believe that “Paul may have used the expression ‘son’ to refer to Timothy as his ‘son in the ministry,’ one whom he had trained and encouraged greatly in his Christian development.”⁷⁵

Desiring that his spiritual son follow in his footsteps, Paul strongly encouraged Timothy to be a lifelong critical thinker and learner. To illustrate, Paul writes to Timothy, saying, “Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who does not

⁷³ “Who Were the Bereans in the Bible?” GotQuestions.org, accessed December 27, 2015, <http://www.gotquestions.org/who-Bereans.html>.

⁷⁴ Thomas D Lea and Hayne P Griffin, *1, 2 Timothy, Titus* (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1992), 181.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 51.

need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth” (2 Timothy 2:15 NIV). The Greek word for “approved” in this passage is *dokimon* (*dókimos*). This term is defined as “what passes the necessary test (scrutiny); hence acceptable because genuine (validated, verified).”⁷⁶ It was also “used for the proving (testing) of coins, i.e. confirming they were genuine (not counterfeit, corrupted).”⁷⁷ In other words, being an approved worker meant being one who was tested and tried and proven faithful. Part of being proven faithful meant working hard to understand, interpret, and practice the teachings of Scripture, emphasizing the need for and value of studying the Scriptures. Paul also reminds him of the special reward for doing so - approval from God. Paul wanted Timothy to follow the pattern of what he had taught him, stating, “What you heard from me, keep as the pattern of sound teaching, with faith and love in Christ Jesus. Guard the good deposit that was entrusted to you—guard it with the help of the Holy Spirit who lives in us” (2 Timothy 1:13-14).

Additionally, the book of Second Timothy is Paul’s last epistle to the churches and to Timothy, as he is well aware that his time is nearing for his departure from the earth (2 Timothy 4:6-8). Knowing what was to come, Paul intentionally passed the torch to Timothy. He had “[prepared] Timothy to carry on the work of Christ even after he was gone. His reminders of divine faithfulness would provide that incentive to the younger friend of the apostle.”⁷⁸

⁷⁶ “1384 Dokimos,” Bible Hub, accessed February 15, 2016, <http://biblehub.com/greek/1384.htm>

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 45.

Meanwhile, back in prison, Paul continued to receive reports about false teachers whose teachings were multiplying and spreading like yeast throughout the various churches. This was especially the case throughout Ephesus and Crete, where both Timothy and Titus were working to build, instruct, and teach truth in the new churches. Apparently, other were working too, but for the wrong side. While Timothy was attempting to make the church at Ephesus stronger, former associates of Paul and previous good friends of Timothy were doing just the opposite by spreading heresy to naïve believers and inflicting their inaccurate assumptions about the resurrection, spreading deceit as they led a portion of the converts away from the truth when they neglected to question their teaching. Hurt and dismayed by such actions and behavior, Paul continued to focus on Timothy and Titus by encouraging them to remain faithful to God and to preach the word to all, that they might connect more deeply with Christ and avoid false doctrine.

In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who will judge the living and the dead, and in view of his appearing and his kingdom, I give you this charge: Preach the word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage—with great patience and careful instruction. For the time will come when people will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths. But you, keep your head in all situations, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, discharge all the duties of your ministry (2 Timothy 4:1-5).

To combat the meddlesome heresy of the false the teachers, Paul encouraged Timothy to go on the offensive by teaching the truth and modeling good behavior in both doctrine and attitude to the church members that were still in his care. “He attempted to fortify Timothy for accomplishment and steadfastness in ministry after his departure... In

[2 Timothy] 2:14-26 Paul explained proper response to doctrinal errors.”⁷⁹ The defense would come in the form of the people hearing the truth and using it to judge and critically think about the false teachings that were ever before them. “False teachers still hovered in the background, but Timothy was not to focus merely on defeating them ([2 Timothy] 2:24-26). He was to focus on proper teaching and was to pass on the gospel truths to faithful, committed followers of Christ gathered around him ([2 Timothy] 2:1-2).”⁸⁰ In other words, Timothy was to identify those who had proven themselves as reliable and who were qualified to help him teach these proven truths to the people. Paul would continue to encourage and equip Timothy with a layered strategy to combat the messy doctrine. Paul reminds Timothy that during such crucial times he should be mindful of his speech and his conduct, as they were strong witnesses to the truth of Christ for both the believers and the wayward.

In the process of handling this situation, Paul reminds Timothy not to become sidetracked from his main purpose. Paul urged Timothy, a young pastor who was on the front end of ministry, to neither let the manipulative, misguided words of others nor the harm that they might attempt to inflict, take priority over the people in his care.

This New Testament example encourages modern day students from a spiritual standpoint to know the truth of Scripture so that they also are not confused by the wayward teaching of others. In addition, just as Timothy was deemed thorough and approved for his work in pastoring, preaching, and theology, students should also seek to heavily invest in comprehending their fields of study so that when life presents

⁷⁹ Ibid., 179.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 44–45.

challenges they are prepared to combat them and to help others do the same. This example emphasizes the importance of critical thinking in one's discipline so that when false information arises it can be readily identified and addressed.

The Work of the Reader

Readers, and more specifically for the purpose of this study, Christian university students, approach the Bible with a variety of intentions. Some seek to gain spiritual insight and a better understanding of God, while others are in search of direction regarding their purpose in life. Some desire a greater cultural comprehension of the biblical times, and others are curious about who Jesus is. Numerous other intentions exist. Whatever the motivation, it is imperative that readers not project unintended meaning on the text based on their assumptions. This is called eisegesis, with *eis* meaning "into," as in inserting meaning into the text.⁸¹ Instead, readers "want to be confident that [they] can pull the actual truth out of a text and not just develop an arbitrary, fanciful, or incorrect interpretation."⁸² This is called exegesis, noting that "ex-" means "from," as in drawing meaning from the text.⁸³ In an effort to properly exegete Scripture, some prefer a more in-depth study by taking Christian higher education classes to gain historical insight, to better connect the smaller narratives within the metanarrative of Scripture, and to learn more about the helpful life principles that Jesus and the other prophets and disciples were

⁸¹ "Definition of EISEGESIS," accessed December 26, 2015, <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/eisegesis>.

⁸² J. Scott Duvall and J. Daniel Hays, *Grasping God's Word: A Hands-on Approach to Reading, Interpreting, and Applying the Bible*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012), 17.

⁸³ "Definition of EXEGESIS," accessed February 17, 2016, <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/exegesis>.

teaching the original audiences. Countless insights, messages, and truths surrounding the biblical characters and cultures are scattered throughout this ancient book.

It is the work of the reader to comprehend what was happening those thousands of years ago during biblical times and then to discern how to correctly apply the principles to today. Gordon D. Fee and Douglas K. Stuart speak of the ‘tension’ that exists between “its eternal relevance and its historical particularity.”⁸⁴ Though some may overlook this, it is an important part of the task of biblical interpretation that involves properly assessing the original context.

Since the Bible is of human authorship, it must be treated in the same way as any other communication. The goal is to determine the author’s intended meaning. But certain barriers—differences in language and culture—divide the author and the reader. To understand the author’s meaning, the reader must understand the context from which the author writes. Only that way can the effect of the differences between author and recipient be overcome and true understanding become possible.⁸⁵

The use of critical thinking encourages modern day society’s Christians and non-Christians to better understand both the context and cultures of the biblical characters, serving to redirect those who would have been overly influenced by their personal assumptions.

In an effort to assist interested readers in unpacking a better interpretation of the Bible, scholars point to the scientific, critical thinking method of hermeneutics to help them arrive at a richer understanding of the text. These principles are useful for all types

⁸⁴ Gordon D. Fee and Douglas Stuart, *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth*, 4th ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2014), 21.

⁸⁵ J. Robertson McQuilkin, *Understanding and Applying the Bible* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1992), 67.

of people - people of faith, people who only talk about the faith of others, as well as for unbelievers.

Critical Thinking through the Lens of Hermeneutics

The process of critical thinking involves grasping a proper understanding of the Bible and relating it to culture today. Such a process is important for students in Christian higher education who attempt to live their lives guided by God's holy word, the Bible. And it is necessary for clergy and scholars, as even the most advanced religious thinkers must remain willing to negotiate their own personal assumptions about the text. This critical thinking method or process is known as hermeneutics, which is the science of biblical interpretation.⁸⁶ Hermeneutics, while being a science and an art, is also a "spiritual act", in that, a reader is able to approach it as more than mere literature; rather, it is a text that the Holy Spirit illuminates. Thus, hermeneutics is a process that leads the reader to depend upon history, cultural context, genres of writings, as well as the Holy Spirit for interpretation.⁸⁷

Such a process helps an individual to incorporate critical thinking, leading them to the objective at hand, which is "to grasp the meaning of the text God has intended. We do not create meaning out of the text; rather, we seek to find the meaning that is already there."⁸⁸ In addition, all readers, especially students, must keep in mind the following:

Each reader approaches Scripture with his own, or her own presuppositions. These presuppositions are part of [their] worldview, part of our personal theology.

⁸⁶ Fee and Stuart, 9.

⁸⁷ Grant R. Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral: A Comprehensive Introduction to Biblical Interpretation* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1991), 5.

⁸⁸ Duvall and Hays, 19.

In the first instance they relate to how [the readers] regard scripture. Does it consist of infallible propositions? Is it the record of certain acts of God? Is it an inspired record? Is there revelation outside of Scripture? [Their] views here will dictate how [they] handle the text. [Their] minds are not empty when [they] read or listen to Scripture; what [they] hear is already partly predetermined by what is already in them; [their] presuppositions shape what [they] understand.⁸⁹

After all, “a text cannot mean what it never could have meant to its author or his or her readers.”⁹⁰

To help put aside assumptions and presuppositions when attempting to correctly interpret the Bible, Duvall and Hays have compacted the proven elements of hermeneutics and embedded them into a five-step process to assist all students of Scripture. This critical thinking process is designed to help uncover the original message as heard by the original audience.

1. Grasp the text in their town. What did the text mean to the biblical audience?
2. Measure the width of the cultural river to cross. What are the differences between the biblical audience and people today?
3. Cross the principle-bridging bridge. What is the theological principle in this text?
4. Consult the biblical map. How does our theological principle fit with the rest of the Bible?
5. Grasp the text in our town. How should individual Christians today apply the theological principle in their lives?⁹¹

⁸⁹ Ernest Best, *From Text to Sermon: Responsible Use of the New Testament in Preaching* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1978), 97–99.

⁹⁰ Fee and Stuart, 74.

⁹¹ Duvall and Hays, 47.

These steps provide a safeguard against making prescriptive assumptions about Scripture, a danger that forces meaning onto a text as a result of what the reader believes it ought to mean. They remind the student that Scripture's meaning in that time needs to have a voice in what Scripture means today. It is also important to check one's interpretation against the whole of Scripture in an attempt to reveal if the reader's interpretation is biased, thus checking one's assumptions one more time before the he or she makes an application. This task of correct biblical interpretation requires that students invest a due amount of time in studying and researching the passages that they hope to better understand. Critical thinking is not always a quick process, but it can be a very rewarding process.

The Role of the Holy Spirit in Interpretation

God can use critical thinking as a method to speak to students in deeper ways through his Holy Spirit. After all, he first spoke to the prophets and other writers of Scripture, telling them what to write (2 Peter 1:20-21). God is certainly capable of also speaking to today's readers as they invest in diligent study of his word recorded so many years ago.

It is the work of the Holy Spirit to illuminate the meaning of Scriptures in the heart of the believer. The triune member of the God-head is able to speak to the reader by renewing the insight found in the Bible and showing how the timeless principles fit into the lives of Christians today.⁹² The Holy Spirit can illuminate a passage, whether it is

⁹² Gary L. Nebeker, "The Holy Spirit, Hermeneutics, and Transformation: From Present to Future Glory," *Evangelical Review of Theology* 27, no. 1 (January 2003): 157.

easily understood or very challenging, so that reader can grow in understanding and be transformed in his or her inner person.

Jesus speaks of the Holy Spirit being a teacher: “But the advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the father will send in my name will teach you all things and remind you of everything I have said to you” (John 14:26 NIV). The Holy Spirit also exists as a revealer of God’s truth. This is important because interpretation is centered on understanding the truth presented in the Bible.

Because ‘truth’ can be understood as that which is Christocentric and transformational in character, the role of the Holy Spirit in hermeneutics must be understood in a similar way. The Spirit’s role—or goal—in interpretation is to allow the interpreter to understand the text in such a way that the text transforms the interpreter into the image of Christ.⁹³

It is the work of the Holy Spirit to transform God’s people into becoming more like Jesus, reminding them of the works, ways, and wonders of the Son of God. This process occurs throughout one’s lifetime.⁹⁴

The following sections of this chapter will demonstrate the implementation of sound hermeneutical principles and the skill of critical thinking as a means of discovering the in-depth, rich meaning of Scripture. The chapter also presents examples of misunderstanding the Scriptures as a consequence of not applying the critical thinking process.

⁹³ Clark H. Pinnock, “The Work of the Spirit in the Interpretation of Holy Scripture from the Perspective of a Charismatic Biblical Theologian,” *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* 18, no. 2 (September 1, 2009): 47, doi:10.1163/096673609X12469601161791.

⁹⁴ Nebeker, 48.

General Principles for Interpreting the Scriptures

James Davis, a New Testament professor, outlines a seven-step critical thinking process to help students come as close as possible to the genuine meaning of a biblical passage, one that matches what was intended by the author, and ultimately by God. His process is largely focused on guiding the reader through what Duvall and Hays would consider to be the first step of interpretation - “grasp[ing] the text in their town.”⁹⁵ As with any good investigation, it takes time, consecutive steps, and thorough details to uncover and understand the facts.

Step One: Gain the Biblical Writer’s Perspective

To begin the interpretive process for better understanding the text, students should seek to gain the biblical writer’s perspective on the issue or topic at hand.⁹⁶ Davis states, “Interpretation must be based on the author’s intention of meaning and not the reader.”⁹⁷ It is important that the reader does his or her best to understand the intended meaning and emphasis of the author and not simply flow with his or her own projections or personal agenda. In other words, the reader must be willing to challenge his or her assumptions about what the passage is saying. This is true, even if he or she has spent years being indoctrinated with a different interpretation than what is discovered.

This reinforces Stephen Brookfield’s paradigmatic assumptions. Readers or students must be willing to acknowledge that they assigned too much meaning or the wrong meaning to a text. The original message may be simpler in form. It may also be

⁹⁵ Duvall and Hays, 47.

⁹⁶ Students will continue to acquire such a perspective throughout the various steps of the interpretive process, although a foundation for it should be established during step one.

⁹⁷ Davis; Ibid.

much more complex. While it is not possible to understand every explicit angle of why the author spoke in a certain way, it is possible get a general idea of the direction and meaning of the author's viewpoint. Understanding the connection and tone of the author will pave the way for understanding the larger context. "[This] process of interpretation builds a base for discovering the original intended meaning of the biblical text."⁹⁸

Step Two: Interpret in the Historical Context of the Passage

Step two requires that "[i]nterpretations . . . be done in the context of the passage."⁹⁹ As students approach any book or passage of the Bible, they should seek out what was happening culturally, linguistically, and politically during the time of its writing. This step involves exploration and inquisitiveness about the situation at hand in that day and about the overarching era in history. Bible dictionaries, lexicons, Study Bibles, and commentaries speak to these aspects. Parallel passages in Scripture can also offer insight and further explain a scenario; these will be discussed in further detail in step four. Students should not assume that they will properly discern all of these details by merely consulting the one passage of Scripture they are investigating.

This type of information is generally known as the historical context. It considers research into human authorship, the time in which it was written, the timing of the events being written about, the group to which it was addressed, and its intended purpose and themes (perhaps the most valuable of these considerations).¹⁰⁰ The investigative information helps the interpreter become more familiar with the setting of the text,

⁹⁸ Osborne, 8.

⁹⁹ Davis; Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ Osborne, 20.

focusing less on modern day projections. The idea of establishing the context parallels a parent learning about an event involving their children and wanting to know the details surrounding the circumstance before assuming the best or worst about it or about their children. “The value of this preliminary reading is that it draws [the readers] out of [their] twentieth [or twenty-first] century perspective and makes [them] aware of the ancient situation behind the text.”¹⁰¹

Step Three: Distinguish Plain Speech from Figurative Language

Step three of Davis’ critical thinking process states, “Interpret the Bible literally (or normally), allowing for normal use of figurative language. Take the plain meaning of the text at face value. When the literal does not make sense you probably have a figure of speech.”¹⁰² There will be times as one is reading when the literal text is substituted by a figure of speech. It is here that an illustration of some sort is being made to help the reader more clearly grasp the meaning of a statement or a circumstance. In addition to establishing the context of the biblical passage in focus, students need to be able to identify any symbolic or metaphorical speech, being careful not to inflict modern day interpretations. Scripture often uses figures of speech as powerful expressions that emphasize the meaning of a passage. For instance, Luke 19:40 reads that Jesus said, “If they keep quiet the stones will cry out” (NIV). However, stones cannot produce tears, so what might the text be trying to literally express to its audience and readers? When readers zoom out from this verse to study the larger passage or chapter, they can observe that the unbelieving and disgruntled Pharisees demanded that Jesus rebuke the outlandish

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² Davis; Ibid.

behavior of his disciples who were loudly praising God for his miraculous work among them. Jesus responded to the Pharisees by letting them know that one way or the other, God was going to be praised. If his people did not voice this adoration, then nature in its own way would revere him.

Step Four: Use Other Scriptures to Help Interpret

Step four states, “Use the Bible to help interpret itself.”¹⁰³ John Calvin more simply states it as, “Scripture interprets scripture.”¹⁰⁴ J. I. Packer adds:

Every text has its immediate context in the passage from which it comes, its broader context in the book to which it belongs, and its ultimate context in the Bible as a whole; and it needs to be rightly related to each of these contexts if its character, scope and significance is to be adequately understood... the Westminster Confession states it thus: ‘The infallible rule of interpretation of scripture is the scripture itself; and therefore, when there is a question about the true and full sense of any scripture, it must be searched and known by other places that speak more clearly.’¹⁰⁵

Different accounts of the same events are recorded in various books of the Bible. Study Bibles often note such parallel passages. Passages with similar themes may be able to assist the student with accurate interpretation when they feel challenged by a particular passage. Furthermore, specific parts of Scripture directly refer to other parts, even quoting them at times.

Having more than one account of a passage helps in gaining multiple perspectives on the circumstance or the teaching. There are also numerous occasions where the Bible will address one topic from many angles and from different contexts. For instance, the

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ R. Ward Holder, *John Calvin and the Grounding of Interpretation: Calvin’s First Commentaries* (Boston, MA: Brill, 2006), 108.

¹⁰⁵ J. I. Packer, *“Fundamentalism” and the Word of God: Some Evangelical Principles* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1958), 101–114.

Bible speaks to the topic of suffering in the book of Job, noting that it is not always a sign of God's judgment of someone's sin. This is supported in the New Testament when Jesus challenges this cause-effect relationship or causal assumption by explaining that a particular man's blindness was not caused by his sin or his parent's sin. "[T]his happened so that the works of God might be displayed in him" (John 9:3 NIV). That said, Scripture is not making a blanket statement on this. The book of Judges quickly sets a different context for the topic of suffering, clearly displaying that some people do suffer because God is punishing them for their sins. Noting these different approaches toward the same topic of suffering broadens the student's viewpoint and cautions him or her on making generalizations about the reason for one's suffering. These generalizations could also be termed as assumptions. Thus, it is important to note that each text examined or cross-referenced needs to be understood in light of its own specific historical and literary contexts before linking its principle to the principle exegeted from the originating text being studied.

The Bible speaks to many other topics that humans face in the twenty-first century: the meaning of life, grace, qualifications for church leaders, divorce, women in ministry, same sex marriage, and eschatology to name a few. It presents numerous opportunities for students to critically reflect on their own narrow understanding of such areas and opens the door for transformation to take place. Ultimately, good interpretation leads to better application. While the two are closely connected, their differences are important.

Step Five: Separate Interpretation from Application

Step five of Davis' method states, "Interpretation must be distinguished from application."¹⁰⁶ Students must refrain from attempting to make applications too early in the process of interpreting the passage of Scripture. It is imperative that students not ignore the steps of interpretation if they truly seek a well-informed and proper understanding. Prematurely assigning a modern day context by way of application can result in inaccurate assumptions of the text's meaning – a meaning for today that should mirror the meaning for that historic setting. There can be much to consider before concluding one's study on a passage. One might consider the word picture of taking time to cross the bridge rather than making a gigantic leap to the modern day context and falling short. Duvall and Hays's five-step process speaks to this step when mentioning a "principilizing bridge" that crosses over the river of "culture, language, situation, time, and often covenant...[The] Christian today is separated from the biblical audience by [these] differences."¹⁰⁷

These differences form a river that hinders us from moving straight from meaning in their context to meaning in ours. The width of the river, however, varies from passage to passage. Sometimes it is extremely wide, requiring a long, substantial bridge for crossing. Other times, however, it is a narrow creek that we can easily hop over. It is obviously important to know just how wide the river is before we start trying to construct a principilizing bridge across it.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁶ Davis; Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ Duvall and Hays, 18-20.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 22.

Again, this is clearly a layered process that that requires much investment before arriving at accurate conclusions.

Step Six: Distinguish between the Old and New Covenants

Step six is, “Be sensitive to distinctions between Israel and the Church and Old Covenant and New Covenant eras/requirements.”¹⁰⁹ For instance, commitments and promises that were made under the Old Covenant will not necessarily be transferred to the church of today since it is under the New Covenant. Israel, through Abraham, was promised both land and many descendants, but the property guarantee does not mean that the Church of today will literally inherit the same physical property as well.

Another example of this stems from the many laws provided in the Pentateuch. For instance, God instructs Moses to tell the people, “Do not cook a young goat in its mother’s milk” (Exodus 23:19). One might assume by not thinking critically that this is a random, insignificant prohibition recorded in Scripture that would have no bearing on God’s people. However, after an analysis of what this would have meant so many centuries ago, it has been concluded that the Canaanites living in the land practiced sympathetic magic, which is “the idea that symbolic actions can influence the gods and nature.”¹¹⁰ They would engage in this practice in an effort to please the gods and “magically ensure the continuing fertility of their flocks.”¹¹¹ God gave the Israelites this law to help them understand what it meant to be a people committed to him only. God would be his people’s provider; they did not need to look to false gods. They were not to

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ Fee and Stuart, 165.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

mimic the incantations of the Canaanites. They were to be a people that were set apart for the Lord alone. Now, does this directly apply to today in terms of twenty-first century Christians refraining from the act of boiling young goat? The applicability is limited because it is a law that is part of the Old Covenant, which was an agreement made with Israel. It was not carried over into the New Covenant that God made with all nations. Yet, the principle of the matter, in terms of Christians looking to the one true God to provide for them and not mimicking the practice of trying to appease false gods for personal gain, is timeless. The principle is also addressed in the New Testament. (See Matthew 6:25-34 and 1 John 5:21.)

However, some binding elements do transfer from the Old Covenant (Israel) to the New Covenant (the Church), as is the case with some of the ethical laws. This occurs when the New Testament repeats or directly speaks to a particular requirement found in the Old Testament.¹¹² For instance, students can see that the Great Commandment, as well as the Ten Commandments, are mentioned in both the Old and New Testaments. In the instance of the Great Commandment, we read, “Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength” (Deuteronomy 6:4-5 NIV). In the New Testament, Jesus answers a question from a scribe about the greatest commandment of all and quotes Deuteronomy 6, saying “‘The most important one,’ answered Jesus, ‘is this: ‘Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.’ (Mark 12:29-30 NIV).” Matthew 22:37 also records this commandment. Hence, it carries over for the Church today.

¹¹² Ibid.

Step Seven: Consider the Type of Literature

The final step, number 7, says, “Be sensitive to the type of literature you are in.”¹¹³ The biblical writers expressed God’s truth through multiple genres of writing. A classical working definition by Wellek and Warren claims that “genre should be conceived, we think, as a grouping of literary works based, theoretically, upon both outer form (specific meter or structure) and also upon inner form (attitude, tone, purpose—more crudely, subject and audience).”¹¹⁴ The primary categories of literary genre are narrative, poetry, wisdom, prophecy, apocalyptic, parables, and epistles. Each genre of writing in Scripture has specific guidelines to keep in mind when interpreting Scripture. The writings found in Proverbs highlight this issue: “Start children off on the way they should go, and even when they are old they will not turn from it” (Proverbs 22:6 NIV). Many parents have misinterpreted this verse as a promise, though it is meant as a wise saying or principle, according to the guidelines for interpreting wisdom literature. James Mohler reminds students and parents of the issue of genre:

The wisdom literature of the Bible contains wise sayings, poetry and teachings that give guidelines for people to follow. The book of Proverbs is a collection of pithy, wise sayings that harbor general truths, but not necessarily promises. A proverb is brief and poetic to be memorable, enabling it to be handed down from generation to generation, providing a form of wise and moral grounding.¹¹⁵

By following steps one through seven, the reader typically attains one overarching interpretation of a selected passage of Scripture. However, there are several ways to

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ Rene Wellek and Austin Warren, *Theory of Literature: New Revised Edition*, 3d ed. (New York: Harvest Books, 1984), 231.

¹¹⁵ James Mohler, “Proverbs 22:6 — A Promise to Parents?” *Biola Magazine*, accessed January 2, 2016, <http://magazine.biola.edu/article/07-spring/proverbs-226-a-promise-to-parents/>.

apply the interpretation, as some are historic applications particular to the biblical audience and others relate to modern day. Of course, the reader will seek to make modern day applications from his or her interpretation of the situation and the timeless principles.

Correcting a Misunderstanding of *Critical* Using the Greek Language

Some Christians, both in the local church and in Christian higher education circles, look down upon approaching the Scriptures from a critical perspective. “Many balk at the mention of critical thinking. They associate the phrase with skepticism and ‘criticism’ of the Bible and of religion in general; thus they want nothing to do with it.”¹¹⁶ It is likely that such opposition to critical thinking has a direct link to the connotation of the word *critical*. Paul Corrigan and Rickey Cotton speak to college students about this as they encourage them by saying, “Have a critical mind, but not a critical spirit.”¹¹⁷ Students may have also had a previous personal experience where such thinking was not encouraged. Yet, there may be another reason. Joel McDurmon lays some fault and responsibility at the doorstep of some secular college professors who have taught critical thinking with the intent to “use reason and logic to lure children away from the faith their parents taught them. While university professors have often stolen away children in the name of “critical thinking,” the unbelieving skepticism promoted by these types does not deserve the label: it is not “critical” in the least bit, at least not in the *biblical* sense of the

¹¹⁶“The Bible and Critical Thinking,” *The American Vision*, accessed December 12, 2015, <http://americanvision.org/1830/bible-critical-thinking/>.

¹¹⁷ Paul Corrigan and Rickey Cotton, *College in the Spirit: Christian Higher Education as a Calling*, 2012, 2.

term.”¹¹⁸ The biblical understanding of the word critical comes from the Greek word *krités*, which can be translated as “a judge.”¹¹⁹

Perhaps the closest sounding equivalent to our English ‘critical,’ *kritikos*— meaning, ‘able to judge (or discern),’ appears only once in the New Testament but is attributed to the Word of God: ‘For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge [*kritikos*] the thoughts and intentions of the heart.’¹²⁰

To further explain and to help students and their parents to view critical thinking as a help and as the heartbeat of sound biblical interpretation, *Encyclopedia Britannica* offers the following:

Critical interpretation, and hermeneutics, or the science of interpretive principles, of the Bible have been used by both Jews and Christians throughout their histories for various purposes. The most common purpose has been discovering the truths and values of the Old and New Testaments by means of various techniques and principles, though very often, owing to the exigencies of certain historical conditions, polemical or apologetical situations anticipate the truth or value to be discovered and thus dictate the type of exegesis or hermeneutic to be used. The primary goal, however, is to arrive at biblical truths and values by an unbiased use of exegesis and hermeneutics.¹²¹

For centuries, Jews and Christians have used the process of critical thinking to grow wiser and closer to God. When critical thinking is used to interpret God’s word, it is like a person holding an arm rail as they make their way up or down a dimly lit staircase in search of the light switch. Critical thinking is an enlightening process that leads to

¹¹⁸ “The Bible and Critical Thinking,” Ibid.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

¹²⁰ Ibid. The scripture reference in this quote is Hebrews 4:12.

¹²¹ “Biblical Literature: The Critical Study of Biblical Literature: Exegesis and Hermeneutics,” *Encyclopedia Britannica*, accessed December 29, 2015, <http://www.britannica.com/topic/biblical-literature/The-critical-study-of-biblical-literature-exegesis-and-hermeneutics>.

meaningful revelation and treasure that would have remained buried had they not been carefully sought out.

An Example from Ephesians

Assumptions about Biblical Submission

This next New Testament example demonstrates the use of critical thinking in relation to cultural issues. Such issues arose in biblical times as they do in modern day society.

Throughout the epistles, “four major areas of authority [are] addressed... human government, church leadership, employers, and the home.”¹²² The area of authority in the home draws a variety of traditional, middle of the road, and liberal opinions. This is especially so when discussing submission in the context of the marital relationship. Misinterpretation of the concept of mutual submission has led to confusion and frustration. Ephesians 5:22 has often been isolated at the center of the conversation: “Wives submit to your husbands as unto the Lord” (NIV). The isolation of this verse from its context tends to wedge separation for men and women rather than getting to the core of what submission really means for today and how families live it out. Some writers infer that the word submission means weak, inferior, or incapable of decision making. Such an assumption is unfortunate and does not even come close to the tone of voice that Paul uses with his audience at Ephesus. The passage can raise many questions:

What does submission mean? How inclusive is it? Does it mean that a wife can never disagree, can never have a part in decision making, cannot control the budget, write a check, or even have money to spend without accounting for it?

¹²² From the Series *The Influential Woman* “Lesson 5: The Truth about Submission,” *Bible.org*, accessed December 30, 2015, <https://bible.org/seriespage/lesson-5-truth-about-submission>.

Does it mean that a wife obeys her husband in the same way a slave obeys his master, or the way a child obeys his parents? Does it mean that a woman's personality is to be repressed or obliterated, having no valid expression? Is marriage a chain of command?¹²³

Raising such questions is beneficial, in that, it reveals the need for further research. Answering such questions too soon is what leads to incorrect assumptions and shoddy thinking. Paul's statement must be discussed and understood using the hermeneutic process to gain a true interpretation of biblical submission that will help instruct the reader in what God intended as the meaning for the passage. It is imperative that readers interpret the statement within the context of the passage. Just one verse earlier, Paul prefaces the statement with another sentence about submission: "Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ." (Ephesians 5:21 NIV) This particular verse, which is often omitted during this dialogue, first focuses the audience towards the concept of mutual submission to one another in Christ. It is indeed an act in which both the husband and the wife participate. The use of "submit" (*hypotassomenoi*) in Ephesians 5:21 means "to submit to one's control" or "to subject."¹²⁴ In verse 23, the use of "head" (*kephalē*) refers to "master" and "lord," distinguishing the roles of the husband as the head of his wife and Christ as the head of the church.¹²⁵

There is a common misguided assumption among some believers that this passage is the quintessential passage for giving insight into the relationship between Jesus and the Church, with the martial relationship being the model for the spiritual relationship with

¹²³ Ibid.

¹²⁴ "5293 Hupotassó," Bible Hub, accessed February 17, 2016, <http://biblehub.com/greek/5293.htm>.

¹²⁵ "2776 Kephale," Bible Hub, accessed February 17, 2016, <http://biblehub.com/greek/2776.htm>.

Jesus and his Church. Being true to hermeneutics, that is not necessarily the context or the order of things. Keeping true to the relationship between the husband and wife as the context, it is possible to understand the intended meaning of the author a little clearer.

Because many Christians have missed Paul's main point, they believe that Paul used marriage to illustrate the close relationship between Jesus Christ and the Church. Actually, it is the other way round: The unity between Jesus Christ and his Church is a profound model for marriage. As followers of Jesus, both husbands and wives should be building unity, nurture, love, and respect in their marriages.¹²⁶

It is also worth noting that the participle "submitting" in verse 21 is a part of a series of participles and refers back to a command in verse 18.

After calling for his readers not to get drunk on wine [5:18], Paul commands... his readers to "be filled with the Holy Spirit." Resulting from the command are five adverbial participles... speaking, singing, making music, giving thanks, and submitting... The people envisioned being filled with the Holy Spirit are also those speaking, singing, making music, giving thanks and submitting [5:18-21].¹²⁷

Additionally, verse 21 speaks to an idea of mutual submission through which the section of 5:22-6:9 is interpreted. "Paul teaches wives, children, and slaves to be submissive to those "over" them. However, Paul also demands a level of submission from husbands, fathers, and masters premised on the self-giving nature of the incarnation."¹²⁸

This serves as a classic example of the value of seeking out other points of view on a passage of Scripture in an attempt to validate or refute an assumption. The last statement in the quote above serves to explain an overarching definition of submission as

¹²⁶ "Paul's Main Point in Ephesians 5:22-33," *New Life*, accessed December 30, 2015, http://newlife.id.au/equality-and-gender-issues/pauls-main-point-in-eph-5_22-33/.

¹²⁷ Stanley N. Helton, "Ephesians 5:21: A Longer Translation Note," 39-40, accessed February 17, 2016, https://www.academia.edu/11556623/Ephesians_5_21_A_Longer_Translation_Note.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, 41.

presented in Ephesians 5, helping to answer the questions presented about submission. It speaks to a healthy team and makes no provision for an oppressive, ruthless dictator who demands that his wife attend to his every need. Instead, this portion of the Bible points to Christ laying his life down for the Church, being willing to sacrifice greatly for her, for the sake of love and redemption. It can be said that a man who is willing to lay his life down for his wife demonstrates his care, concern, and personal cautiousness as he seeks to do his best to take care of her, no matter the cost. Seeing submission in this light frames it as a welcoming concept. *The Expositor's Bible Commentary* explains it further:

Such subordination implies no inferiority, rather the opposite. A free and sympathetic obedience -which is the true submission-can only subsist between equals. The apostle writes: "Children, obey; Servants, obey"; [Ephesians 6:1, Ephesians 6:5] but "Wives submit yourselves to your own husbands, as to the Lord." The same word denotes submission within the Church, and within the house. It is here that Christianity, in contrast with Paganism, and notably with Mohammedanism, raises the weaker sex to honour. In soul and destiny it declares the woman to be man, endowed with all rights and powers inherent in humanity. "In Christ Jesus there is no male and female," any more than there is "Jew and Greek" or "bond and free." The same sentence which broke down the barriers of Jewish caste, and in course of time abolished slavery, condemned the odious assumptions of masculine pride. It is one of the glories of our faith that it has enfranchised our sisters, and raises them in spiritual calling to the full level of their brothers and husbands.¹²⁹

By thinking critically about this passage, it becomes clear that mutual submission in the marriage context lifts up each spouse to fulfill their duties as lovers who are working together to accomplish the great good that they can offer to each other and God.

In all, readers should weigh this hermeneutically sound interpretation of submission against whatever assumptions they have been taught. Depending on their

¹²⁹ "Ephesians 5 Commentary - The Expositor's Bible Commentary," *StudyLight.org*, accessed December 31, 2015, <http://www.studylight.org/commentaries/teb/view.cgi?bk=48&ch=5>.

convictions, they may find that some of their deeply embedded paradigmatic assumptions are challenged as they learn to embrace the beauty of submission.

Conclusion

Being willing to challenge assumptions about Scripture has the potential to alter students' worldviews regarding their understanding of God, life, relationships, and what it means to be a disciple of Jesus. A big part of challenging these assumptions has to do with taking the time to venture back to the original context of a passage and "seek to understand the meaning for the original reader through exegesis and then use sound hermeneutic methodology to ascertain its contemporary significance."¹³⁰ Without the clearest possible picture of the past, it is nearly impossible to bring forth pure, timeless, truths to assist with navigating the future. With a thoughtful understanding of the context of any subject, the interpretation is bound to provide a more precise application for life.

As students fully engage in the critical thinking process through soundly exegeting and applying Scripture, it becomes a transformative experience. In fact, critical thinking requires people to be willing to question and transform their thoughts and conclusions, so as to improve their thinking and influence the way that they live their life.

¹³⁰ "Critical Review: How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth by Fee & Stuart," *Logos Apologia*, accessed December 27, 2015, <http://www.logosapologia.org/critical-review-how-to-read-the-bible-for-all-its-worth-by-fee-stuart/>.

CHAPTER THREE

AWARENESS OF THE PRESENT STATE & INSPIRATION FOR THE FUTURE

Introduction

It is one thing to teach about critical thinking; it is another thing to have students buy into the concept, and then use it in their classes across the disciplines. It is an even bigger stretch for students to actually see the need for critical thinking as an important life skill. One of the top priorities in Christian higher education, academically speaking, appeals to epistemology: teaching students how to learn and know the truth, weighing what is put before them so as to live wisely.¹³¹ However, assessing the frame of mind of Christian university students reveals that there is a need for a reframing of how university students should approach learning and education. This applies to both private and public higher education settings. Whether intentionally or unintentionally, many of these recent high school graduates were trained to believe that “the emphasis [in learning] tends to be on “lower order thinking:” to passively absorb information then repeat it back on tests.”¹³²

Academic Pursuit versus Social Interest

Although academic institutions have been the flagship for higher education, historians say that social interests have been a featured part of the college experience in

¹³¹ Linda Elder and Richard Paul, “Critical Thinking: Teaching Students How to Study and Learn (Part I),” *Journal of Developmental Education* 26, no. 1 (Fall 2002): 36.

¹³² Gregory Bassham et al., *Critical Thinking: A Students Introduction*, 5th ed. (McGraw-Hill Higher Education, 2012), 1.

the eyes of students since the inception of colleges in the United States.¹³³ Students often seek this social culture when choosing a college instead of gravitating towards the challenge of higher thinking or searching for a university that emphasizes academic rigor.¹³⁴ The social tide seems to have gained even more momentum in recent decades. Many today unashamedly sacrifice blocks of time that should be devoted to academics and invest it in college life activities or other areas. This is not to say that students should not be social or take breaks from their studies to relax and be refreshed. It confirms that, based on the research, more playing and less academic diligence seems to be the primary higher educational experience for the majority of students. Studies by Philip Babcock and Mindy Marks show the following:

[F]ull-time college students through the early 1960s spent roughly forty hours per week on academic pursuits (i.e. combined studying and class time); at which point a steady decline ensued throughout the following decades. Today, full-time college students on average report spending only twenty-seven hours per week on academic activities – that is, less time than a typical high school student spends at school. Average time studying fell from twenty-five hours per week in 1961 to twenty hours per week in 1981 and thirteen hours per week in 2003... [I]n 1961, 67 percent of full-time college students reported [studying more than twenty hours per week]; by 1981, the percentage had dropped to 44 percent; today, only one in five full-time college students report devoting more than twenty hours per week on studying.¹³⁵

These statistics applied to all demographic groups that were studied and to all types and sizes of four-year colleges that were assessed.

¹³³ Richard Arum and Josipa Roksa, *Academically Adrift: Limited Learning on College Campuses* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011), 3.

¹³⁴ Ibid.

¹³⁵ Ibid., 3-4.

Here is how one student responded in a survey taken by undergraduates. It demonstrates a disinterest in wanting to academically invest in reading, writing, and critical thinking. The student commented,

I hate classes with a lot of reading that is tested on. Any class where a teacher is just gonna give us notes and a worksheet or something like that is better. Something that I can study and just learn from in five [minutes] I'll usually do pretty good in. Whereas, if I'm expected to read, you know, a hundred-and-fifty-page book and then write a three-page essay on it, you know, on a test let's say, I'll probably do worse on the test because I probably wouldn't have read the book. Maybe ask the kids what's in the book? And I can draw my own conclusions, but I rarely actually do reading assignments or stuff like that, which is a mistake I'm sure, but it save me a lot of time.¹³⁶

In this example, the student views higher education, particularly the purpose of it, as being divorced from the pursuit of mastering or improving upon how or what he or she thinks. The student communicates a vibe of being uninterested in gaining knowledge about a particular career field. He or she may be the type of student referred to in the following comment.

For their part, students seem to think they are ready for the office. But their future bosses tend to disagree. A Harris Interactive survey of 2,001 U.S. college students and 1,000 hiring managers last fall found that 69% of students felt they were “very or completely prepared” for problem-solving tasks in the workplace, while fewer than half of the employers agreed.¹³⁷

The students' egocentric inclination opposes a humble observation of his or her skewed assumptions, and demonstrates a distinct lack of critical thinking.

Despite the student's approach (in the quote at the top of the page), he or she still sought to earn, and was able to manage, an acceptable grade point average through

¹³⁶ Bassham et al., 4.

¹³⁷ Melissa Korn, “Bosses Seek ‘Critical Thinking,’ but What Is That?” *Wall Street Journal*, October 21, 2014, sec. Careers, accessed January 8, 2016, <http://www.wsj.com/articles/bosses-seek-critical-thinking-but-what-is-that-1413923730>.

intentionally registering for classes with professors who were deemed as easy by other students. By doing so, it allowed the student to repurpose study hours as leisure hours. This may have been, in part, the result of what George Kuh calls a “disengagement compact” that faculty and students share. It is portrayed in the following scenario.

“I’ll leave you alone if you leave me alone.” That is, I won’t make you work too hard (read a lot, write a lot) so that I won’t have to grade as many papers or explain why you are not performing well. The existence of this bargain is suggested by the fact that at a relatively low level of effort, many students get decent grades – B’s and sometimes better. There seems to be a breakdown of shared responsibility for learning – on the part of the faculty members who allow students to get by with far less than maximum effort, and on the part of students who are not taking full advantage of the resources institutions provide.¹³⁸

This implies that faculty have a role to play, in terms of the expectations they set and what they communicate with their students. The faculty’s expectations affect the investment that students believe they will need to make in the course in order to do well. These expectations also affect the level of depth in which students will engage in critical thinking. Hence, the type of commitment and level of interest that professors convey in their students truly mastering the material is reflected in student performance.

Unfortunately, the student’s attitude exemplified above represents the opinions of far too many other students who demonstrated a low commitment to academics and minimal effort in the learning process. Barbara Schneider and David Stevenson have categorized students today as “drifting dreamers” who have “high ambitions, but no clear plans for reaching them...[They have] limited knowledge about their chosen occupations, about educational requirements, or about future demand for these

¹³⁸ George D. Kuh, “What We’re Learning About Student Engagement From NSSE: Benchmarks for Effective Educational Practices,” *Change: The Magazine of Higher Learning* 35, no. 2 (March 1, 2003): 28, doi:10.1080/00091380309604090.

occupations.”¹³⁹ It appears that these students are academically aloof. Paul Corrigan and Rickey Cotton cite additional research which found that “most students are ‘satisfied with their college experience; 87 percent will rate it ‘good’ or ‘excellent.’” Second, academically speaking, most students do not learn very much in college.”¹⁴⁰ This is why assumptions about the ideal purpose of college versus the student’s authentic intentions must be challenged. Students should seriously consider what they hope to gain from attending college besides their diploma. Do they exhibit any concern for learning how to improve their thinking about life, faith, or their chosen discipline? Are learning and critical thinking on their radars? Honest assessments can help clarify their focus, direction, and mission when attending college to determine if their intentions are worthy.

Higher education must pay attention to the continuing downward spiral in critical thinking. Learning skills need to be revived in the academic careers of students as they will become the leaders of the future. The people who will be under their leadership will benefit most from the college education these students receive and not simply their piece of paper known as a degree.¹⁴¹

Barriers that Prevent Critical Thinking

In order for students to improve their weak critical thinking skills, it is necessary for them to identify and consciously acknowledge what is blocking them from thinking at a higher level. Students should to be honest with themselves by admitting their known

¹³⁹ Barbara Schneider and David Stevenson, *The Ambitious Generation: America’s Teenagers, Motivated but Directionless* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1999), 7.

¹⁴⁰ Corrigan and Cotton, 9.

¹⁴¹ “College Education or College Degree?,” *The Huffington Post*, accessed January 4, 2016, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/troy-henderson/college-education-or-coll_b_5672541.html.

personal reasons which contribute to their inadequate critical thinking skills. In other words, what behaviors or attitudes stand in the way of improving critical thinking? For the most part, this is a question that only the student can answer. Such barriers may not be easy to uncover, as they may carry with them paradigmatic assumptions about the topic. Even so, some are well known, and it helps students advance in the learning process if they speak up about them. Barriers can be complex, or barriers can be simple. At the end of the day, they are still barriers. Gregory Bassham provides a list of common barriers in his book *Critical Thinking: A Student's Introduction*:

- Lack of relevant background information
- Poor reading skills
- Bias
- Prejudice
- Superstition
- Egocentrism (self-centered thinking)
- Sociocentrism (group-centered thinking)
- Peer pressure
- Conformism
- Provincialism (narrow, unsophisticated thinking)
- Narrow-mindedness
- Closed-mindedness
- Distrust in reason
- Relativistic thinking
- Stereotyping
- Unwarranted assumptions
- Scapegoating (blaming the innocent)
- Rationalization (inventing excuses to avoid facing our real motives)
- Denial
- Wishful thinking
- Short-term thinking
- Selective perception
- Selective memory
- Overpowering emotions
- Self-deception
- Face-saving (maintaining a good self-image)

- Fear of change¹⁴²

He goes on to highlight the five barriers that may have the most influential roles in hindering critical thinking. They are egocentrism, sociocentrism, unwarranted assumptions, relativistic thinking, and wishful thinking.¹⁴³ In attempting to create buy-in for critical thinking at large, it is helpful for the professor to unearth these barriers, bringing them to the surface so that students are aware of what holds them back from higher levels of thinking and learning.

Encouraging Student Buy-in

The overarching goal within Christian higher education is to assist students to understand both the value of developing critical thinking skills and then the practice of using such skills inside and outside of the classroom. This requires that students have a space to voice their apprehensions, their excitement, and their fears about the subject.

Regarding the importance of buy-in, Patrick Lencioni states, “[C]ommitment is a function of two things: clarity and buy-in.”¹⁴⁴ Students neglecting to make a personal commitment to improving their thinking skills may be resistant to the process because they have not had a chance or taken time to personally assess and openly express their honest opinions about the way they view critical thinking and why.¹⁴⁵ Two activities can help start this conversation and ease the tension: group discussion and personal reflection. Some students will want to verbally discuss their thoughts, feelings, and assumptions

¹⁴² Bassham et al., 10–11.

¹⁴³ Ibid., 11.

¹⁴⁴ Patrick Lencioni, *The Five Dysfunctions of a Team: A Leadership Fable* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2002), 189.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., 207.

about critical thinking; others will process their thoughts better through writing. The group forum may allow those who were apprehensive about the topic to begin to relax as they recognize that other students can relate to their anxiety and that they are not alone. After considering the organic thoughts of their peers and expressing their own assumptions, students may be encouraged to go against their initial reactions about this higher level of thinking and instead embrace it. The discussion provides the teacher with a prognosis of where the students are, relative to their understanding, as well as their use of critical thinking, since students are actually being encouraged to think critically about thinking critically. The process of discovery and giving voice must not be aborted too quickly, as quick answers shut down the act of critical thinking. The process also ceases when students and professors move away from asking questions that trigger further thought.¹⁴⁶

The Value of Vision

Once the common barriers are addressed and the students have critically assessed their own personal barriers, they are in a better position to both hear and embrace a vision for how critical thinking can and should be practiced in the classroom. Such a vision would also apply to their chosen disciplines to life. It is helpful for both students and professors be able to articulate their new way of thinking and operating.

¹⁴⁶ Linda Elder and Richard Paul, "Critical Thinking: Teaching Students How to Study and Learn (Part IV)," *Journal of Developmental Education* 27, no. 1 (Fall 2003): 36.

Vision is direction. It offers a mental picture of where one is headed.¹⁴⁷ It recognizes the need for change and moves toward the desired future. Vision often prompts a shift in current thinking and behavior. It prompts an exploration of dreams and ideals for a person or organization. “Vision generates energy and ignites passions.”¹⁴⁸ Like the start of a campfire, vision initiates and changes the atmosphere by releasing a new direction for a specific time. “Vision calls a [group of people] out of its comfort zone.”¹⁴⁹ It is a (re)birthing of goals that one hopes to accomplish. Vision relies on using improved skills and techniques and is intended to reinvigorate a person’s core being.

Norman Shawchuck and Roger Heuser claim, “It is a compelling image of a more desirable future.”¹⁵⁰ Once it is inside of an individual, it becomes a part of him or her for life. Once it infiltrates a specified group of people, it becomes a natural functioning component for everyone connected to that group. Vision breeds transformation in a person and in organizational cultures. Wayne Lee adds, “[V]ision/mission affirms what is important (values), what is not important (non-essentials), and why (motives).”¹⁵¹ By internalizing the vision/mission, people gain a sense of purpose, and believe that the intended outcome can become a reality. So, they find ways to invest themselves in the process. More specifically, it assists educational institutions in both discovering and

¹⁴⁷ “Vision and Mission - What’s the Difference and Why Does It Matter?,” *Psychology Today*, accessed January 5, 2016, <http://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/smartwork/201004/vision-and-mission-whats-the-difference-and-why-does-it-matter>.

¹⁴⁸ Norman Shawchuck and Roger Heuser, *Managing the Congregation: Building Effective Systems to Serve People* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996), 101.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 111.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 101.

¹⁵¹ Wayne Lee, “Church Life: Models of Ministry for Today’s Church” (Church Life Resources, 1999), 2.

maintaining what they deem to be priorities, which in this case is critical thinking. They provide a stable purpose and produce meaningful results.

Vision is an impetus for new abilities, fresh approaches, better direction to accomplish new goals, and to revive unachieved existing goals. It inspires new energy and new people to buy-in to the new direction. In the same vein, everything does not necessarily have to be new. It is more accurate to say that the people are being given a new outlook—something to belong to that matters and is a good use of their time. Pat MacMillan, in speaking to vision, and more particularly to individuals of a team (or a classroom of students for the purpose of this study), says that the vision must be “relevant to the point that they want it.”¹⁵² People want to belong and attach themselves to something meaningful or to what they believe will make a difference in the lives of others. He articulates the fact that relevance and ownership partner together within the heart of the people.

Shawchuck and Heuser delineate the depth in which people attach themselves to a vision, generally speaking, by addressing six levels of commitment. These levels greatly affect one’s ability to implement a vision. They are helpful for college and university professors seeking to obtain a pulse for the level of buy-in from their students relative to their willingness to thinking critically.

1. **Commitment:** Those persons who really want the vision and will do whatever it takes to make it happen.

¹⁵² Pat MacMillan, *The Performance Factor: Unlocking the Secrets of Teamwork* (Nashville, Tenn: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2001), 279.

2. **Enrollment:** Those persons who want the vision and will do whatever it takes within the ‘spirit of the law.’
3. **Genuine Compliance:** The ‘good soldiers’ who, seeking the benefit of the vision, will do what is expected of them (and perhaps even more).
4. **Formal Compliance:** The ‘pretty good soldiers’ who will do what is expected of them (but nothing more).
5. **Noncompliance:** Those persons who do not see the benefit of the vision and will not do what is expected of them. No one can make them become involved.
6. **Apathy:** Those persons with no interest or energy who are neither for nor against the vision.¹⁵³

Ultimately, the vision for critical thinking can only be implemented if students are on board. For this to happen students need to clearly perceive their task. Communication and repetition help to clarify the goals. Furthermore, students must not only be able to visualize the vision/mission as “clear – I see it,” but MacMillan says that it must be, “relevant—I want it.”¹⁵⁴ Students will be more inclined to attach themselves to something meaningful or to what they believe can be used to make a difference in the lives of others. It is likely that once the students begin to see the beneficial results of their efforts, they will want to dig deeper. They want to know that their involvement is, “significant—it’s worth it.”¹⁵⁵ “The degree to which the mission of the [student] is desirable and wanted by

¹⁵³ Norman Shawchuck and Roger Heuser, *Managing the Congregation: Building Effective Systems to Serve People* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996), 119.

¹⁵⁴ Pat MacMillan, 279.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.

the [student] will greatly influence the energy, creativity, and effort they exert to achieve it.”¹⁵⁶ They want to see the value of their investment. When students are committed to the learning process, they take on an attitude that says this mission is “achievable—I believe it.” [Students and professors] must really believe that this task is achievable. This is where the art of goal setting resides. On one hand, the goal must be big enough to motivate the needed effort; on the other, it must be realistically achievable.”¹⁵⁷

The Big Picture: Stages of Development as a Thinker

After reviewing the current student outlook on critical thinking in the realm of Christian higher education and then recognizing the value of vision in exploring the possibilities of “a more desirable future,” it is appropriate to now explore a vision for critical thinking in the classroom.¹⁵⁸

As with any uncharted territory, vision is a discovery process, and so is critical thinking. Critical thinking expert Richard Paul aids students in establishing a launching point as he reveals the six stages of development as a critical thinker. These stages are provided with the intent to create awareness of the present (reality check), as well as to develop vision for the next level.

1. Stage One: The Unreflective Thinker (we are unaware of significant problems in our thinking)
2. Stage Two: The Challenged Thinker (we become aware of problems in our thinking)

¹⁵⁶ Ibid.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid.

¹⁵⁸ Shawchuck and Heuser, 101.

3. Stage Three: The Beginning Thinker (we try to improve but without regular practice)
4. Stage Four: The Practicing Thinker (we recognize the necessity of regular practice)
5. Stage Five: The Advanced Thinker (we advance in accordance with our practice)
6. Stage Six: The Master Thinker (skilled & insightful thinking become second nature to us)¹⁵⁹

One area that students can immediately begin to think about is their purpose for attending college. If they are uncertain, then they should ask themselves the question that some organizations ask to refocus and recalibrate direction. “What is [my] business? How is business?”¹⁶⁰ For the college student, his or her business is to “learn how to think—that is how to become independent, self-directed thinkers and learners.”¹⁶¹ This is a major part of their academic calling from God. This power behind the broader sense of this “business” or calling should not be underestimated.

A sense of calling to higher learning will help sustain college students in the ups and downs of college life and help them make sense of both the delights and disappointments of being a college student. A sense of calling provides an organizing and stabilizing center. College will certainly involve times of excitement and affirmation. But it will also involve frustrations, trials, and boredom. Some students will even experience trouble and loss while in college. In other words, daily life as a college student will still be daily life. But knowing that you are called by God to be a college student and developing a sense of the presence and action of God can trump all else and make the years of being a

¹⁵⁹ Richard Paul and Linda Elder, *Critical Thinking: Tools for Taking Charge of Your Professional and Personal Life*, 2nd ed. (Indianapolis, IN: Pearson FT Press, 2013).

¹⁶⁰ Shawchuck and Heuser, 93.

¹⁶¹ Bassham et al., 1.

college student exciting, dynamic, and [an] essential part of your spiritual journey.¹⁶²

Such a sense of divine purpose is what should compel students to invest their best effort in college, giving proper attention to their academic pursuit and doing it as unto the Lord. (Colossians 3:23-24)

Thinking Deeply about the Academic Calling

In their book, *College in the Spirit: Christian Higher Education as a Calling*, Paul Corrigan and Rickey Cotton explain that students should see learning and critical thinking as part of their commitment to God and service to others.¹⁶³ At the core of the Christian doctrine are Jesus' commands to "love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength... [and] [I]ove your neighbor as yourself." (Mark 12:30-31) Emphasis in this context is placed on loving and serving God with one's mind. Scripture also speaks to being "transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is – his good, pleasing, and perfect will." (Romans 12:2) Whatever major a student chooses, he or she should pursue it with the intention of better serving God and his people as a result of choosing to fully invest and apply himself or herself to the learning process. When students adopt this desire, it becomes part of their academic and professional mission to explore deeper thinking.

A biblical framework is a key factor when it comes to integrating faith and learning and for understanding one's academic calling. In the earlier chapter, an

¹⁶² Corrigan and Cotton, 12-13.

¹⁶³ Ibid., 1-2.

understanding about hermeneutics was introduced to aid students in proper interpretation of the Bible. This comes into use when attempting to discern the biblical purpose for Christians to invest in Christian higher education. Corrigan and Cotton have articulated a list of such purposes. It should not be considered exhaustive.

- To be a good steward of God’s gifts (1 Peter 4:10)
- To prepare to serve one’s “neighbors” (Mark 12:31)
- To learn about the world that God so loves (John 3:16)
- To learn more about God (Proverbs 1:5)
- To grow closer to God (James 4:8)
- To learn to serve God in all things (Colossians 3:23)
- To dialogue about important issues with other Christians (Acts 15:6)
- To grow as a person (Colossians 1:10)
- To develop spiritual community (John 17:20)¹⁶⁴

Critical thinking comes into play as students then consider how to improve and mature in each of these areas and as institutions and professors implement ways to help students learn about their academic calling. Indeed, as students connect new information that they are learning in college to their faith and their purpose for being in college, it adds layers to their thinking. In his book, *The Integration of Faith and Learning: A Worldview Approach*, Robert Harris explains that “successful integration requires consistency and coherence.”¹⁶⁵

¹⁶⁴ Ibid.

¹⁶⁵ Robert A Harris, *The Integration of Faith and Learning: A Worldview Approach* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2004), 2.

First, the process requires consistency. Information gathered, heard, or received should line up with what one already knows to be true regarding a biblical worldview. If there is a contradiction of any kind, then “the information of knowledge gained or knowledge known must be adjusted, reinterpreted, or rejected.”¹⁶⁶ In other words, students will be forced to wrestle with why their previous assumptions about truth and interpretations of it are invalid. They will need to ascertain instances when the new information does not line up with known truth. No matter what college a student attends, he or she has to be able to filter information gained in class, through a textbook, or in general conversations. Both Christian and non-Christian colleges use textbooks outside of the sphere of Christianity. This is where the critical thinking skills of the student are essential for helping to decipher what is true and biblically sound, and then distinguish it from the false, inconsistent information that does not fit within their biblical framework.

Second, the process involves coherence. New information must be integrated, so that the whole makes sense and not just part(s) of it. In other words, there should be a “sense of harmony of the interrelated set of ideas” that binds them together. Philosopher James Moreland says, “To integrate means to blend or form into a whole. In this sense, integration occurs when one’s theological beliefs, primarily rooted in Scripture, are blended and unified with propositions judged as rational from other sources into a coherent, intellectually adequate Christian worldview.”¹⁶⁷

A “successful integration of faith and learning depends on a thorough, accurate, and carefully thought through understanding of the Bible, together with a good

¹⁶⁶ Ibid.

¹⁶⁷ James Porter Moreland and William Lane Craig, *Philosophical Foundations for a Christian Worldview* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 17.

understanding of how academic knowledge claims are made and the worldviews underlying those claims. Skillful interpretation in both areas is a key factor.”¹⁶⁸ As students assimilate the knowledge they are learning inside and outside of the classroom, it is important for them to weigh the information and determine how the worldview being offered fits into their Christian worldview. Professors also have the opportunity to weigh and test the student’s synthesis of such viewpoints. It is hoped that students attending Christian higher education institutions have already embraced a Christian worldview as their own. A broad understanding of Christian worldview employs a “Christ-centered, theory of everything, [and] begins with a proper understanding of the Bible.”¹⁶⁹ Students are to be mindful about the knowledge they are trying to integrate with their faith. Using the side rails of consistency and coherence mentioned above, they are better equipped to pinpoint what to accept and apply, and what to reject.

Integrating faith and learning is a practice that has long been in existence; it is also not unique to Christianity. Hence, as students are exposed to broader viewpoints and different ways of seeing the world, they should be ever ready to analyze and critically consider the content of other worldviews, investing diligent effort in comparing and contrasting them with God’s truth. This, indeed, is a necessary part of growing in knowledge and fulfilling one’s academic calling.

Inspiration from Martin Luther on the Value of Deciphering Truth

Within the basic framework of a Christian worldview exists a subset of worldviews which are derived from how Christians interpret and apply Scripture and

¹⁶⁸ Harris, 5.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid., 184.

other second-hand theologies.¹⁷⁰ There was a time in history when such interpretation and application was more dictated to the common people by church leaders. In that day, people were not encouraged to think for themselves or to do their own interpreting of Scripture or exploring of theological ideas. They merely accepted the views of church leaders, thus embracing a second-hand theology. However, part of the historical theology was not biblically accurate. Furthermore, the motivation of the church authorities during this period was partly motivated by financial gain at the expense of the people. Yet, the people could not see this; they blindly and confidently held to the doctrine and religious requirements of the day as stated by the church leaders. This scenario from the time of Martin Luther in the Sixteenth Century speaks to the danger of passivity when people fail to think critically and to search for evidence to validate even the assumptions of church leaders. Stephen Brookfield elaborates in his book, *Teaching for Critical Thinking: Tools and Techniques to Help Students Question Their Assumptions*.

[I]f you can't think critically your survival is in peril because you risk living a life that – without you being aware of it – hurts you and serves the interests of those who wish you harm. If you can't think critically you have no chance of recognizing, let alone pushing back on, those times you are being manipulated. And if you can't think critically you will behave in ways that have less chance of achieving the results you want. [Critical thinking] is a way of living that helps you stay intact when a number of organizations (corporate, political, educational, and cultural) are trying to get you to think and act in ways that serve their purposes.¹⁷¹

Hence, the power and scope of critical thinking spans far beyond the academic classroom. It affects daily living and one's spiritual life. It pushes people to become more aware, not only of their own thinking, but also of the thinking of others. While

¹⁷⁰ Keith Drury, "A Christian Worldview?," accessed January 6, 2016, <http://www.drurywriting.com/keith/worldview.Christian.htm>.

¹⁷¹ Stephen Brookfield, *Teaching for Critical Thinking: Tools and Techniques to Help Students Question Their Assumptions*, 1st ed. (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2011), 2.

manipulation may or may not be intentional, critical thinking can shine a light when it does occur. Martin Luther is a worthwhile example of critical thinking in action.

It was Luther's father's hope that he would become a lawyer and thus ensure a better, more stable, future than his previous years as a peasant. On the brink of earning his degree, events led Luther to change his direction. "On July of 1505, Martin was caught in a horrific thunderstorm. Afraid that he was going to die, he screamed a vow, "Save me, St. Anna, and I shall become a monk." St. Anna was the mother of the Virgin Mary."¹⁷² In July of that year Luther chose to become an Augustinian monk and entered "a strict order noted for its academic interests and pastoral concerns."¹⁷³ Choosing this path meant standing up to his father in order to pursue his own desires. It hurt his parents deeply that he would abandon the other path.

Outside of a vow he made while enduring inclement weather, one of Luther's underlying motivations in choosing to become a monk had to do with his own lack of assurance regarding his salvation. He wanted to "win God's favour [*sic*] and forgiveness for his (largely imagined) sins through many acts of self-mortification."¹⁷⁴ When he continued to struggle to find answers after joining the monastery, his mentor eventually encouraged him to "focus on Christ and him alone in his quest for assurance. Though his

¹⁷² "Luther, Martin | Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy," accessed January 6, 2016, <http://www.iep.utm.edu/luther/>.

¹⁷³ Michael Mullett, "Martin Luther's Ninety-Five Theses..." *History Review*, no. 46 (September 2003): 46.

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 47.

anxieties would plague him for still years to come, the seeds for his later assurance were laid in that conversation.”¹⁷⁵

He would go to become an ordained priest, a doctor of Sacred Scripture, and assume a professorship at the university of Wittenberg in Saxony, Germany. Through his teachings on the book of Psalms and Paul’s writings in the book of Romans to university students, Luther gradually became aware of the doctrine of justification by grace through faith alone. (Romans 3:24) This deeply reformed understanding set him ablaze. It stood in stark contrast to the teaching of the Late Medieval Catholic Church, which promoted the need for good deeds to earn salvation. It prompted Luther to write and post his *Ninety-Five Theses* outside of the chapel at the university to invite further discussion. This document explained his new findings and rejected the practice of selling indulgences. Luther also sent this to the Archbishop so as to address the inaccurate assumption about salvation and call for an end to practices supporting it, namely, the sale of indulgences.¹⁷⁶ He disagreed with them because he believed, based on what the Bible says in Romans, they had no bearing on whether or not God would choose to forgive someone of their sins.

¹⁷⁵ “Luther, Martin | Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy.”

¹⁷⁶ “Around 1505, Pope Julius II began building St. Peter’s Basilica and commissioned Michelangelo to paint the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel. Both of these were tremendously expensive. When Leo X became pope in 1513 he was in great need of funds; therefore, he decided to promote the indulgences (where any Catholic parishioner could pay money to the church in exchange for the forgiveness of sins) in order to help pay for it. This practice was not accepted by all, especially by the professor, Martin Luther. He argued that only God could forgive the sins of those who put all of their faith into Jesus, and not into indulgences...” “Sale of Indulgences,” *The Protestant Reformation*, accessed January 7, 2016, <http://protestantreformationhd.weebly.com/sale-of-indulgences.html>.

With regard to the ensuing upset in the status quo, Luther's colleague, Philip Melancthon, stated that Luther was simply a "lover of truth."¹⁷⁷ He writes that "Luther hardly knew what he was doing."¹⁷⁸ Luther was not really suspecting any wide-scale change or major overhaul from the Church after posting his *Ninety-Five Theses*, only moderation. This was a substantial underestimation. His actions and unwavering position led to his excommunication, for he refused to change his claims unless they could be disproven by Scripture. His reasoning also spawned what is known today as the Protestant Reformation. In the end, Luther was ultimately able to find relief and assurance for his tattered heart. Through personally applying the biblical doctrine of justification by grace through faith, he was able to find peace and rest from the anxiety that he was haunted by for years. He also paved the way for others to experience such peace and truly divine forgiveness.

Martin Luther's life embodies the essence and power of critical thinking. He was and is a well-respected critical thinker who passionately sought to empower people with the ability to move past dictated understandings of God in favor of personally studying the Scriptures. Luther used his love for people, his obedience to God, his inward unrest, his reasoning skills, and, ultimately, God's word, to speak the truth on the people's behalf. This how critical thinking helps others. In fact, his influence extends to even twenty-first century students who are reaping the benefits of his investment.

Luther provides a fitting demonstration of the value of wrestling with assumptions, even those communicated on a grand scale by the church; even the pope. He

¹⁷⁷ "Luther, Martin | Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy."

¹⁷⁸ Ibid.

showed the importance of gathering evidence to prove human claims, looking to the Bible as the ultimate source for his theology. This is what allowed him to take informed action, to questions the existing assumptions in favor of expressing accurate interpretations.

In a final note about Luther, it is worth mentioning that his shift in thinking partially took place in the classroom as he lectured. God used the field of Christian higher education as the context for truth to be revealed to Luther. The same can happen for students today who are willing to deeply invest in improving their thinking as they grapple with difficult concepts and take inspiration from people like Luther. May students entering Christian and non-Christian colleges and universities see the urgency in learning what it means to be a critical thinker and one who thinks for himself or herself.¹⁷⁹

Advantages of Critical Thinking

Having identified some advantages of critical thinking as displayed in the life of Martin Luther, it is appropriate to continue unveiling what critical thinking offers, looking to the modern world. Christian university students will want to ponder these and other benefits as they make a conscious decision of whether or not to commit to becoming a critical thinker. One important advantage of critical thinking that is valued in today's work is that "critical thinking promotes creativity."¹⁸⁰ It encourages the exploration of new ideas and new angles for solving problems big and small and for

¹⁷⁹ "Think for Yourself," *Psychology Today*, accessed January 6, 2016, <http://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/what-would-aristotle-do/201001/think-yourself>.

¹⁸⁰ Paul and Elder, *The Thinker's Guide*, 19.

inventing new technologies. Creativity has helped engineers to dig fresh water wells for people in third world countries with no other means to tap into the fresh water themselves. MP3 devices with ministry training material are being sent to pastors in third world countries and to those in the underground church. Farmers are traveling the world teaching people how to grow their own vegetables so that they can feed their families year-round, preventing starvation. Farmers are also encouraging entrepreneurship as some of the families go on to become local farmers in their hometown creating a family business for the first time. Watches are now phones for the public in an on-the-go society. And the list goes on.

Furthermore, most jobs require critical thinking, including higher paying jobs (i.e. doctors, dentists, psychiatrists, and lawyers).¹⁸¹ Data from 2014 states that “[m]entions of critical thinking in job postings have doubled since 2009.”¹⁸² Companies creating and inventing devices and strategies have asked some skilled people with deep knowledge and an understanding across multiple disciplines to join their team with starting salaries at six-figures. While critical thinking is not necessarily about money, good thinking in a field can make someone a desired candidate for the highest paying jobs. Companies like Apple, Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and 3M are clearly selective when it comes to hiring individuals for high paying jobs. However, it should not be assumed that all companies have the same precise definition of critical thinking. Michael *Desmarais*, *Global Head of recruiting at Goldman Sachs Group*, asks, “Do[es a candidate] make use

¹⁸¹ “6 Company Holiday Party Temptations and Tips | Pearson’s Critical Thinking Blog - Part 2016,” accessed January 7, 2016, <http://critical-thinkers.com/2010/12/6-company-holiday-party-temptations-and-tips/2016/>.

¹⁸² Korn; *Ibid*.

of information that's available in their journey to arrive at a conclusion or decision? How do they make use of that?"¹⁸³ Richard Arum describes critical thinking as "[t]he ability to cross-examine evidence and logical argument. To sift through all the noise."¹⁸⁴ This definition may appeal to those seeking to become lawyers. Others define it as "[t]he ability to work with data, to accumulate it, analyze it [and] synthesize it, in order to make balanced assessments and smart decisions."¹⁸⁵

Critical thinking expert Peter Facione explains how critical thinking is vital for democracies and free market economies to thrive.¹⁸⁶ He expresses a compelling word picture of the potential chaos in society if its citizens abandoned critical thinking:

Imagine an electorate that cared not for the facts, that did not wish to consider the pros and cons of the issues, or if they did, had not the brain power to do so. Imagine your life and the lives of your friends and family placed in the hands of juries and judges who let their biases and stereotypes govern their decisions, who do not attend to the evidence, who are not interested in reasoned inquiry, who do not know how to draw an inference or evaluate one. Without critical thinking people would be more easily exploited not only politically but economically.¹⁸⁷

The decision of one person to embrace or reject the need for critical thinking as a life skill impacts not just that individual, but his or her community. When citizens undervalue the need for informed decision-making, it hinders the overall progress of society. Critical thinking is important globally, not just individually.

Over time, critical thinking helps a student to become a skilled learner who is a "self-directed, self-disciplined, self-monitored, and self-corrective thinker who has given

¹⁸³ Ibid.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid.

¹⁸⁶ Facione; Ibid.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid.

assent to rigorous standards of thought and mindful command of their use.”¹⁸⁸ It keeps them from having to be the type of student and learner who needs to be shoved in the right direction to make progress. They have indeed taken ownership of the critical thinking process and are able to continue practicing it long after their days in college because they have embraced critical thinking as a life skill. They recognize its value. This provides the student with the opportunity to not only improve their personal quality of life but to enhance the quality of life for those around them. Such students may well be the ones who later advance in their disciplines and jobs to manage their own successful companies or to become leading employees at some of the largest and most influential companies in the world.

The Educated Christian

Two of the critical thinking gurus of the twenty-first century, Linda Elder and Richard Paul, remind students that it takes time, work, unlearning, relearning, engagement, patience, questions, reading, conversations, and intentionality to learn how to study properly, think critically, and transform an idle, passive mind into a functioning, skilled “educated mind.”¹⁸⁹ Such a mind should exude humility while exploring the truth to better serve humanity. An educated mind should not to be confused with an arrogant mind that exalts itself above others. Rather, it allows the student to be a great resource to society at large as they have the opportunity to impact others by sharing their knowledge with co-workers, family members, church members, and perhaps even their own students one day. Thus, a quality education is beneficial to both the student and the people whom

¹⁸⁸ Paul and Elder, “Critical Thinking (Part I),” 36.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid.

the student will one day offer services to in his or her profession. This re-emphasizes a student's academic calling, in that, "[t]he call to be a Christian college student means being called to be a learner and a critical thinker in the Spirit, not learning for its own sake but learning for the sake of God and for service to others."¹⁹⁰ It broadens the scope of being an educated Christian, in that it "involves curiosity and listening and reading and understanding the questions of those we encounter daily in our lives. We have to care about others in our lives and be interested in their lives."¹⁹¹

Recognizing the importance of hard work in earning an education is an important part of preparing to become a critical thinker. Learning to study well is an art. This observation stands in stark contrast to the mindset that as long as students love God and embrace his grace, they have all they need and thus see no need to make a deep investment in education. Instead, students seeking to become educated Christians will be stretched over the course of their four-year degree programs to think more deeply, ask more questions, do more writing, consider additional viewpoints, challenge their assumptions, and read more voraciously. Students should seek to fully engage the learning process and thereby attain deeper knowledge and better discretion that Proverbs speaks about in the Old Testament.¹⁹² Students have the opportunity to grow in their relationship with Jesus as they endeavor to understand God, truth, others, their disciplines, and themselves.

¹⁹⁰ Corrigan and Cotton, 1–2.

¹⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 2.

¹⁹² "Proverbs 1, New American Standard Bible (NASB)," accessed January 2, 2016, <https://www.bible.com/bible/100/pro.1>.

Expectations for Academic Challenge

In light of the hard work it takes to earn an education, it is helpful for professors to communicate early on in the semester with students about the level of academic challenge presented in their courses. The idea of creating academic challenge for university students involves stretching students beyond their comfort zones by way of academic rigor to help them see that they can accomplish more than they had originally thought.¹⁹³ With that in mind, professors should maintain high standards as a source of motivation for students, which can lead to a sense of accomplishment when students meet the challenge.

It should not be assumed that students' expectations match faculty expectations regarding the intensity of the course and the depth of critical thinking required. Hence, students should be made aware of the challenge before them and initially coached on how to meet this challenge. The American Association for Higher Education claims, "Students will be better prepared to manage successfully the many challenges that college presents if beforehand they have an idea of what to expect and when and how to deal with these issues."¹⁹⁴ It is ideal that this would happen before students enter the university classroom, but that cannot be assumed as the norm. Providing examples of assignments from successful students has proven to be an enormous support in student performance levels. This is especially relevant for freshmen and transfer students, who are newcomers adapting to the expectations of their new university. Furthermore, students should be made aware of academic resources that are available to them such as any writing labs,

¹⁹³ George D Kuh, Jillian Kinzie, John H. Schuh, Elizabeth J. Whitt, and Associates. *Student Success in College: Creating Conditions That Matter* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2005), 11.

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 307.

tutoring services, and any other support services that can help them focus and put forth their best effort in class engagement.

As the professors do their part in clarifying expectations concerning the level of academic challenge and critical thinking for their course(s), students must accept responsibility for their role in the learning process. Their chosen level of engagement plays a vital part in setting the tempo for a course. Faculty then make their contribution by monitoring student academic commitments and standards as they continually seek to help the student move closer toward their set goal(s) in the learning environment, noting student responsibility that exists inside and outside of the classroom. Faculty and students are interdependent in creating and maintaining an engaging learning experience.

Bloom's Taxonomy and the Sequencing of Christian Higher Education Courses

As students in Christian higher education progress throughout their undergraduate degree programs, the institution (i.e. academic advisors) and professors should explain to students that the courses in their degree programs are sequentially designed to help them progress from lower levels of thinking at the beginning of their academic career to higher levels at its conclusion. The expectations and language used in freshmen and senior level courses will and should differ greatly. Bloom's Taxonomy classifies six levels of targeted cognitive skills that range from the lowest to the highest level of complexity. The revised version categorizes these skills as remembering, understanding, applying, analyzing, evaluating, and creating. The following offers a brief explanation for professors to use when preparing their syllabi and establishing their course expectations. The corresponding verbs identified in each level should also be considered when reviewing the intended learning outcomes of a course.

1. Remembering (most basic skill): Can your student[s] recall, restate, and/or relay information? Use words and phrases such as: how many, when, where, list, define, tell, describe, identify, etc. to draw out factual answers.
2. Understanding: Can your students grasp the meaning of information by interpreting and translating what has been learned? Use words such as: describe, explain, estimate, predict, identify, differentiate, etc., to encourage students to translate, interpret, and extrapolate.
3. Applying: Can your students use strategies, concepts, principles and theories when they encounter a new situation? Use words such as: demonstrate, apply, illustrate, show, solve, examine, classify, experiment, etc., to encourage students to apply knowledge to situations that are new and unfamiliar.
4. Analyzing: Can your students dissect information to explore understandings and relationships? Use words and phrases such as: what are the differences, analyze, explain, compare, separate, classify, arrange, etc., to encourage students to break information down into parts.
5. Evaluating: Can your students make decisions based on in-depth reflection, criticism, and assessment? Use words such as: assess, decide, measure, select, explain, conclude, compare, summarize, etc. to encourage students to make judgements according to a set of criteria.
6. Creating (most advanced skill): Can your students generate new products, ideas or demonstrate new ways of viewing things? Use words and phrases

such as: combine, rearrange, substitute, create, design, invent, what if, etc., to encourage students to combine elements into a pattern that's new.^{195, 196}

Christian higher education course work should be organized to ensure that students are gaining higher thinking skills as they progress through their four years of classes.

Institutions and professors should help students to see the structured plan of the institution and realize where their particular course fits into the spectrum (100 level – lowest level of thinking, 400 level – highest level of undergraduate thinking). It should not be assumed that students automatically grasp the macro view of their program, thus it is helpful to reveal the logic behind their route and destination.

A task force at Southern Illinois University Edwardsville has put together a proposal for defining course levels with regard to expectations for cognitive domain. Professors are encouraged to review this sampling of objectives in light of the courses they teach and how such classes fit into a student's degree program. It should not be considered exhaustive.

100 Level:

- Introduction to terms, concepts, techniques and ways of thinking/learning with [the] discipline, typically in a broad context of a relatively broad survey of topics
- Focus on incorporating and recalling basic information and understanding basic connections among facts and concepts

¹⁹⁵ Jennifer Farr. "Using Bloom's Revised Cognitive Domain to Improve Instructional Practice," January 2009, accessed February 16, 2016. <http://farr-integratingit.net/Theory/CriticalThinking/revisedcog.htm>.

¹⁹⁶ "Bloom's Taxonomy: An Overview." Teacher Vision, October 2015, accessed February 16, 2016. <https://www.teachervision.com/teaching-methods/curriculum-planning/2171.html>.

- Recognition and creation of meaningful categories of terms and concepts from material presented in the course

200 Level:

- Continued introduction to terms and concepts within the discipline, although typically within a more defined topic
- Greater emphasis on understanding connections among terms and concepts
- Development of written and oral communication skills as especially those used within the discipline

300 Level:

- Development of specialized terms, concepts, techniques, and approaches pertaining to a narrowly defined topic within the discipline; curriculum designed for a subset of majors with shared interests and goals
- Inclusion of assessment/evaluation tools such as writing assignments, assigned project, and performance, etc. that require use of [the] library and other outside sources of information
- Integration across multiple topics such that students come to recognize deeper predictable patterns within the terms, concepts, techniques and approaches of a discipline
- Development of ability to independently recognize relative values of different approaches within the discipline and to recognize potential biases, viewpoints, and/or intentions within the scholarship underlying the discipline

400 Level:

- Development and analysis of the most current terms, concepts, techniques and approaches shaping the discipline
- Application of techniques and approaches toward divergent assignments or projects that are potentially novel to the discipline
- Increased focus on inclusion of primary scholarship in the discipline as material for students to analyze and critique constructively
- Independent application of the standards of the discipline toward writing assignments, oral presentations, performances, etc.¹⁹⁷

These objectives serve as a guide for faculty in helping students to achieve higher levels of critical thinking throughout their academic career and as an end-goal upon graduation.

Conclusion

A paradigm shift, a change from one way of thinking to another,¹⁹⁸ looms on the horizon for students entering college. It moves away from the idea of pursuing college for social reasons and places the emphasis on engaging academically. It acknowledges that though students have often been taught *what* to think in secondary school, they should now expect to be taught *how* to think in the university setting. This requires that students take ownership of their education and learn to practice better critical thinking skills.

Shifting to this new perspective is a journey that necessitates commitment to higher levels of thinking: a process that does not always come naturally. It is helpful for students entering college to acknowledge the various reasons they have not practiced

¹⁹⁷ Paul Brunkow, et al, "A Proposal for the Definition of Course Levels," accessed February 16, 2016, <https://www.siue.edu/ugov/faculty/FinalLevelsDraft.pdf>.

¹⁹⁸ Thomas S. Kuhn and Ian Hacking, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions: 50th Anniversary Edition*, 4th ed. (Chicago, IL: University Of Chicago Press, 2012), 10–11.

thinking critically in the classroom in past years. A number of barriers have been identified in this study that can assist students in bringing about awareness so that they can make such a determination.

This awareness opens the door for professors to then partner with students by communicating a vision for critical thinking which requires students to open up to and eventually adopt the practice of continually evaluating and intentionally improving upon their thinking.¹⁹⁹ Martin Luther provides a historical example of a man who took critical thinking seriously and, as a result, paved the way for reforming the common person's understanding of salvation in his day. It is hoped that students can use Luther as an example of the kinds of contributions they might make when they commit to becoming better thinkers both in their studies and in life.

Whatever the statistics may be, the possibility still remains for students in Christian higher education to embrace the full college experience while becoming disciplined thinkers who are learning to use their minds to their fullest potential by becoming critical thinkers. Such is their service to God and to the people they will lead and serve.

¹⁹⁹ Bassham et al., 1.

CHAPTER FOUR

APPLYING CRITICAL THINKING IN THE CLASSROOM

Introduction

Critical thinking practitioners have developed several meaningful exercises to assist students in applying the critical thinking skills in the classroom. Whatever the course of study may be, professors have the opportunity to utilize these resources as demonstrations for their expectations of how students should consider different angles and perspectives of thinking and expose the multiplicity of invalid human assumptions. The value of learning and doing in the classroom should not be underestimated.

Increasing Student Engagement through Educationally Purposeful Activities

For students to be able to achieve their academic potential, high levels of engagement are a necessity. Such engagement is possible through seven practices: “student-faculty contact, cooperation among students, active learning, prompt feedback, time on task, high expectations, and respect for diverse talents and ways of learning.”²⁰⁰ Researcher and Professor George Kuh makes some claims on how to foster such engagement:

[I]f faculty and administrators use principles of good practice to arrange the curriculum and other aspects of the college experience, students would ostensibly put forth more effort. Students would write more papers, read more books, meet more frequently with faculty and peers, and use information technology appropriately, all of which would result in greater gains in such areas as critical thinking, problem solving, effective communication, and responsible citizenship.²⁰¹

²⁰⁰ Kuh et al., *Student Success in College*, 2.

²⁰¹ Ibid., 9.

Kuh also makes a case for providing students with “educationally purposeful activities” and a chance to apply disseminated information in multiple outlets to further engage lectures and textbooks in more non-traditional contexts.²⁰² “The voluminous research on college student development shows that the time and energy students devote to educationally purposeful activities is the single best predictor of their learning and personal development.”²⁰³ Hence, professors should invest time in combining both learning and doing inside and outside of their classrooms.

Students learn more when they are intensely involved in their education and have opportunities to think about and apply what they are learning in different settings. And when students collaborate with others in solving problems or mastering difficult material, they acquire valuable skills that prepare them to deal with the messy, unscripted problems they will encounter daily during and after college.²⁰⁴

To better engage undergraduate students in their courses, faculty are encouraged to review their teaching methods and curriculum in light of their students’ learning styles, deciphering which aspects best connect with their students and which are less relevant. Faculty at every level must be open to experimenting with new educational pedagogies, particularly when it comes to assisting students who are less prepared to succeed in the university setting. They are advised to regularly update their repertoire of teaching material, being keen to also acknowledge those times when they, personally, have

²⁰² Ibid., 8.

²⁰³ Ibid., 2.

²⁰⁴ Ibid., 11.

become exhausted by the recirculation of the same information using their same teaching routine over an extended number of semesters.

Learning Styles

In order to engage with the range of learning styles represented in classrooms, it is helpful to review the working definition of a learning style and its diversity. Learning styles are “the complex manner in which, and conditions under which, learners most efficiently and effectively perceive, process, store, and recall what they are attempting to learn.”²⁰⁵ It is to say that students, and people in general, have a natural, innate style or preference of learning. It can also be a matter of habit. Some will come alive more when using their hands, or seeing a visual, or listening to a particular rhythm. Other students may connect best through an entirely different method. Students will likely be able to connect with more than one style, although the depth of its impact will vary. Some even prefer a combination of approaches. Student preferences may also change depending on the type of information being presented and who they are learning it from. This is true of life in general as people mature in thought, experience, and language. They evolve in how they connect with new insights and how they link it to previous knowledge. Furthermore, different cultures may exhibit group preferences for learning styles.²⁰⁶

Below is a list of seven common learning styles.

- **Visual:** The [students] prefer to use picture, images, diagrams, colors, and mind maps to cement learning.

²⁰⁵ Sidney Groffman, “Learning Styles-Do They Matter?,” *Optometry and Vision Development* 36, no. 2 (2005): 73.

²⁰⁶ Jawanza Kunjufu, *Understanding Black Male Learning Styles* (Chicago, IL: African American Images, 2011), <http://site.ebrary.com/id/10459071>.

- **Physical:** These are the “learn by doing” [students] who use their body to assist in their learning. Drawing diagrams, using physical objects, or role-playing are all strategies of the physical learner.
- **Aural:** [Students] who prefer using sound, rhythms, music, recordings, clever rhymes, and so on to help them remember.
- **Verbal:** The verbal learner is someone who prefers using words, both in speech and in writing to assist in their learning. They make the most of word-based techniques, scripting, and reading content aloud.
- **Logistical:** The [student] who prefer using logic, reasoning, and “systems” to explain or understand concepts. They aim to understand the reasons behind the learning, and have a good ability to understand the bigger picture.
- **Social:** These [students] are the ones who enjoy learning in groups or with other people, and aim to work with others as much as possible.
- **Solitary:** The solitary learner prefers to work alone and through self-study.²⁰⁷

The art of learning cannot be considered a one-style-fits-all approach. By integrating a variety of critical thinking exercises that appeal to a variety of learning styles, it is hoped that professors will be able to help each of their students to better grasp how to think critically. Most professionals and educators deem the visual, physical (kinesthetic), and audible styles as three primary modalities, so examples and exercises utilizing each of these styles is pertinent.

²⁰⁷ Justin Ferriman, “Learning & Collaboration Blog,” *7 Major Learning Styles – Which One Are You?*, accessed January 7, 2016, <http://www.learndash.com/7-major-learning-styles-which-one-is-you/>.

As professors invest their lives in teaching their students, it is imperative that they remember that teaching is not the same as learning. Individual students, taught the same information as the others in the class, actually learn, or process, it differently. In his book, *Student Success in College: Creating Conditions That Matter*, George Kuh, the Director of the National Institute of Learning Outcomes Assessment, states,

Teaching and learning do not go hand in hand in that teaching does not necessarily lead to learning. Indeed, over the past two decades a discernible shift from a focus on teaching to an emphasis on student learning has taken place in many corners. A key element supporting the shift is systematic use of active and collaborative pedagogies.”²⁰⁸

Professors are also reminded that “[t]he goal of a teaching strategy is to facilitate learning, to motivate learners, to engage them in learning, and to help them focus.”²⁰⁹

Although some professors may not fully understand learning styles,²¹⁰ tapping into these styles as tools to improve the learning outcomes may be just what students need to really engage in the dialogue and to actually understand the content. After all, the goal is for them to be able to take what they are learning in the classroom and use it in their career fields and in life.²¹¹

²⁰⁸ Kuh, et. al., 69.

²⁰⁹ Boundless, “Effective Teaching Strategies,” *Boundless*, July 21, 2015, <https://www.boundless.com/education/textbooks/boundless-education-textbook/working-with-students-4/teaching-strategies-21/effective-teaching-strategies-64-12994/>.

²¹⁰ Catherine Scott, “The Enduring Appeal of ‘Learning Styles,’” *Australian Journal of Education (ACER Press)* 54, no. 1 (April 2010): 14.

²¹¹ Ken Bain, *What the Best College Teachers Do* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004), 17–18.

A Framework for Making Applications

It has already been noted that “[s]tudents generally lack the intellectual skills and discipline to learn independently and deeply.”²¹² Even so, all students, whether they consider themselves above average, average, or indifferent to academic proficiency, are expected to know how to study, learn, and apply the details of their chosen discipline(s). Where does a professor begin in teaching students how to understand, appreciate, and demonstrate critical thinking? Richard Paul and Linda Elder provide a meaningful explanation that is applicable to students of every age and level of study.

To study well and learn any subject is to learn how to think with discipline within that subject. The key elements include:

- raising vital questions and problems, formulating them clearly and precisely
- gathering and assessing information, using ideas to interpret that information insightfully
- coming to well-reasoned conclusions and solutions, testing these against relevant criteria and standards
- adopting the point of view of the discipline, recognizing and assessing, as need be, its assumptions, implications, and practical consequences
- communicating effectively with others using the language of the discipline and that of educated public discourse
- relating what one is learning in the subject to other subjects and to what is significant in human life²¹³

²¹² Paul and Elder, “Critical Thinking,” Fall 2002, 36.

²¹³ Ibid.

These key elements of thinking create a foundation for reviewing the examples and exercises of critical thinking that follow, and as professors continue to build their portfolio of resources. This list of activities is not intended to be exhaustive in addressing all of these areas.

Critical Thinking Examples and Activities for the Classroom

Considering the plethora of critical thinking examples and activities available for use in the classroom, it is a good idea for professors to be intentional about which type(s) of critical thinking skills they are seeking to demonstrate or have the students practice in the moment. Ideally, these should also be connected to one of the intended learning outcomes for the course. Professors can use the illustration or exercise and then make more specific applications within their course context using the skill(s) mentioned.

Linking Information

Critical thinking does not have to be an insurmountable educational mountain that intimidates its audience at the onset before they even take the first step towards it. This idea of thinking in layers can be demonstrated by teaching in layers. Multiple examples demonstrating the many angles that critical thinking seeks to unveil will be described in this section.

To begin with, John Bean in his book *Engaging Ideas*, promotes the strategy of linking new information presented in a class to something already known by the students or to personal experiences.²¹⁴ He illustrates this with an example pertaining to a philosophy course.

²¹⁴ John C Bean, *Engaging Ideas: The Professor's Guide to Integrating Writing, Critical Thinking, and Active Learning in the Classroom* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2011), 160.

What are your current views toward what it means to live a full life? What specific things do you have to attain and work for in order to live as full a life as possible? [The instructor assigns this task near the beginning of the course; students reread their explorations at the end of the course to measure some of the changes in their thinking as a result of the course.]²¹⁵

This strategy provides a context for the students to assimilate new insight gained from their professor's lecture or presentation. It is intended to whet students' appetites to spur on layered thinking as they open their minds to embrace new concepts. This repeated process enables students to keep building on what they know, thereby improving upon how they think. This is the gist of what critical thinking is all about.

Thinking Critically Using Photography

An English teacher employs a different strategy that appeals to other learning styles and helps students to literally view their topic at hand from another lens. This teacher and another colleague decided to forgo using textbooks, instead allowing students to use cameras as their teaching tool for engaging literature. The English teachers speculated about what would happen if they engaged their urban students with an opportunity to give teachers an insight on what life looks like for them on a daily basis outside of school. Each student was provided with a high-end camera to create a photo-journal. Students were required to write about why they took certain pictures and to explain the meaning behind each photo.

By using visual media with which the students were already familiar, the teachers gained insights into the nature of their literacy habits and adjusted classroom pedagogy to

²¹⁵ Ibid., 152.

meet their students' academic needs.²¹⁶ At the conclusion of the photo journalism projects, the English teachers had gained valuable insights, for current and future classes: pedagogical experiences are closely tied to their students' families, friends, communities, and children. The English teachers also learned that their urban students were not illiterate but merely alliterate. This means in many cases, urban students are fluent in and choose to be influenced by many unendorsed texts or different mediums like visual and electronic media, text messages, and hip-hop lyrics.²¹⁷ In the end, the English teachers and their students established a stronger rapport and a better understanding of what each party had to offer. This unconventional approach opened the door for teaching, learning, and relationships to all take place in a meaningful fashion.

Removing Imaginary Limitations and Utilizing Available Resources

In her book *The Critical Thinking Tool Kit: Spark Your Team's Creativity with 35 Problem Solving Activities*, Marlene Caroselli invites her readers to embrace the obvious when invoking critical thinking.

Often, we fail to find the solutions we need because we fail to use the resources we have. We wear blinders, it seems, that prevent us from using what is right in front of us or right inside of us. Or we impose imaginary limits upon ourselves and assume that we are not allowed to proceed in a particular fashion. In truth, though, there are fewer rules or impediments than we think there are.²¹⁸

To illustrate this point, she mentions a group of students in a creative engineering class at Massachusetts Institution of Technology. On the day of the final exam, their

²¹⁶ Marquez-Zenkov, Kristien and James A. Harmon, "Seeing English in the City: Using Photography to Understand Students' Literacy Relationships," *The English Journal* 96, no. 6 (July, 2007): 24.

²¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 25.

²¹⁸ Marlene Caroselli, *The Critical Thinking Toolkit: Spark Your Team's Creativity with 35 Problem Solving Activities* (New York: AMACOM, 2011): 179–180.

instructor told them to devise a method to remove two ping-pong balls from a five foot metal cylinder that was bolted to the floor in their science lab. This cylinder was approximately seven inches wide. Students had full use of anything in the room to accomplish this, but could not leave to gather any additional materials. They were both permitted and encouraged to work together. Finding a solution meant that they passed their final exam. If they were unable to solve the problem, they would all fail. Sadly, the hour expired and the students still had no answer.

She encourages professors (and others) to then have their students attempt to solve the problem by stating what they would have done. The answer is to use water from the lab faucets to fill the cylinder and float the ping pong balls to the surface.

This example appeals to creative problem solving skills. Students must be willing to consider different angles for utilizing the resources that they already have access to and generating solutions to seemingly complex tasks. In an effort to spur on this type of creative thinking even more, the improvisation game “Props” can be used. In this game, students are given specific objects and asked to reinvent their usefulness. For instance, one young man turned a chair into an imaginary prison by crouching behind the vertical bars along the back of the chair.

A Visual Exercise

Caroselli also spurs the use of critical thinking by having students analyze a diagram. The professor should draw a cross on the board in one color and then, using a different mark, write a lowercase letter k in the top left quadrant of the cross, a lower case letter m in the top right quadrant, a lowercase letter q in the bottom left quadrant, and a

lower case letter w in the bottom right quadrant.²¹⁹ Students are to figure out which letter does not belong. The correct answer is the letter t, which is the cross that is drawn in another color. It is a much bigger letter and therefore stands out.

Force Field Analysis

Students can practice the skill of considering an issue from multiple angles by using Psychologist Kurt Lewin's Force Field Analysis. It contrasts the current and ideal state of affairs of a stated problem. Students attempt to identify the restraining forces causing the current condition and the driving forces that can work toward positive change. It is a useful strategy for helping students decide the next steps to take in resolving issues in life.

The Force Field Analysis is depicted as a large "T"... It's a valuable tool for analyzing a problem, ascertaining its causes, and evaluating the resources available for achieving the desired effect. An example of a problem that might be subject to such analysis is the literacy rate in America – 1 out of 5 adults is functionally illiterate. That is the current status; ideally, there would be no such thing as illiteracy. The next step involves asking what forces could be used to bring us to the ideal state. Finally, we would consider what forces are causing the rate to be so high or keeping us from reaching the ideal. By reviewing the two columns, we can decide the course of action that should be pursued.²²⁰

This can become a kinesthetic exercise as students are paired into groups and given either a section of the board to work on or gigantic post-it notes from an easel pad that stick to the wall. Each group should identify an issue in society and use the Force Field Analysis T-model to work through the driving and restraining forces related to the ideal and current states. It is important to bring a physical aspect to this exercise by allowing students to move away from their seats. Students should report their findings to

²¹⁹ Ibid., 180.

²²⁰ Ibid.

the class, serving as the teachers-in-the-moment, as they lead the class in thinking critically about their chosen issue.

Integrating Technology into Critical Thinking

In addition to the learning styles mentioned earlier, technology has also proven to be a meaningful method for learning.²²¹ “Recent studies show that soon-to-be-college students are restless with traditional ways to learn and want to maximize the use of the technology that has become such a significant part of their lives.”²²² Professors can integrate digital education into the classroom by taking polls in their classes about topics and having students record their responses in real-time through the use of apps such as Kahoot. “Everybody has to answer, but nobody has to take center stage. The results of the poll can help instructors determine if a lesson has been mastered or if it needs more work. It also keeps students on task.”²²³ Professors can put forth scenarios and ask students to indicate how they would handle a situation. Professors might provide a selection of responses, each being realistic and demonstrating a different level of thinking. Once students have taken the poll using their smartphones, professors can immediately generate a report to decipher what level of thinking the majority of the class is exhibiting.

²²¹ Mel Schiavelli, “Learning Styles, Habits Shape How Colleges Teach,” *Central Penn Business Journal* 27, no. 11 (March 11, 2011): 14.

²²² Ibid.

²²³ “8 Ways to Develop Critical Thinking Skills with EdTech,” *Global Digital Citizen Foundation*, accessed January 10, 2016, <https://globaldigitalcitizen.org/8-ways-to-develop-critical-thinking-skills-with-edtech>.

Further discussion as to why students chose their responses should also take place.

Numerous other digital education tools are available online for faculty and students.²²⁴

Brookfield's Scenario Analysis Exercise

Brookfield encourages the use of scenario analysis exercises to help students work through the first three steps in his four-step process for critical thinking. Professors provide a brief, fictional case study for students to examine in groups. Students are asked to first identify the assumptions that the character(s) is (are) operating under in the situation, both consciously and subconsciously. Next, they are to investigate which assumptions the character(s) can “check by simple research and inquiry.”²²⁵ Finally, students are to find ways to reinterpret the scenario that go against what the character(s) originally assumed, exposing the incorrect nature of the assumptions and revealing blind spots. Brookfield calls these “alternative perspectives.”²²⁶ The purpose behind this exercise is to “show students that the quality of any advice offered is correlated with how well people are able to identify the assumptions they bring to their understanding of a problem.”²²⁷ Professors can have their students share their findings with the class and compare their assessments and interpretations.

²²⁴ Kathy Dyer, “50 Digital Education Tools and Apps for Formative Assessment Success,” *Teach. Learn. Grow*, accessed January 10, 2016, <https://www.nwea.org/blog/2015/growing-list-50-digital-education-tools-apps-formative-assessment-success/>.

²²⁵ Brookfield, 89.

²²⁶ *Ibid.*

²²⁷ *Ibid.*

The MBTI and the Zig Zag Process for Problem Solving

Students can benefit from completing the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) as a means of honestly assessing and better understanding their preferences. The research behind it is richly infused with critical thinking.

The MBTI is a personality inventory that is used worldwide and taken by nearly two million people each year.²²⁸ It helps individuals better understand their preferences for perceiving and organizing the world based on the theories of Psychologist Carl Jung. Jung theorized that “much seemingly random variation in the behavior is actually quite orderly and consistent, being due to basic differences in the ways individuals prefer to use their perception and judgment.”²²⁹ Jung’s theory would later be synchronized in a practical way to gauge one’s preference when interacting with others and exploring the world. Katherine Briggs and Isabel Myers, a mother and daughter duo, created the personality-based inventory, which put Jung’s theory in the hands of everyday people. The instrument took decades to establish and perfect. Briggs gathered information from thousands of people over the years, asking questions of nearly everyone she encountered about their preferences. As a result of her diligence, multiple viewpoints were tested and established. The Myers-Briggs Foundation notes,

After several years of adding her own observations to those of Jung, Isabel Myers, a graduate of Swarthmore College, began creating a paper-and-pencil questionnaire to assess type. The MBTI® instrument was developed over the next three decades as research was collected from thousands of people. Research on the MBTI instrument has continued into the present, with dozens of articles published each year.²³⁰

²²⁸ The Myers & Briggs Foundation, “Myers-Briggs Type Indicator,” accessed January 8, 2016, <http://www.myersbriggs.org/my-mbti-personality-type/mbti-basics/>.

²²⁹ Ibid.

²³⁰ Ibid.

After one completes the personality inventory, based on the computed responses, a four letter personality type is proposed. The four letter personality type is derived from the following dichotomies:

- Extrovert (E) or Introvert (I)
- Sensing (S) or Intuition (N)
- Thinking (T) or Feeling (F)
- Judging (J) or Perceiving (P)²³¹

In all, there are a total of sixteen combinations representing personality types that can be used to explain how a person prefers to interact and interpret the world.

Participants taking the MBTI are assessed on their clarity of preferences based on how they respond to different items. One needs to know that the MBTI does not tell them who they are. It simply interprets the preferences of one's personality.

Using the foundations of the MBTI, psychological-type expert Gordon Lawrence created the *Zig-Zag Process for Problem Solving*.²³² It provides people with the opportunity to engage in problem solving by using their preference type as interpreted through the MBTI. It focuses on gathering information about a situation, exploring possibilities, analyzing their effects, and then weighing the consequences of such potential decisions. The exercise is intended to show students how aspects of the MBTI come into play in problem solving. Additional information about this assessment can be found on www.capt.org.

²³¹ The Myers & Briggs Foundation, "Myers-Briggs Type Indicator."

²³² Gordon Lawrence, "The Zig-Zag Process for Problem Solving" (Center for Applications of Psychological Type, Inc., 2004), <http://www.capt.org/products/examples/20023HO.pdf>.

The Importance of Questions

When giving lectures, professors are often tempted to end the class or their lecture with a summary of information they have covered. The practice stems from a popular quote from Dale Carnegie, a man famous for his advice about public speaking. "Tell the audience what you're going to say, say it; then tell them what you've said."²³³ Yet, Brookfield goes against this practice, stating that summaries tend to be interpreted as a "last word" on the matter, offering closure to the discussion instead of prompting further thought. This reinforces Paul and Elder's claim that "[t]hinking is not driven by answers but by questions"²³⁴ As an alternative, he recommends ending by "pointing out all the new questions that have been raised by the content of the lecture."²³⁵ Professors may choose to end class about ten minutes early to allow time for students to write down their questions to then share them in groups or with the class as a whole. Students could also text their questions to the professor or use another form of technology, like an app or a forum, to express their thoughts. This helps students to think critically, in that, they are not seeking to simply chunk information into their memory bank but are actively wrestling with the concepts.²³⁶ This practice may take time for students to adjust to, as they are more often used to receiving summaries. However, in time, they too will begin to learn how to raise new questions about the topics being discussed.

²³³ Gary Genard, "How to Open a Presentation: Tell 'Em What You're Going to Say," *The Genard Method*, November 22, 2015, accessed January 10, 2016, <http://info.genardmethod.com/blog/bid/192061/How-to-Open-a-Presentation-Tell-Em-What-You-re-Going-to-Say>.

²³⁴ Elder and Paul, "Critical Thinking," Fall 2003, 36.

²³⁵ Brookfield, 68.

²³⁶ Elder and Paul, "Critical Thinking," Fall 2003, 36.

An Example of Poor Thinking

Professors may want to share an example of a poor form of thinking by using the true story of an incompetent bank robber. A man by the name of MacArthur Wheeler once perused an article that shared little known secrets of familiar items. He came across an intriguing find that he wanted to use. The article revealed that lemon juice could be used as a form of invisible ink. It led Mr. Wheeler to imagine other ideas for its invisible power. He later robbed two banks and made a quick getaway with the money. Shortly thereafter, he was greeted by authorities who took him into custody. With a confused facial expression, he failed to understand how he could have been caught. “I wore the juice,” he said.²³⁷ Mr. Wheeler apparently thought that if he covered his face in lemon juice, security cameras would not be able to capture his features. He clearly demonstrated an extremely misinformed assumption. That reality seems to go along with what Scripture states in Proverbs, “The way of fools seems right to them” (Proverbs 12:15a).

Considering Multiple Causes

According to Associate Professor of Government Paul Wyckoff, critical thinking also pertains to “the ability to think in terms of multiple, rather than single, causes.”

²³⁸ He explains,

When you drop a book, it will fall on the floor—a single-cause event. But most of the interesting things in the world have multiple causes; educational success, for example, is affected by a student's aptitude, but also by the educational achievements of the student's parents, the quality of the school he or she attends,

²³⁷ Dale Hartley, “How Can Smart People Sometimes Be So Stupid?” *Psychology Today*, November 10, 2015, accessed January 9, 2016, <https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/machiavellians-gulling-the-rubes/201511/how-can-smart-people-sometimes-be-so-stupid>.

²³⁸ Paul G. Wyckoff, “What Exactly Is Critical Thinking,” *Inside Higher Ed*, October 11, 2012, accessed January 9, 2016, <https://www.insidehighered.com/views/2012/10/11/essay-what-political-campaign-shows-about-need-critical-thinking>.

and the attitudes and intelligence of the other students in that school. In such cases, simple comparisons become unreliable guides to action, because the effects of intervening variables haven't been screened out. So, for example, judging a president by Reagan's famous question – "Are you better off now than you were four years ago?" – implicitly assumes that presidential actions are the only variable affecting the economy. This is, of course, nonsense – our globalized economy is affected by a huge variety of factors, including exchange rates, oil prices, the fate of the European Union, the strength of the Chinese economy, and so on. In these situations, we need higher-order analysis that adjusts for these external factors to gauge the true effect of a policy.²³⁹

Critical thinking requires students to think in layers. One-dimensional or monological thinking often collides with multi-dimensional or multi-logical thinking.²⁴⁰ In college and in life, the reasons behind things are often complex and not simple. Unveiling them may require the assistance of multiple perspectives on an issue both regarding the details of it and the big picture surrounding it.

For instance, in a smaller-scale scenario relevant to home life, a teenager was responsible for mowing the yard every Saturday morning. On Saturday evening, his father arrived home to an unkempt lawn and was ready to immediately confront the teenager. (This was not the first time.) The father was so focused on his son's irresponsibility, that he nearly failed to observe his teenager's limp as he walked down the hallway. It eventually caught his eye, and the father asked his son about it. The teenager explained that he had sprained it the night before while playing basketball. Furthermore, he acknowledged that the lawn was still wet that morning from the rain late Friday night and early Saturday morning. His dad quickly altered his negative assumption about his son and extended grace.

²³⁹ Ibid.

²⁴⁰ Linda Elder and Richard Paul, "An Educator's Guide to Critical Thinking Terms and Concepts," n.d., <http://www.criticalthinking.org/pages/glossary-of-critical-thinking-terms/496>.

Paul and Elder say, “Thinking gets us into trouble because we often cannot see issues from points of view other than our own.”²⁴¹ Asking questions and seeking to understand other points of view is important for checking the validity of assumptions. It clarifies realities and prevents monological thinking.

Professors can use these examples to prompt the students to share their own personal experiences of the consequences of one-dimensional thinking when other causes were not taken into account.

Studying Abroad

As a means of exploring critical thinking opportunities outside of the classroom setting, students might consider studying abroad and living in cultures different than their own over the course of a semester. Such ventures expose them to viewpoints beyond what they are familiar with, as students are immersed in societies, customs, and worldviews foreign to them. It serves to broaden their perspectives and increase their capacities to think critically.

Hearing Their Stories

A small focus group of Christian higher education faculty members who teach the same course entitled Christ, Culture, and the University (CCU) met to discuss their methods for introducing and promoting critical thinking to their college freshmen.²⁴² Before sharing different ways that they encouraged critical thinking in their classrooms, a comment was made that “the difference between a high school senior and a college

²⁴¹ Linda Elder and Richard Paul, “Becoming a Critic of Your Thinking,” accessed January 9, 2016, <http://www.criticalthinking.org/pages/becoming-a-critic-of-your-thinking/478>.

²⁴² CCU is designed to help freshmen college students gain a better understanding of their calling and worldview, as well as to introduce critical thinking skills.

freshman, is simply a summer vacation.” After the light-hearted observation, the same professor mentioned a technique she uses at the beginning of each semester to set the tone for her class. She has her students demonstrate plurality in perspectives, the act of negating assumptions, and cultural misconceptions by writing a one-page life story about themselves, called a life script. In it, students describe the major events, common or uncommon experiences, failures, successes, and family dynamics that have shaped their lives up to the point of arriving in her classroom. Students then have eight to ten minutes in class, over the course of the semester, to present their life scripts, having their liberty to share as much or as little as they desire.

When offering their final reflections about the course, students often comment about their appreciation of these life scripts. In hearing from other students, they discover that their preconception about their fellow students is often wrong. As stereotypes and initial personal assumptions are challenged and disintegrated, the door opens for some of the most meaningful friendships that students make in college. The students create a bond of trust, and approach the class setting with more respect. The professor believes that the skills her students gain from this assignment benefit group discussions in the class as the students continued to engage the learning process in considering additional material.²⁴³

Brain Teasers: Stories with Holes

Another professor in this group explained that she has noticed a change in the attitude of the class after introducing critical thinking in the early weeks of class. She uses a creative learning approach that connects to the lecture and group discussion. She

²⁴³ Kayla Turner, "Teaching Strategies for Critical Thinking," Interview by Cedrick Valrie. September 22, 2015.

strives to provide the students with a scaffolding as they build upon and synthesize old and new information. As a result, the students demonstrate a refreshed curiosity for considering problems from different angles.²⁴⁴ As an experienced educator who has transitioned from secondary school into the collegiate level, she has found that both age groups benefit from attempting to solve mysteries with only a few clues. She uses a concept derived from *Nathan Levy's Stories with Holes*. Students are provided with brief statements of the outcome of a situation and must ask the professor yes-and-no questions to determine the cause. This spurs on higher levels of cognitive thinking as students pursue additional information and consider the scenario from multiple points of view.²⁴⁵ The exercise embraces the idea of teaching students *how* to think and not *what* to think, encouraging students to investigate, make new connections, and search for answers using well-formed questions rather than merely being told what to conclude.

These are essentially brain-teasers that encourage logical thinking and the art of making new connections. For example, she will tell the students, "John and Mary are lying dead on the floor of the apartment they live in. Surrounding them is broken glass and water. A breeze is blowing in the window. Explain."²⁴⁶ As students collectively ask questions, they receive answers of "yes," "no," "does not compute (the answer is more complicated)," or "is not relevant." In the process, students are reminded of the value of "no," as it brings clarity by way of elimination. After a few minutes of critical analysis,

²⁴⁴ Lindsey Croston, "Teaching Strategies for Critical Thinking," Interview by Cedrick Valrie, September 22, 2015.

²⁴⁵ Nathan Levy, *Stories with Holes*, vol. 13 (Trend Enterprises, Inc., 2000), 5.

²⁴⁶ Patrick Gormley, "Mind Stretching Activities," accessed January 5, 2016, <http://chem.lapeer.org/Chem1Docs/BrainTeasers.html>.

students are typically able to solve the riddle: “John and Mary are goldfish. A cat came in through the window and tipped their bowl over onto the floor.”²⁴⁷ It is helpful for the group to then reflect on the principles of the experience of accurately filling in the missing pieces. The professor follows this with an additional scenario: here is one from *Nathan Levy’s Stories with Holes*. “Jason held up the train. The sheriff and his deputies quietly observed Jason’s actions. Jason’s actions went unpunished. Why? Jason’s aunt married the sheriff and he held up the train on her wedding dress as she went down the aisle.”²⁴⁸ This type of activity serves as a way for students to apply the critical thinking skills they are learning. The professor expressed her excitement in watching her students genuinely doing their best to discover the truth of what happened, and overcoming incorrect assumptions to be able to collectively move toward a solution. Students often moved away from passive responses when solving the riddles and engaged in group interaction and thought. The engagement often continued throughout the class period as she taught students additional concepts about critical thinking.

Conclusion

A vast number of critical thinking examples and exercises for the classroom have been developed and shared openly by experts and teachers, some of which have been shared in this chapter. They serve as a great resource for introducing and exploring the many angles of critical thinking. They also help teachers to respond to various learning

²⁴⁷ Ibid.

²⁴⁸ Levy, 7.

styles so that students can better connect with the content that they are being taught, engaging it at a deeper level and applying it to their studies and to life in general.

CHAPTER FIVE

CRITICAL THINKING AT WORK IN SOCIETY

Introduction

The process of critical thinking is intended to navigate students, and people in general, toward making informed decisions and taking knowledgeable action. It is vital that students not only comprehend the process, but are able to perceive the effects of critical thinking in society. Hence, it is appropriate to provide a demonstration of identifying and checking assumptions, considering additional points of view, and finally taking informed action. This will be done using the landscape of effecting social and educational change in the urban youth of North America.

As we have discovered in the previous chapters, critical thinking is, itself, a framework for discovering what type of change needs to take place. It is a process and a cycle that repeats itself over and over, as new information and new challenges are introduced. Once students become aware of the informed action(s) they should take, they may need to engage the critical thinking process yet again to explore the best option(s) for working toward such change. In addition, students will be made aware that just because they are ready to take informed action does not automatically imply that others will be willing to embrace the proposed action(s) and welcome the change(s). Students should not assume that others have taken the time to work through the critical thinking process in the same way to arrive at the same conclusions about the situation at hand. Even so, they should continue to strive for promoting truth as they expose and attempt to correct inaccurate and harmful assumptions.

The Critical Thinking Process Applied to Social Change

A person's point of view is shaped by making associations and generalizations about their perceived realities. People first make inferences about situations and then form assumptions. Paul and Elder delineate these terms as follows.

- **Inference:** An inference is a step of the mind, an intellectual act by which one concludes that something is true in light of something else's being true, or seeming to be true. If you come at me with a knife in your hand, I probably would infer that you mean to do me harm. Inferences can be accurate or inaccurate, logical or illogical, justified or unjustified.
- **Assumption:** An assumption is something we take for granted or presuppose. Usually it is something we previously learned and do not question. It is part of our system of beliefs. We assume our beliefs to be true and use them to interpret the world about us.²⁴⁹

For example, one might observe that a student attends an urban public school. He then infers that the student is receiving a sub-par education. As a result, he assumes that all students attending urban public schools receive a sub-par education. To illustrate this another way, a young black man is turned down for a high-paying job. One can infer that he lacks the qualifications. It can then be assumed that any black man turned down for a high-paying job lacks the qualifications.

For the context of this study, the researcher will consider the situation in the segregated South of North America during the second half of the Twentieth Century. Two distinct prescriptive assumptions prevailed. One group, the Whites, saw the world as existing the way they assumed it should, assigning superior value to people with their skin color. Based on the norm of the day, their children may have observed that a Black

²⁴⁹ Linda Elder and Richard Paul, "Distinguishing Between Inferences and Assumptions," *Foundation for Critical Thinking*, accessed January 11, 2016, <http://www.criticalthinking.org/pages/critical-thinking-distinguishing-between-inferences-and-assumptions/484>.

person was treated harshly, inferred that he deserved it and was inferior, and then assumed that all Black people deserved to be treated harshly and were inferior to Whites. Another group, the Blacks, saw the world as sinfully tainted by racism and yearned for what it could be, despising the way it was. The Jim Crow laws²⁵⁰ favored White supremacy and Black oppression. African Americans were to behave as non-citizens who were disenfranchised; they were forced to work the undesirable, low-level jobs such as cooking and cleaning for those who were more privileged in society. African Americans were expected to use the terms “sir” or “ma’am” when referring to Whites, though such terms did not compel genuine respect for them. Rather, it was an understood recognition of being inferior during this era.

Blacks also received little, if any, formal education. By taking notice that African American schools often received outdated and badly worn textbooks and materials, Black students may have inferred that they did not deserve a quality education like the White students. They could have then assumed that because they attended a Black school they did not deserve a quality education. Although this assumption was promoted, that did not mean that it was correct or true. The Jim Crow laws that oppressed the Black population were extremely mono-focused. Opposing points of view were shunned and violently rejected.

Even so, those compelled to fight for social justice rose to the occasion, especially the church. They held firmly to the belief that the assumptions of White supremacists had been proven inaccurate using evidence from The Declaration of Independence: “We hold

²⁵⁰ Richard Wormser, Bill Jersey, and Sam Pollard, “The Rise and Fall of Jim Crow,” Television, *People, Events, and Personal Narratives* (PBS, 2002), <http://www.pbs.org/wnet/jimcrow/>.

these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.”²⁵¹ Martin Luther King, Jr. championed this cause in his “I Have a Dream” speech. Informed action by way of a social revolution ensued. Deep convictions empowered by critical thinking effected change.

Leading Social Change during the Civil Rights Movement²⁵²

One of the greatest social change moments in history took place in North America during a period well-known as the Civil Rights Movement. This movement gained momentum during the 1950’s and 1960’s. Martin Luther King, Jr., was a primary leader and was “strongly influenced by the social gospel.”²⁵³

Through the living of his own life and his leadership in the non-violent movement of the social change for America, [King] demonstrated that the noble idea of our Judeo-Christian values could be incorporated into our everyday lives, that the true practice of Christianity could be a dynamic and transforming force in the life of the individual as well as the whole society.²⁵⁴

²⁵¹ “Creating the Declaration of Independence - Creating the United States | Exhibitions - Library of Congress,” webpage, April 12, 2008, <http://www.loc.gov/exhibits/creating-the-united-states/creating-the-declaration-of-independence.html>.

²⁵² Note on Terminology: For the sake of clarity, the reader should know that the term *Christian Church* (or local churches) in this study includes all Christian churches and traverses denominational and ethnic boundaries. The researcher will direct the reader in each instance where a particular group of people or denomination is mentioned. The researcher will later call on the Christian Church to lead the charge in rebuilding the ghettos across America. At times, the phrase *Black Church* will be used when the researcher is referring to a particular group of Christians to lead the way in restructuring Urban America. The researcher will highlight particular community practices and models used by churches and para-church organizations that are making a difference and proving effective in urban communities.

²⁵³ Coretta Scott King. “The Legacy of Martin Luther King, Jr.: The Church in Action.” *Theology Today* 65, no. 1 (April 2008): 8.

²⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 7.

As a Christian and as a minister, he took the Bible and his convictions seriously, and sought to defend Scripture's truth that God made humankind in his image (Genesis 1:27) – and this did not imply just one race or class of people. King also embodied James 2:1-7, believing that people should not show partiality to others based on their appearance. These truths stood in direct opposition to the leading assumptions of the masses in their day. Numerous other scriptures could be cited as well. For instance, Isaiah 1:17a says, “Learn to do good; seek justice, correct oppression...” (ESV). In essence, King's use of critical thinking in unveiling inaccurate and ungodly assumptions demanded that people take informed action to correct the unjustified wrongs of racism, bigotry, and mob lynchings. Hence, he joined many other church leaders and laity members on the frontlines of the Civil Rights Movement to strike down the unconstitutional Jim Crow Laws and demand justice and equality for an oppressed and rejected people of African descent.²⁵⁵

Alongside King, leaders of the Montgomery Improvement Association (MIA), representing a wide variety of professionals that included ministers, met to cope with and take action against segregation. Sizeable meetings were often hosted by ministers and held in churches to organize, communicate, employ strategy, and give mutual encouragement. For the community, the church was a beacon of hope, a guiding light, and a place where identity was recaptured and solidified as one traveled throughout life.

²⁵⁵ As a social minister, King also spoke out in opposition of the Vietnam War, began the Poor People's Campaign, and made claims against racism as a national issue. “The racial issue that we confront in America is not a sectional but a national problem.” Jacquelyn Dowd Hall, “The Long Civil Rights Movement and the Political Uses of the Past,” *Journal of American History* 91, no. 4 (March 2005): 1234.

The Black community at large has traditionally found strength, encouragement, and hope in its churches.²⁵⁶

Such churches in that day had already been attempting to take informed action in combatting social evils and had made some progress. However, they were in need of additional resources and support to make a greater impact. The MIA was continuously litigating in court to reverse the unconstitutional Jim Crow Laws. The group members used various bold and creative ways to send clear messages to the local and state authorities, specifically in Alabama. They informed them of their intentions to oppose segregation through peaceful means, such as orchestrating bus boycotts to dismantle sections of the local economy.²⁵⁷ The well-publicized Montgomery Bus Boycott followed soon after.

The arrest of Rosa Parks on December 1, 1955, was the spark that ignited the Montgomery bus protest; but Parks' arrest occurred in the context of an ongoing struggle against the mistreatment and humiliation of Blacks on the city's buses. For several years, Black leaders had attempted to use the growing power of the Black vote to pressure the city to change its bus-seating policies. However, city leaders were intransigent, and Blacks were forced to consider other measures, including organizing a bus boycott. At least from the time the Supreme Court decided *Brown v. Board of Education* in May of 1954, some Montgomery Black leaders also considered challenging state and local bus

²⁵⁶ Anthony B Pinn, *The Black Church in the Post-Civil Rights Era* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2002), 36.

²⁵⁷ Christopher Coleman, Laurence D. Nee, and Leonard S. Rubinowitz, "Social Movements and Social-Change Litigation: Synergy in the Montgomery Bus Protest," *Law & Social Inquiry* 30, no. 4 (Fall 2005): 663.

segregation laws in court. Eventually, Black leaders would decide that both of these strategies were necessary for change.²⁵⁸

The verdict from *Brown v. Board of Education* inspired great hope that their actions to bring about reform were not in vain. It compelled them to continue taking informed action toward their goals of equality and desegregation. This moment rekindled a deep sense of urgency within the Black community and its churches. They were making progress. It was now the proper time to publically take a stand with Rosa against unjust social offenses. They had prayed and planned and now it was time to act.

Many leaders within the local church crossed denominational and ethnic lines to pool their resources, energy, and faith to push back the Jim Crow Laws in the South and lingering discrimination in the North. Although Blacks in the North were not necessarily directly under oppression by the Jim Crow Laws in the South, many felt like second class citizens. Only uninformed thinkers would assume that racism only existed in the South.

The North failed to offer decent wages, which resulted in intentionally scarce job opportunities. Schools in Black areas were often overlooked for funding, which led to a poorer quality of education of this group. Eateries and public swimming pools were often closed to Blacks. While many Whites in the North expressed publicly they were not affiliated with segregation, it was often expressed in a covert or concealed manner to Blacks. It was stated that a minister was recorded as saying the only difference between a Negro in the North or South is the weather.²⁵⁹

²⁵⁸ Ibid., 669.

²⁵⁹ Aarushi H. Shah, "All of Africa Will Be Free Before We Can Get a Lousy Cup of Coffee: The Impact of the 1943 Lunch Counter Sit-Ins on the Civil Rights Movement," *History Teacher* 46, no. 1 (November 2012): 128.

Critical Thinking and the Long Road to Resolve

At this point in the study, it should again be pointed out to students that just because these social activists were able to invoke the various steps of the critical thinking process by questioning assumptions, finding them to be woefully invalid, and then taking action against them, it did not automatically resolve their issues. This was a long but worthy process that required incredible stamina and diligence. Educators Stephen Brookfield and Stephen Preskill would add that it required “radical patience.”²⁶⁰ It was imperative that they view the “major structural change [they sought as] a long haul, a long revolution. To allow the inevitable defeats and roadblocks to kill the energy for change [would be] disastrous.”²⁶¹ The activists and the people would need to bravely persevere and “call on [their] deepest reserves of commitment when facing up to such resistance and fear.”²⁶²

As these leaders strived for justice in the midst of such a hostile environment, they continued to tirelessly invest in their people and their cause. They continued to organize and participate in peaceful protests and to give of their time and financial resources. After all, finances had to be raised to maintain strong communication with the masses, as well as feed the vast number of volunteers who gathered to assist. Money was also required to take care of the physical needs of leaders and to cover legal fees. They

²⁶⁰ Stephen Brookfield and Stephen Preskill, *Learning as a Way of Leading: Lessons from the Struggle for Social Justice* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2009), 53.

²⁶¹ Ibid.

²⁶² Ibid.

would continue using critical thinking to guide their actions and develop their arguments to take to court and the authorities. With attorneys in place, these leaders pleaded their case to the courts about the value of all humanity while faithfully encouraging their oppressed audiences to stand firm in their non-violent plight to see justice at work in their midst. They were to stand firm in the midst of violent oppression, despite seeing little progress at times toward their goal of a social revolution. Even so, the broad spectrum of their effectiveness would take much time to come to fruition.

Payoff did come. Eventually, little by little, Blacks were able to travel, eat, and move about throughout society as desired. Social education and took on a new look as ethnic groups began to gather at juke joints to dance to the music of that day. Formal education, slowly but surely, provided Blacks with an opportunity to be as well-versed academically as their White counterparts. Ultimately, it was the passing of the 1964 Civil Rights Act that provided the impetus for Black Americans to achieve a redefined freedom, better education, prosperity, and the hope for a brighter future for their children.²⁶³ Dr. King believed that “[t]he gospel at best deals with the whole man, not only his soul but also his body, not only his spiritual well-being but also his material well-being.”²⁶⁴ Although the Civil Rights Act was meaningful and beneficial, it would still take many years for Blacks to overcome hidden discrimination and to be viewed as equal. Yet, they remained hopeful that, in the future, their children would be more secure. That is, if their children would continue to invest in the changes by practicing a higher

²⁶³ Shah, 131–132.

²⁶⁴ King, 8.

level of thinking and working toward ongoing reform both inside and outside of their communities.

Promoting Dignity and the Hope of Jesus in a Depressing Ghetto

Several decades later, while there was reason to celebrate some reform, other forms of oppression lingered. On a positive note, the earlier efforts towards change had resulted in Blacks in North America being able to gain access to meaningful employment, quality education, and economic empowerment. Yet, society still presented its hurdles and faulty assumptions, even on the part of some of the Black population. The truth is that the process of critical thinking becomes a cycle that must be repeated over and over again in addressing new and old issues. This time part of the negative assumptions surfaced as Blacks living in urban areas bought into the idea that they were bound to reside in impoverished, depressed areas. They assumed that it did not matter if they branched out to live elsewhere, as they were likely to find more hardship in the new location. Thus, they felt bound to embrace their pessimistic, familiar atmosphere, remaining troubled by a looming darkness.

Peter Marina, an assistant professor and sociologist, has studied urban life in-depth in the inner city of Brownsville, a borough in Brooklyn, New York. While walking the streets, he witnesses boarded up buildings, littered grounds, low-end food chain stores, derogatory graffiti, and huge empty lots. The scenario is a good example of what a modern day ghetto looks like in Urban America.²⁶⁵

²⁶⁵ Peter Marina. *Getting the Holy Ghost: Urban Ethnography in a Brooklyn Pentecostal Tongue-Speaking Church* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2013).

However, this was once a thriving Brownsville community. After the Second World War, the migration north led many African Americans to major cities like Brownsville to find better work and social living opportunities. Already in residence in the area were Russian, Polish, Austrian, Hungarian, and Romanian Jews who had fled their homeland to escape persecution.²⁶⁶ In the beginning, there were some clashes between cultures as everyone tried to adjust and find their way. Eventually, the five ethnic groups living in a crowded Brownsville borough in New York would join forces to demand equality, better education for the children, and quality public facilities altogether. There was a kindred spirit in promoting interracial cooperation for African Americans and Jews to push for an overhaul in social reform that would constitute a better quality of living for all of the residents living in Brownsville. However, over time, as more and more of the African American population increased, Jews made their way out and settled in other boroughs in multiple communities across the great state of New York. As the demographics shifted, the poor community became poorer.

Today, Brownsville does not reflect its past that was filled with those seeking to work together for better education, public facilities, and residents with earned degrees and with travel experience. In fact, it is quite the opposite. So much so, that according to Marina, it is extremely hard to imagine the strength and vitality that once flooded the neighborhood during the late 1940's.

According the New York City Housing Authority, Brownsville contains a staggering eighteen low-income development housing projects with over 110,000

²⁶⁶ Ibid., 36.

residents.²⁶⁷ Everything appears depressed and in distress. In most neighborhoods with a low-grade corner or grocery store, drunks can be found heckling anyone for a quarter or a dime. Many of the residents lack an education, and the education that is provided within such a community is not necessarily offering quality resources for a productive and challenging education. This particular borough was once promised a state-of-the-art, newly-built, high school, but in its stead, a juvenile detention center was built to house and rehabilitate the juveniles within the community. The decision was made without the consulting with the community about the change of plans.

“Brownsville residents live in a community with a tumultuous past characterized by struggle against external structural forces and internal problems.”²⁶⁸ Such forces and problems are still a major reality today. Yet, many residents are afraid to move. The familiarity with their current environment is comfortable and is simply what they know how to navigate. For many, they have generational roots connected to Brownville. At the same time some residents that desire to leave Brownsville fear that they will face even more violence over what they are currently trying to avoid. Territorial gangs, made up of residents within each housing project, often physically harming people who do not stay on their own turf.

Even so, there are those people who desire to combat the oppression and create new outcomes by challenging the social infrastructure. They are aware of the negative assumptions and realities in their community and are taking action to effect change once again. The Holy Ghost Church, a Pentecostal congregation providing an emotional and

²⁶⁷ Ibid., 33.

²⁶⁸ Ibid.

spiritual outlet for its members and the community, is taking action to challenge the community's assumptions about itself and inspire hope. With their area's multiple pressures, crowdedness, and the daily fight to survive and live, many in the Brownsville community have turned to this red-bricked building and to God for help.

The Holy Ghost Church is a congregation of fifty and is one of about 300 small churches within the parameters of the Brownsville area. As Marina records in his study, the people in the local congregation at Holy Ghost Church are close-knit. In recognizing the depressing realities in their community, "the churches, like the Holy Ghost Church, provide access to an alternative status and self-esteem system that many working-class people in economically disadvantaged communities are denied."²⁶⁹ They exemplify a theology that parallels that of professor and theologian Jürgen Moltmann. Moltmann is known for addressing the question of who Christ is for poor people living in a world of violence.²⁷⁰ Addressing this question helps oppressed individuals to personally internalize the evidence of Christ's presence during a time of trouble or when there is a major need. Moltmann speaks to both Christology and Christopraxis. In the latter, he claims that what one believes about Christ is reflected in their behavior and conduct. In other words, if the people can grasp that God, their creator, is also their helper and has a plan to redeem them in this current life, such a belief should alter the way they view themselves, their situations, and their decisions. It beckons a revamping of the people's assumptions about themselves and about God. This is the message the church is seeking to communicate.

²⁶⁹ Ibid., 37.

²⁷⁰ Jürgen Moltmann, *Jesus Christ for Today's World*, 1st ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), 7.

When speaking of the poor, Moltmann also says that the kingdom of God brings the poor a new dignity and a powerful stimulus to negate oppression and humiliation. “Jesus brings the poor the certainty of their indestructible dignity in God’s eyes.”²⁷¹ It is not that the poor necessarily become rich. It is, however, that the poor in spirit are welcomed into the fellowship of God’s kingdom. Hence, the church opens its doors in sharing this truth and redirecting the people’s thinking. This type of change in thinking requires a willingness from the people to embrace God’s help and continually invest in the process of transforming their thoughts and their realities. This, too, takes time.

For now, the people in Brownsville remain in desperate need of spiritual, social, economic, and emotional renewal. Such holistic renewal is needed in many urban areas throughout America. One church in this area is offering hope, but many more are needed to do the same. As stated earlier, to carry out the vision of action necessitated by critical thinking, additional resources and support are needed. That said, it is necessary to still explain some of the issues within the urban Black community that have impacted their negative assumptions and behavior.

Social Challenges Currently Plaguing Urban American Youth At Large

Compounding issues contribute to the lack of self-worth, the discrimination, and the misguided and careless behavior of urban youth in the 21st century. It is a flawed assumption to believe that these youth simply choose to live this way. “The complex challenges faced by inner city children cause many children to become at risk.”²⁷² For

²⁷¹ Ibid., 17.

²⁷² Vanessa A Camilleri, *Healing the Inner City Child Creative Arts Therapies with at-Risk Youth* (Philadelphia: Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2007), 21, <http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&scope=site&db=nlebk&db=nlabk&AN=202349>.

instance, from the east coast to the west coast, urban inner-cities are disproportionately crowded, with more families living in small spaces.²⁷³ The over crowdedness contributes to many of the challenges that plague urban youth and their communities.

According to former US Senator, Daniel Moynihan, in his 1965 report (what is known today as the Moynihan Report), he writes that a “tangle of pathologies” which includes the breakdown of a weak family unity is the primary source of weakness in Black families.²⁷⁴ The Moynihan Report identifies the tangle of pathologies that include: poor education, weak job prospects, concentrated neighborhood poverty, dysfunctional communities, crime, and disintegrating families. Moynihan noticed that unmarried birth rates among Blacks were high and that the strong matriarchal society in their midst gave Black men no choice but to move, as there was no place for them.²⁷⁵ He believed that this was the primary reason why many Black men chose to abandon their roles as husbands, fathers, and providers altogether. He went on to argue that the Black family was “battered and harassed by discrimination,”²⁷⁶ which was the source of its weakness and instability. Whether one agrees or disagrees with Moynihan’s findings, one major challenge, often viewed as the primary source behind the issues that persists, is Urban America is fatherlessness.

²⁷³ Ibid., 16.

²⁷⁴ “The Moynihan Report (1965) | The Black Past: Remembered and Reclaimed,” accessed December 27, 2013, <http://www.blackpast.org/primary/moynihan-report-1965>.

²⁷⁵ Gregory Acs, “The Moynihan Report Revisited,” Urban.org, June 13, 2013, 1, accessed September 20, 2013, <http://www.urban.org/publications/412839.html>.

²⁷⁶ Ibid., 3.

Fatherlessness in Urban America

The absence of a father from any home will have negative implications. Fathers who do not show up for their children are regrettably becoming commonplace, and the time of abandonment is occurring at younger ages in children's lives. Research reports that

by the end of 2008, more than 1.5 million individuals were incarcerated in federal or state prisons in the United States, with hundreds of thousands more in local jails. An overwhelming majority of these individuals were male, and most had children younger than 18. The large and growing number of incarcerated parents has made understanding the effects of paternal imprisonment on children's well-being especially [burdensome] in relation to other forms of father absence.²⁷⁷

Fifty years after the publishing of the Moynihan Report, the number of children without their fathers, in Black families, is increasing at a high rate with no end in sight. "In 1960, twenty percent of Black children lived with their mothers but not their fathers; by 2010, fifty-three percent of all Black children lived in such families."²⁷⁸ In many inner city dwellings today, fathers are not active in the homes. The issue of fatherlessness remains a generational issue which the Christian Church can speak to through the influence of godly men who are role models and show urban youth how to be good men. Parishioners have participated during some of the most challenging times in the history of the United States, including during the era of segregation. It is time to rally at large against this issue.

²⁷⁷ Amanda Geller et al., "Beyond Absenteeism: Father Incarceration and Child Development," *Demography* 49, no. 1 (February 2012): 50, doi:10.1007/s13524-011-0081-9.

²⁷⁸ Steven Ruggles et al., "Integrated Public Use Microdata Series: Version 5.0," *IPUMS-USA*, Version 5, 2010.

The Lack of Education in Urban Black Churches and Their Communities

For the Black Church and its community, especially those in urban areas, education and skill development will equal empowerment and liberation.²⁷⁹ This will open doors and enhance the community at large. Yet, for far too long, Black churches in urban areas have put a strong emphasis on “Christian education as a desirable goal but have not backed it up financially.”²⁸⁰ The need for education is a common topic, yet little is actually done to help people in the church or the community improve their education. Some believe, as indicated above, that many inner-city Black churches are ill-equipped to make a change in their communities. For the Black church to be on the front lines in making a difference in education, it needs to educate its people and recruit those with an earned education to offer urban residents a “hand up and not a hand out.”²⁸¹ Such a transformation will require leaders on the frontlines to be educated themselves.

A Paradigm for Leading Modern Day Social Change

Today, the Christian Church is uniquely positioned to make an unprecedented impact on Urban America and its youth.²⁸² Philosopher and youth pastor Fernando Arzola, Jr. has set out to help the Christian Church understand a holistic approach for reaching urban youth. The main goal of *Four Paradigms of Youth Ministry in the Urban Context* is to motivate churches to revisit, revamp, and reevaluate their practices and

²⁷⁹ James R Love, *The Gathering Place: Empowering Your Community through Urban Church Education* (Grand Rapids Mich.: Zondervan, 2002), 16.

²⁸⁰ Ibid., 12.

²⁸¹ Ibid.

²⁸² Robert W. Gaines II, “Looking Back, Moving Forward: How the Civil Rights Era Church Can Guide the Modern Black Church in Improving Black Student Achievement,” *Journal of Negro Education* 79, no. 3 (Summer 2010): 367.

presence in urban cities across America. He provides insights and practical, proven case study information to enable new projects to effectively launch and remain sustainable in their endeavor to transform urban youth. Arzola's four paradigms for youth ministry in the urban context include:

1. the Traditional Youth Ministry Paradigm,
2. the Liberal Youth Ministry Paradigm,
3. the Activist Youth Ministry Paradigm,
4. the Prophetic Youth Ministry Paradigm.²⁸³

Of the four paradigms, for the context of this study, the Prophetic Youth Paradigm best captures and describes to a church or organization what they will need to know and do before getting started. It offers a more holistic approach and involves the other three paradigms.

This starting point is significant. The Traditional Youth Ministry focuses on youth ministry programs. The Liberal Youth Ministry focuses on the personal felt-needs of youth. The Activist Youth Ministry focuses on the social concerns impacting urban youth. While all of these issues are important, the Prophetic Youth Ministry does not begin with these. The heart of the Prophetic Youth Ministry is centered on Christ and then reaches out to address all three of these needs.²⁸⁴

This train of thought initiates with Christ at the center and from there seeks creative ways and measures to impact urban youth on a broader scale. Though it focuses heavily on the lordship of Christ in the inner lives of urban youth, it is very much concerned with their felt-needs, day-to-day issues, and their ongoing participation in programs that will help them remain productive. Ultimately, the Prophetic perspective "believes in a

²⁸³ Fernando Arzola, Jr., "Four Paradigms of Youth Ministry in the Urban Context," *Journal of Youth Ministry* 5, no. 1 (Fall 2006): 41-42.

²⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 48.

paradigmatic transformation, a fundamental change of purpose, guiding principle, assumptions and evaluative questions.”²⁸⁵ It is in this model that one working with urban youth engages the emotional, practical, spiritual, and social concerns encountered. People that take such a personal interest in urban youth by incorporating paradigm four, will likely be taken seriously by the youth and gain respect in the community where they work.²⁸⁶

Furthermore, Arzola stresses that the core outcome of this level of urban youth interaction and integration is the word *transformation*.

The word “trans” means to go beyond, through, and on through to the other side. The word “form” comes from the Latin, “forma,” meaning beauty. Form refers to bodies, people, and ideas. Transformation, therefore, implies a reforming and reshaping of people towards “the beautiful”... The call to transformation is to confront and transform the “ugliness” within ourselves (personal), within our hearts (spiritual), and within our society (social).²⁸⁷

In other words, the author is saying the ultimate goal of the local churches and youth workers is to help urban youth grasp a stronger and healthier personal, spiritual, and social image of themselves and their community.

For today’s urban youth to become active participants in society—working, educated, and providing to others a hand up—they need someone to first invest in them for the long run. What better group to do it other than the Christian Church, a place of hope? The Christian Church’s time, talent, and treasures are needed to instill hope for the future, provide direction in education and job skills, to model good character and healthy

²⁸⁵ Ibid., 51.

²⁸⁶ Ibid., 49.

²⁸⁷ Arzola, 50.

families, and to mend the emotionally broken of such communities. The local church's involvement in bringing positive change regarding urban social and economic issues was strongly seen and felt in the past and is strongly needed today. Understanding the dilemma at hand, with God's help, breakthrough can happen again, even in the most depressing of circumstances of America's inner cities. It is possible to not only imagine a better inner city environment but to see it happen as the hope of urban youth and families is restored in North America.

These types of change are needed today in urban communities to restore the family unit and to reestablish a sense of security and stability. Reforming this area of society will benefit North America as a whole. Even so, the future of this group of America's children and youth remains at stake. This unfortunate reality is also evident upon analyzing the quality of urban public education for Black students. This leads into the next area requiring layers of critical thinking to effect social change in this community.

Analyzing Urban Public Education Today

Martin Luther King, Jr., once stated, "The function of education is to teach one to think intensively and to think critically."²⁸⁸ However, in reviewing the landscape of urban public education today, such ideology and empowerment is largely lacking. The researcher will now review the circumstances surrounding this claim, including challenges related to the pedagogical practices of urban school teachers. The researcher will also attempt to identify viable options for revitalization from some of the leading

²⁸⁸ "The Purpose of Education, According to Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.," *THE THINK TANK*, accessed January 14, 2016, <http://thinktank.uchicago.edu/blog/2014/1/15/the-purpose-of-education-according-to-dr-martin-luther-king-jr>.

social organizations, educational professionals, and field experts, thus inviting multiple points of view. This study will also explore the proven pedagogical practices provided by committed and invested teachers working in urban school districts. In doing so, the possibility for renewed hope for public education in Urban America will be assessed, thereby courageously anticipating a better and brighter future for urban youth, their schools, and their communities for generations to come.

Public education is a regular topic of discussion in educational forums, the daily news headlines, congressional agendas, the social media, and even around kitchen tables. With so many opinions, it can be expected that the conversation includes a vast number of assumptions. For Urban America, many of the assumptions are laden with overwhelming evidence. Schools are failing. The dropout rate is massive. Students, teachers, and administrators alike are in need of a lifeline. Debates about how to resolve failing urban schools and how to curb the substantial dropout rate often focus on students' performance, teachers' effectiveness, the lack of academic licensures of teachers, and student scores on standardized assessments. What, then, should be done? What type of informed action should be taken?

Often missing in the urban revitalization discussions are student reflections and the voice of active professionals who are experiencing educational success in urban settings. The latter can offer insight based on practices learned from the students, the community, and resourceful social services. Their success in such circumstances offers hope and may be of use in developing urban pedagogy. Such effective pedagogy is often misunderstood and underrepresented in urban school districts.

This study will propose a three-fold combination of meaningful pedagogy, committed teachers, and engaged students. A culturally relevant pedagogy will help students to accept and affirm their cultural identity. At the same time, they can develop critical perspectives that challenge inequities they find in the schools.²⁸⁹ With this proposal in place, positive educational transformation is bound to be the new reality in urban education, which can eventually lead to better lives for the youth who grew up as impoverished children.

In paving the way for such a transformation, it is pertinent to properly assess the current challenges that comprise the realities of what urban students and teachers face on a day-to-day basis.

Challenge One: Addressing Underachievers and Dropouts

Two of the primary challenges dominating the scene in many urban schools across North America are the high number of dropouts and, for those who earn a diploma, the seeming lack of basic education and college-ready skills. Large sums of money and social media attention have been given to help reverse the epidemic but have yielded little to no change.²⁹⁰ Research reveals that African American and Hispanic students in urban areas are the most likely to be underprepared for higher education.

The graduation rate of American high schools in general is 71%.²⁹¹ However, “only 51% of all black students and 52% of all Hispanic students graduate, and only 20%

²⁸⁹ Ibid., 468-469.

²⁹⁰ Wendy Fischman, Jennifer DiBara, and Howard Gardner, “Creating Good Education against the Odds,” *Cambridge Journal of Education* 36, no. 3 (September 1, 2006): 383, doi:10.1080/03057640600866007.

²⁹¹ C. Chapman, J. Laird, and A. Kewal Ramani, “Trends in High School Dropout and Completion Rates in the United States: 1972–2008” (NCES 2011-012). National Center for Education Statistics,

of all black students and 16% of all Hispanic students leave high school college-ready.”²⁹² Urban students are often multiple grade levels behind, lack parental involvement, and do not have adequate finances to secure the needed and proper resources such as clothing and class materials to adequately function in the class.²⁹³ Such scenarios impair students’ ability to process academic material and often pave the way for low test-scores, a myriad of frustrations, and unsurprisingly bad attitudes. In some cases, a desire to simply give up on the public education system altogether occurs too often in city schools, making most urban high schools perpetual drop out factories. The former US Secretary of Education, Rod Paige, comments, “As a result, students never realize their potential. They leave school undereducated and unprepared for a global economy. They may wander in a kind of economic darkness for a lifetime.”²⁹⁴ Hence, improvements are critical to the success and preparedness of these urban students.

Challenge Two: Updating Urban School Facilities

All schools add to the quality of a city, unless those schools are antiquated and dilapidated. In that case, the school’s appearance and crumbling infrastructure can become a detriment to urban students and prevent their ability to engage in their own education. A number of schools within the American public education system are not

Institute of Education Sciences, U.S. Department of Education (2010), accessed September 21, 2013. <http://nces.ed.gov/pubsearch>.

²⁹² Jay P. Greene and Greg Forster. “Public High School Graduation and College Readiness Rates in the United States.” *Education Working Paper*. Vol. 3 (2003), New York, NY: Center for Civic Innovation at the Manhattan Institute, 3, accessed September 21, 2013, <http://www.manhattan-institute.org/html/public-high-school-graduation-and-college-readiness-rates-united-states-5906.html>.

²⁹³ Jay P. Greene & M.A. Winters. “Public High School Graduation Rates: 1991-2002.” Education Working Paper No. 8 (February 2005), Manhattan Institute.

²⁹⁴ “Remarks by Secretary Paige before the Urban League,” Speeches and Testimony, (May 19, 2008), <http://www2.ed.gov/news/speeches/2004/03/03252004a.html>.

receiving the proper and mandatory maintenance, particularly in the urban demographic.²⁹⁵ Reports and forums indicate that there needs to be a stronger connection and more communication between the education field and the field of city planning, particularly in regard to urban (re)development and school facilities.²⁹⁶ When both agencies work together, it speaks to their seriousness and care for urban schools within their jurisdiction. It also speaks to the students and their families in urban communities that the city is doing all that it possibly can to help meet the educational needs of its young people. However, it seems the trend is for tax dollars to be invested in constructing new schools rather than repairing old school buildings. In some cases the older schools remain in operation though they are in dire need of overhaul and are near condemnation. It is important to note that these sub-par buildings are primarily found in urban areas.

Additional attention is needed on the infrastructure of many urban schools. The overlooked to-do list contains items such as: inoperable technology, leaky roofs, punctured walls, inadequate supplies for teachers, and bleak physical campus. As a result, urban students are hampered by the learning environment in which they are expected to achieve set academic standards. Another item that could be added to the ongoing list is the need for smaller class sizes. The currently overcrowded classrooms disrupt learning and adversely affect the students' retention of new concepts and lessons. The one-on-one opportunity is minimized and the student to teacher ratio makes it nearly impossible for both teachers and students to function at a high capacity.

²⁹⁵ Jeffrey M. Vincent, "Public Schools as Public Infrastructure Roles for Planning Researchers," *Journal of Planning Education and Research* 25, no. 4 (June 1, 2006): 434, doi:10.1177/0739456X06288092.

²⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 433.

Ultimately, families with resources often leave the urban schools in search of better learning environments such as private schools or new suburban schools. Such a migration leaves the urban schools with even fewer resources—material and intellectual—available to serve communities with increased levels of concentrated poverty.²⁹⁷

American cities have a long journey set before them in terms of having the multiagency of federal and local governments communicate and ratify decisions about the overdue fiscal, rezoning, and maintenance responsibilities that need to take place in urban school districts throughout the country. A city is as prosperous as its people. The people are as strong as their education. The future quality of cities, regions, and neighborhoods are intertwined with schools.²⁹⁸ To delay or deny the maintenance and development of urban schools is to take from the city's future growth and progress.

Challenge Three: Understanding Life Outside of the Urban Classroom

Beyond the scope of school pride, teachers who are committed to their students reveal that they often have to put academics on hold to attend to their pupils' developmental, social, and emotional needs.²⁹⁹ When a panel of teachers and administrators asked a group of forty random urban teachers how they produced exemplary work when external conditions were notably challenging, the panel was shocked to realize that none of the teachers mentioned dealing with the issues of limited

²⁹⁷ Ibid., 434.

²⁹⁸ Ibid., 436.

²⁹⁹ Wendy Fischman, et. al., 383.

resources, dilapidated buildings, or large classrooms.³⁰⁰ These teachers were initially concerned about whether or not they measured up to the numerous standards related to their field. After years of working within urban settings and eventually knowing their students on a personal level, the teachers realized that the standards in the larger arena of education were not conducive or relevant to schools in urban districts. In the urban setting, such exemplary work was the result of the teachers' belief that the relationships with their students are the main gateway leading into academics. This relationship also significantly positively affected the student's calling, and thus fulfilled the teachers' mission as educators.³⁰¹

To a great degree, urban teachers feel more responsibility for their students' lives than academics.³⁰² In the same report, one urban-based teacher states that the biggest issue occurring in schools today is what is going on outside of the classroom. Both sets of teachers represented in this grouping—those recently out of college and those with decades of experience—believe that they may be a student's only hope.³⁰³ Forming and maintaining such deep relationships carries a price tag. It is possible that some teachers can become overwhelmed with the problems their students are facing. Many of these teachers invest numerous hours listening to their students and offering advice, and this is emotionally burdensome. Urban teachers share that it is a concern for them in finding the balance, as the needs of their students are many and layered. Teachers with a passion for

³⁰⁰ Ibid., 385.

³⁰¹ Ibid., 386.

³⁰² Ibid.

³⁰³ Ibid.

impoverished students have to wrestle with how to help them with their personal needs while staying true to their own values. All of this is in addition to the necessity of academic learning.

Teachers must also learn how to maintain personal composure and relationships with their family and friends outside of teaching so that the demands of work do not overwhelm or take away from other important relationships.³⁰⁴ Additional concerns in this particular setting involve, but are not limited to, having minimal parent support, helping their students deal with external circumstances like peer pressure, and dealing with their students' tattered family relationships.

Urban teachers have a special and unique calling. While there is a strong population of those who are invested, who care deeply for their students, and who are actively engaged in the daily realities conveyed by their students, more needs to be done to revamp the pedagogy and even the curriculum in urban classrooms to best help them learn and eventually become productive citizens of society.

Challenge Four: Developing Culturally Relevant Teaching Methods

In an effort to help students to better identify with their classroom learning objectives and standardized public education requirements, the concept of culturally relevant teaching has been suggested.

Educational practices must match with the children's culture in ways which ensure the generation of academically important behaviors. It does not mean that all school practices need be completely congruent with natal cultural practices, in the sense of exactly or even closely matching or agreeing with them. The point of cultural compatibility is that the natal culture is used as a guide in the selection of

³⁰⁴ Ibid., 392.

educational program elements so that academically desired behaviors are produced and undesired behaviors are avoided.³⁰⁵

In short, there are community concepts that can be integrated into the classroom to assist students in making a stronger connection with the intended learning outcomes and abstract assessments that some teachers use to introduce different processing methods. For example, some urban schools in Texas use Hip-Hop and R&B music and rhythms to communicate history lessons on past presidents and particular decades of American history. Because the majority of urban students gravitate toward music, the results proved fruitful. Test anxiety dissipated in many cases and individual and class test scores increased throughout consecutive grade levels.³⁰⁶ Additional creative measures are being used each year by educators to pique students' interest. These measures actively engage the students and inspire in them the desire to go beyond the information presented by the teacher. It is possible that all three outcomes can occur in American urban schools as cultural variations are used to trigger the imaginations of students to further explore academic success. This could be one of the powerful tools used to counteract the lack of academic engagement in urban school districts across the United States.

³⁰⁵ Cathie Jordan, "Translating Culture: From Ethnographic Information to Educational Program," *Anthropology & Education Quarterly* 16 (June 1985): 110, doi:10.1525/aeq.1985.16.2.04x0631g.

³⁰⁶ "Flocabulary," accessed September 1, 2013, <http://www.flocabulary.com/testimonial-texas/>.

A Proposal for Enhanced Urban Education Experiences

Achievement and engagement take place in urban schools through key scaffolds like teachers and family members.³⁰⁷ Urban students value teachers who interact with them as people and show that they care about them as individuals rather than as just another urban kid in the class. For example, students became enthused about learning when ideas were presented that gave them an out-of-class option to fulfill their class assignments. In this example, students and teachers reviewed proposed options that included work outside of the classroom, and chose one that piqued the student's interest. An English teacher in the urban setting, Kristien Zenkov, explains that typically problematic urban students have the ability to develop a heart and respect for teachers when they truly feel cared for.³⁰⁸ It allows for them to expose their vulnerabilities and receive direction and become teachable. She also highlights the danger of judging the students, saying, "Teachers who appear to judge youth or the people who matter to them likely did not have the sort of blind faith in students' abilities that was necessary to help them to engage with school."³⁰⁹ Students are able to pick up on vibes and tell the difference between a teacher who values them over one who simply casts a condescending glance. Overall, quality teachers must focus on creating a genuine

³⁰⁷ Kristien Marquez-Zenkov and James A. Harmon, "Seeing English in the City: Using Photography to Understand Students' Literacy Relationships," *The English Journal* 96, no. 6 (2007): 24–26, doi:10.2307/30046748.

³⁰⁸ Kristien Zenkov, "Seeing the Pedagogies, Practices, and Programs Urban Students Want," *Theory Into Practice* 48, no. 3 (July 6, 2009): 168–175, doi:10.1080/00405840902997253.

³⁰⁹ Ibid.

connection with their students, in order to realize that they are listening, even when teachers think that they are not.³¹⁰

Not only are caring teachers vital in a success strategy for urban students, family members also play an important role. Students value family members who are willing to listen to them about their feelings. They value family that offers support and encouragement regarding the situations and choices that have had an influence on their lives. The following accounts are stories that some of the students shared about the family members that have made the greatest impact on their lives thus far. Student 1 shared about how his uncle was one of the only individuals to make him feel like he could talk to him about anything. He said that his uncle encouraged the importance of an education. Student 2 shared about her grandmother. She described her grandmother as a hard worker who oversaw the breakfast orders at a local eatery. Nearly every night, her grandmother would ask about past, present, and future assignments. She even probed around about college applications and job careers. The young lady went on to say that if it were not for her grandmother's accountability and firmness that she would not be in school today or have a future outlook beyond high school.³¹¹ The stories above demonstrate that the power of family is strong, needed, and can set the tone for valuing education.

Reversing the Cycle through Improved Thinking and Action

One of the primary goals of critical thinking entails improving upon the way one thinks, and on a broader scale, the way that a community thinks. For the urban students

³¹⁰ Marquez-Zenkov, 26.

³¹¹ Ibid., 27-28.

described in this chapter, critical thinking involves improving their perception of the value of their education. Without a quality education, there is an increase in the probability of unemployment, which often means that their family will experience poverty. This perpetuates hopeless futures attached to dead dreams of young men and women living in these areas. Yet, taking action toward a new direction can change this.

Reversing this negative cycle that loops around a lack of motivation and resources involves addressing a number of challenges: the high rate of underachievers and dropouts, the dilapidated school buildings, the lack of understanding about life outside of the urban classroom, and a culturally irrelevant pedagogy. Nevertheless, hope remains. Various educators have proven successful in engaging their urban students and increasing student achievement in the midst of such interconnected and complicated challenges. This has come largely by way of embracing creative learning methods that the students find appealing and through support systems that come through the teacher's personal involvement and the encouragement of family. It comes as a result of professionals thinking critically about how they teach and interact with their students.

Thinking and acting strategically about reengaging urban youth towards education is pivotal to their future cities, communities, businesses, generations, and individual career paths. Ownership of and commitment to such a mammoth project demands an unyielding investment from three primary groups: students, teachers, and families. Investments from each of these groups provide urban students with a better chance at life.

The work to revitalize, invest, and restore urban communities is a long way off from a true turnaround. Such efforts take decades to see substantive, long-lasting results. These types of turnarounds require the help and resources from every pocket of society in

order to develop beautified urban school campuses that produce productive, educated, and balanced citizens of society. For the urban students who desire a winning opportunity to overcome poverty and earn a solid education to become participating members in their communities, education, and a global economy, they need the collaborative support of parents/guardians, teachers, city leaders, and business leaders to beat the odds of poverty and not become part of the latest negative statistics of students living in urban communities. As it was stated earlier, cities are as strong as their schools.

The Message for University Students

This chapter has served to demonstrate the many layers of critical thinking involved in effecting change, specifically social change. It has revealed the great and costly effort that can be involved in uprooting old assumptions in favor of embracing unbiased truth. The researcher displayed this by exploring aspects of the struggle for racial equality and social justice. The chapter also analyzes the challenges urban youth face in North America's urban public education system in an effort to improve the quality of their educational experience and ultimately improve their quality of living.

Considering that some students may endeavor to contribute to the ongoing process of effecting social change, educators Stephen Brookfield and Stephen Preskill highlight nine characteristics that social leaders exhibit. These appropriately point back to the value of studying the critical thinking process.

- Learning how to be open to the contributions of others
- Learning how to reflect critically on one's practice
- Learning how to support the growth of others
- Learning how to develop collective leadership
- Learning how to analyze experience
- Learning how to question oneself and others
- Learning democracy

- Learning to sustain hope in the face of struggle
- Learning to create community³¹²

Dr. King also speaks to the need for leaders to be able to “sift and weigh evidence, to discern the true from the false, the real from the unreal, and the facts from the fiction.”³¹³

In fact, King felt that the purpose of education in general was to enable people to do such things. Hence, this social revolutionist connected the purpose of education back to learning the skills to be able to think critically.

³¹² Brookfield and Preskill, 15–18.

³¹³ “The Purpose of Education, According to Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.”

CONCLUSION

A survey conducted in 2013 by The American Association of Colleges and Universities discovered that 93 percent of business and non-profit leaders who were surveyed emphasize that “a demonstrated capacity to think critically, communicate clearly, and solve complex problems is more important than [a candidate’s] undergraduate major.”³¹⁴ This should serve as a wake-up call for students in Christian higher education, motivating them to explore the concepts related to the critical thinking process and to strive to apply them early on.

Ultimately, the aim of this dissertation study is to explore and explain critical thinking concepts that faculty can use to help their students improve their thinking about academics and about life. This writing also speaks to the institution’s role in encouraging this process. It is intended to equip faculty in aiding students in wisely handling and working through challenges or opposition they may encounter in their fields and in their faith, and to one day be sought-after individuals who are known for their expertise in leading and thinking on multiple levels.

For this to occur, students need a valid understanding of what critical thinking entails. This process is not about employing negative, harsh thinking, or about having a critical spirit. Rather, it aims at refining thinking in an effort to improve it. It is useful in helping students avoid the pitfalls that are often created by the snares of personal assumptions.

³¹⁴ “It Takes More than a Major: Employer Priorities for College Learning and Student Success: Overview and Key Findings,” (2013), Washington, DC: Association of American Colleges and Universities and Hart Research Associates, accessed June 19, 2014.
<https://www.aacu.org/leap/presidentstrust/compact/2013SurveySummary>

Critical thinking expert Stephen Brookfield explains that the best way to understand critical thinking is to engage in four primary steps. Each step uncovers the big picture definition of what it means to think in layers.

1. Identify the assumptions that frame [one's] thinking and determine [his or her] actions.
2. Check out the degree to which these assumptions are accurate and valid.
3. Look at [one's] ideas and decisions (intellectual, organizational, and personal) from several different perspectives.
4. On the basis of all of this, take informed action.³¹⁵

Critical thinking begins with the task of unearthing assumptions about a scenario in order to weigh their truthfulness. Assumptions are real for everyone. Left unchecked they could become pseudo reality flowing in opposition to the truth of the matter. No one is exempt from making daily assumptions about whoever they see or whatever topic they may be entertaining in the moment. They have the potential to be buried deep within one's psyche or simply on the surface statement based on an initial encounter or situation. Assumptions, unlike most good thinking about a subject or a person, do not "seek a new way to look at learning or take time to become comfortable with a new perspective."³¹⁶ In addition, assumptions are neither synonymous with truth, nor are they necessarily accurate about people or situations. In many cases, they are simply a shot in the dark or a flighty, passive statement that conveys one's intent to simply move to whatever is next. There are also times where assumptions have been deeply weighed but with limited

³¹⁵ Brookfield, 1.

³¹⁶ Elder and Paul, "Critical Thinking (Part II)," 34.

angles and points of view, resulting in decisions being made that are not well informed. This is where the process of critical thinking comes into play as a means to educate the mind in making better choices.

Assumptions effect everyone, and for the purpose of this essay, the researcher has intended to help students in Christian higher education to become more aware of their assumptions in favor of embracing the critical thinking process.

Unfortunately, as has been pointed out in this study, many university students lack a solid understanding of the critical thinking process and undervalue their importance of good critical thinking skills. They are more conditioned in being taught what to think instead of how to think. This study seeks to reverse such statistics through creating deeper awareness of the value of critical thinking and exploring ways to demonstrate its process and its usefulness in the classroom, in students' personal lives, in their understanding of God, and in society as a whole.

It should be understood that the ideas presented in this study are not exhaustive explanations of critical thinking. They are, however, intended to be foundational in encouraging university students to further explore how they might integrate critical thinking into their disciplines. Additionally, critical thinking itself should not be understood as a process that, when engaged, automatically and easily solves problems. For critical thinking to be used as a means of improving lives and communities, it takes multiple people being willing to relentlessly invest in the endeavor to better their thinking, better their actions, better their lives, and better their communities. The world will be a better place for it.

In summary, as a professor who teaches critical thinking, personal awareness, calling, and worldview to university freshmen at a Christian higher education institution, this dissertation study speaks to me about ways in which I can improve my own pedagogy and my students' experience. I recently completed my first week of class for the spring 2016 semester. In class, I was able to open our discussion by prompting the students with questions about their expectations for the course entitled Christ, Culture, and the University. Because this is a course intended to prepare students for academic success in the university setting, I began with the topic of engagement. I enquired about means that help the class to best engage in the act of learning. This helped me to identify their preferred learning styles and some of their assumptions about what I should bring to the learning atmosphere. They affirmed the use of visual aids, explanations of lofty concepts in simpler terms, discussion questions about the material, the integration of new information with what has already been communicated, and the desire for a high-energy atmosphere. In listening to their comments, I noticed that the majority of their expectations centered on the responsibility of the professor rather than their own responsibility for their role in their academic pursuit. This led into a discussion about how a significant part of the engagement process is the students' own willingness and desire to improve their thinking. It also opened an opportunity to dialogue about assumptions in general, thus paving the way to introduce Brookfield's critical thinking process soon thereafter.

This study has helped me to go beyond merely teaching critical thinking skills during a specified week of the semester. Having a better understanding of the critical thinking process, I now seek to practice and demonstrate critical thinking with my

students throughout the semester as we engage various topics and consider them from different angles and perspectives. I am on this journey with my students to improve our thinking as a whole.

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