

From the Editor's Desk

Frank Fair

In this issue we celebrate the life and work of Richard Paul by inviting his colleagues to describe the development, meaning, and application of his influential conception of critical thinking. Two of those colleagues, Linda Elder and Gerald Nosich, are guest editors for this special memorial issue. So, without further ado, here are their introductions to the issue.

Introductions to the Memorial Issue by Guest Editors Linda Elder and Gerald Nosich

Linda Elder

I am honored to be part of this distinctive edition of *INQUIRY*, which is focused on the life and work of Richard Paul. Paul was an author, professor, advocate for justice, revolutionary for freedom, and thinker *par excellence*. And he was, in the main, like Socrates, a theoretician, philosopher in everyday life, and student of the human mind. Throughout his life of scholarship, Richard Paul pursued an insatiable desire to understand the foundations of human thought and behavior, and believed that the highest path to human enlightenment depended to a significant degree on the quality of one's reasoning abilities and one's will to develop intellectually and personally. He himself embodied confidence in reason and the questioning mind, never satisfied with answers that lacked inherent logic and reasonability, no matter from which part of society or academia they emanated, including his own field of Philosophy.

There are, as far as my understanding can tell, very few truly original thinkers in the history of ideas and of human thought. Paul is one of these rare few. It is for this reason that I have argued in my opening paper for the importance of the establishment of first principles in critical thinking based fundamentally in the theory developed by Richard Paul and Paulian scholars working in this tradition. Readers can decide for themselves whether I have made the argument clear, coherent, and transparent.

Richard Paul believed in the possibility of free and critical societies developing over the long run. And he believed virtually all humans to be capable of advancing to far higher levels of thought and of living than most will ever begin to experience in their lifetimes. He was, in his own words, at one and the same time an "idealist, a realist and a pragmatist." A few of the many powerful ways in which Paul's work has been and can be contextualized in education and professional communities are illuminated through the important contributions in this special edition. One must determine for her or himself whether it is possible, or probable, that humans will embrace the principles of critical thinking in time to save ourselves from the menacing problems we now face. I am not myself optimistic, so powerful are the forces now working against us. Still, one must not give up hope, or I fear that the whole thing will come tumbling down. And it is only through committed unwavering resolve that we can significantly advance our ability to alleviate the suffering pervasive in the world, and raise our species to higher forms of living, based in reasonability, enlightenment, and true egalitarianism.

I would like to thank the authors who have given of their time and intellectual energy to this edition, who have articulated in writing their thoughts about Paul's contributions, and who have shared their expertise with others through this sacrifice of time, all in memory of Richard Paul. I am confident that Richard would be pleased with all of the contributions to this edition, and would, on the whole, agree with our arguments and conceptual moves. He would deeply appreciate the honor to him personally represented through this special edition. He would delight in closely and carefully reading all our assertions, suggestions, concerns, issues, descriptions, victories and stumbling blocks; after closing the journal, he would pause for a long moment of deep satisfaction and quiet reflection. And then, after the knowing smile had faded, and the dusk of reality began to once again set in, mostly he would hope that people, far sooner rather than later, could and would intimately embrace the principles in a robust conception of fairminded critical thinking, for the benefit of all humans and sentient creatures.

On a personal note, it was with extreme difficulty and profound sadness that I finally made it through the process of writing my own article in this edition, so raw is the memory of the loss of Richard Paul as my husband and closest friend and colleague. Given the depth of my grief at this time and throughout the last year, it was possibly too soon for me to try to attempt such an important piece. But it is my way to ask too much of myself, something Richard consistently warned me against. It seems to me that an essential gift we give to those who go before us is to continue living, appreciating and enjoying life to the utmost in the very moment of living, and to keep living at the highest levels, while we still have the gift of life, and even when we experience profound grief. Richard himself embodied this principle every day of his life during the time I knew him; he would expect nothing less from me at this time. For Richard, sadness and grief would need to take a back seat to pragmatic reality and the good that can be done through our efforts today. This understanding did help in impelling me onward to the finish line of my contribution, however much I would have liked to succumb to the real and debilitating effects that have been implicit in losing Richard as my intimate partner, after more than 20 years of marital love; this, I now entirely understand, is the price of love. And it is a price I pay, though not gladly.

I want to thank Frank Fair, Editor of *INQUIRY*, for his ready willingness to work with Gerald Nosich and me when we approached him with the idea of this special edition. He has been a delight to work with throughout the process.

Finally, I want to thank my colleague and very good friend Gerald Nosich for the primary role he played in working with the authors in this edition, to smooth over the rough edges and fine tune our contributions. Gerald and I were both dealt a tremendous personal blow through the loss of our closest colleague and constant friend when Richard died. A rare few understood something of the intimate workings of Richard's mind, and hence can begin to conceptualize the loss that Richard's death represents to the advancement of ideas. Gerald was one of those rare few. I want to thank Gerald for his continual reminder to me that our grief is normal, and that we will get through it; it seems by all evidence before us that he is right and that now, more than a year after Richard's death, the fog is beginning to lift. Thank you, Gerald, for your unwavering support of me personally during this difficult time.

Living with so magnificent a thinker as was Richard Paul has made me appreciate the power and theoretical ability of the human mind. Experiencing Richard's mind at play and at work over many years has helped me conceptualize the intellectual possibilities for the human

species, so highly disciplined was he as a reasoner. But it has also drawn for me in stark relief the distance between highly skilled thinkers and most other people, so far are “normal” humans from realizing anything like the level of intellectual discipline that people like Richard routinely cultivate in their thought and action and the intellectual virtues they embody.

What Richard would wish is for us to comprehend with deep understanding the accessibility of critical thinking for all persons in every part of human societies, and he would compel us to take foundational consistent steps in precisely that direction as soon as is humanly possible.

Gerald Nosich

Richard and I were friends and colleagues for more than 35 years. He was a close friend. I carry a deep sense of appreciation for this memorial issue of *INQUIRY* and an abiding gratitude for the privilege of co-editing this issue dedicated to him and his work.

Linda Elder and I invited contributions to this issue with an eye both to honoring Richard as a person and to displaying some part of the wide range of ways Richard’s work has shaped educational practice. Hundreds of thousands of educators in a growing international community now incorporate Richard’s work, in whole or in part, into their teaching and their practice. For Richard himself, the directionality of his work was always toward developing fairminded, substantive critical thinking, and, ultimately, in the service of furthering the creation of fairminded critical societies.

In this issue, Richard, the person, comes through most vividly in the paper by Linda Elder. But a sense of him also comes through in my paper and, in a somewhat different light, in Donald Hatcher’s. In that paper Don describes Richard’s personal stewardship of “the Critical Thinking Movement” “of the 80s and 90s, and the profound personal influence he had on Don and others in that “first generation” of critical-thinking scholars.

But, as those who knew him well can attest, Richard the person was not really separable from critical thinking or from his work on critical thinking. It permeated and flowed through his whole life and all his pursuits. All the papers in this issue address Richard’s work.

Both Linda’s paper and my own address Richard’s work as an organic, integrated whole. Linda lays out what came to be called “the Paul-Elder approach,” but she also describes many of the lesser-known aspects of Richard’s work in critical thinking. She also argues for the importance of creating a field of critical-thinking studies, one that is distinct from and not under the control of any other academic discipline or department. The creation of such a field was always dear to Richard’s heart, though he (like Linda) was skeptical that such a field could, given the political realities of colleges and universities, actually be brought into existence.

In my paper, I describe what Richard was trying to achieve overall, his on articulating a comprehensive and systematic approach that would help people, as he so often said, take control of their learning and their life. Richard’s most developed work after 1991 was designed expressly to apply, in a straightforward way, to thinking about *anything*, and to address all aspects of critical thinking usable in practice. A consequence of this is that Richard’s approach can be used in any context and can enhance more specialized ways of engaging in critical thinking, either in pedagogy or in practice.

Such contextualization and enhancement are shown vividly in the next two papers in this issue. Amanda Hiner's paper shows Richard's work being brought to and shaping her courses in writing. And Robert Niewoehner's paper brings Richard's work to both the teaching of engineering and to the practice of engineering by professionals.

Two rich individual areas of study: writing and engineering. As different as writing courses are from courses in engineering, the contextualizations that Amanda and Rob construct are strikingly similar. That deep similarity derives from the integrity and flexibility of Richard's approach. It is an approach, as each author exemplifies, that provides a template for building an entire course or field of study around critical thinking. Amanda and Rob also show how Richard's framework serves as a model for structuring not just pedagogy, but practice. In this case it is the lifelong practice of writing and the career-shaping practice of being a professional engineer.

Amanda's paper is written in the elegant prose of someone who deeply values fine writing. She describes the way she re-designs and re-thinks her lessons, her syllabus, her learning-outcomes, her assessments—virtually everything in fact—bringing in the intellectual virtues, intellectual standards and the elements of reasoning. It is clear, in reading her article, that her re-conceptualized course is a transformative one. She shows us her students as they gain new insight into the egocentrism inherent in confirmation bias and cognitive dissonance, and she shows us the empowerment they gain from that insight. To me, her recounting of her students' experiences was wonderfully uplifting. Perhaps even more moving, for me at least, was the transformation she herself experienced.

Rob's paper, by comparison, is quintessentially that of an engineer. The paper would be gratifying to Richard because his abiding goal was for critical thinking to be contextualized to all fields of inquiry, and Rob was one of the first co-authors of a *Thinker's Guide* specifically adapted to a particular field or area. In Rob's paper he lays out the way he "portaged" Richard's work into his teaching and practice. He describes the *Guide* he co-wrote with Richard and Linda, and how he then used that *Guide* to shape both his courses and his presentations to professional engineers. He shows how Richard's approach both underlies and enhances standard models for conducting business and engineering. Most invigorating for me, though, are the vivid examples he gives of the use (or misuse, or lack of use) of critical-thinking principles in engineering-related practice.

Contextualizations as thorough-going as Hiner's and Niewoehner's require someone as committed and thoughtful as Amanda and Rob to carry them out and adapt them to the specifics and the rigors of their respective subject matters, but the framework for doing so is there in Richard's approach. The ways Hiner and Niewoehner adapt that framework to their own specific courses and practice can, in turn, be models for other instructors, in other fields, at any level of education, or in any life-practice.

Donald Hatcher does something different. He shows in his paper how Richard's work is part of a tradition of humanistic philosophy, philosophy that is centered on how best to live one's life. Don's appreciation is heavily centered on the rich theme of ethics that is omnipresent in Richard's work and on the intellectual virtues that Richard saw as the necessary foundation for engaging in authentic strong-sense critical thinking. Don also shows us a Richard Paul who brought together and nurtured "the critical-thinking movement," bringing together at his yearly International Conference virtually every one of the first-generation of critical-thinking scholars.

Don's paper, characteristically for him, is carefully argued, imbued with the history of humanistic philosophy, exhilaratingly literate, and open-hearted in its appreciation for Richard and his work. To me, there is a spirit of nobility to the way he situates Richard's work within the grand tradition of perennial philosophy. As guest editor, and as Richard's friend, it was a pleasure to read it and to communicate with Don about it.

The final paper in this issue is the one by Patricia Payette and Edna Ross. In their paper they describe the contextualization of the Paul-Elder approach to two seemingly very different domains within a university. They address the domain of pedagogy: promoting the incorporation of critical thinking into the teaching of courses across the curriculum. But they also address the domain of professional staff: tutoring, advising, and helping students develop necessary library-skills.

With respect to the pedagogical domain, Patty and Edna describe the innovative strategies they used to bring the Paul-Elder approach to pedagogy across disciplines. Payette and Ross do not discuss the challenges they encountered in bringing such a program to bear at the University of Louisville, but, in my view, a large research university, with its abundance of independent academic departments and schools, many with radically different pedagogical traditions, is perhaps the most difficult venue for an integrated, organic program of teaching to take root. To me, the success that Patty and Edna have had, and continue to have, is inspirational.

In a significantly different vein, though, they bring in another rich set of applications of Richard's work, this time by professional staff. This is the work of tutoring students, of collaborating with students for effective advisement, and of helping students learn how to make substantive, thoughtful use of library resources. Infusing critical thinking into these three endeavors faces significantly greater challenges than those that obtain in pedagogy. In regular scheduled courses, instructors have the opportunity to teach critical-thinking concepts and reinforce their use by students over the course of a full semester. They also have the considerable motivational advantage of giving grades: assessments in a classroom can be made to hinge directly on students' ability to use critical-thinking concepts and tools to think through the subject matter of the course. By contrast, in tutoring, in advising, and in library-based research, professional staff meet with students much more sporadically, for a far more limited amount of time, in less circumscribed conditions, and without the motivation that comes with the power to give formal grades. Yet in all three areas, students make choices and engage in learning in ways that affect their whole experience in higher education as well as in their careers after graduation. The challenges facing professional staff in fostering the critical thinking that is essential for students' success in college and thereafter are formidable. Payette and Ross describe the impressive way professionals in these three areas have changed the substance of academic student service in the direction of critical thinking. In so doing, though, they give yet another usable template for how the Paul-Elder model can be used to transform large-scale practice at any major research university.

Acknowledgement from Linda and Gerald

Linda and Gerald want to express their appreciation to the scholars who contributed to this memorial issue of *INQUIRY* dedicated to Richard Paul and his work. Our hope is that the papers in this issue may have a positive impact on advancing critical education and practice, and, over time, moving us toward the creation of critical societies.