Module 5 Homework

Tonya Estes

1. I understand strong sense critical thinking to mean habits of reasoning that include analysis and assessment in a highly fair-minded, ethical way. Through regular analysis and assessment of thinking – with a commitment to being vigilant to ego and socio centric obstacles to fair-mindedness – a person develops their intellectual virtues, or traits. These traits are not a part of thinking per se, but a way of being intellectually.
2. I understand weak sense critical thinking to mean a person who actively strives to analyze and assess reasoning to do harm to others or only for personal gain. A weak sense critical thinker uses elements and standards of reasoning in unethical ways.
3. I have always had a strong sense of justice and fairness, ever since I can remember. It is no wonder that I chose to be a teacher to the most oppressed and under-represented in our educational system. I am also a systems thinker. When I analyze my program, everything from intake, assessments, curricula, and articulation, I do it from the point of view of the students, how they are experiencing it, what motivates them, and what works for them. Their life experiences are very different from mine. Their abilities to learn are very different from mine. I have learned to listen and observe in ways that lessen the impact of my own biased assumptions. I’ve always been empathetic, and this has definitely helped me to want to continually learn more from others and be responsive to their experiences. Of course, I do this while creating highly challenging educational experiences for them! They want and deserve to get to where they are going as efficiently and effectively as possible.
4. I eat meat. I know 100% that it is ethically wrong. I am killing sentient beings for my own pleasure and benefit. I can also understand the points vegans make of not using animals in any way for our own consumption; however, I’m not yet convinced eating anything that animals have produced is unethical – like milk or honey. I suppose if I were to really think through it more, though, I could see that rationale. I make up for not being vegan by purchasing ‘free range’ dairy food, or farmer’s market honey, for example.

I live in a society that aggressively supports the meat industry. I was raised eating meat. My mother was raised on a farm in Iowa. I married into a heavily meat-eating family. My husband’s grandfather owned a meat market in Pike Place Market. In fact, I ate primarily plant-based foods when I met my husband to be. I hadn’t eaten bacon or sausage in years. He and his family ate those almost daily. I gave into the pressure, blocking off the part of my mind that knew it was wrong.

I have gone through periods of my life when I didn’t eat meat. I depended on tofu or other plant-based alternatives in my cooking. The most recent time I did this, I went for my annual physical, and my doctor was concerned by my extremely low B, D, and iron. I told her I wasn’t eating much meat and she said, That’s not working well for you. I know I could spend more time figuring out alternative foods to get the vitamins and minerals I need. But, I don’t. I believe eating meat is probably my most egregious weak-sense thinking and action. It is something unethical that I do regularly.

My daughter has been pescatarian since she was 13 (now 21), and her boyfriend for 3 years is vegan. So, I do make fun, fancy vegan meals when they are here. I am thrilled by the growth of good quality, good tasting plant-based foods. I often choose those. But, not always! I guess I justify my actions with ‘at least I’m moderating how much meat I eat.’ Moderation is a good direction, but I know I could keep moving toward 100%.

1. I can improve my thinking and my behavior in the following ways, based on this analysis. To change and live more aligned to my ethics, it is imperative that I train myself to be aware of what is just self and societal beliefs/deceptions and not actual truths. Not just in the realm of my diet, but in all decisions I make that may be doing others harm.

I know that when I’m not at my physical/mental best – I’m tired – or hungry - my reasoning often faulters. It takes a lot to intellectually persevere against myself. I feel bombarded by societal propaganda, misinformation, and fearmongering. I find it exhausting, quite honestly, so I need to find ways to keep myself in balance, so I can make balanced decisions.

**Definitions:**

In critical thinking, we are dealing with interconnected ideas – clusters of ideas in our minds with pathways moving in between and among. It is the practice of applying the critical thinking standards to the elements which enables us to develop intellectual virtues/traits. There is a constellation of intellectual virtues and they inter-relate with each other and the other areas of critical thinking.

**Intellectual integrity** – I think of intellectual integrity as a person who consistently holds their thinking to the same standards they do for others, including their antagonists. For example, if I require someone I don’t agree with to provide more evidence, then I need to make sure that I am able to provide evidence as needed. If I call out someone for fearmongering, then I should not engage in that tactic.

**Intellectual humility** – I enter a situation, a reading, a discussion, a meeting, etc...with the knowledge that I am not the holder of all truths, or that others may not have spent as much time considering a situation as I have, so I should be open to where they are in the process. There is always something to learn or understand differently or better.

**Intellectual sense of justice** – we should use knowledge and reasoning to make this world a better place, especially for those who are in historically and contemporarily oppressed groups, those who have been marginalized, and underrepresented, and the non-human world that cannot defend itself.

**Intellectual perseverance** – To me, this is crucial today, as so many of us are exhausted, overloaded, distracted, and tempted by what comes fast and easy. In addition, we are constantly being bombarded with weak-sense reasoning, fallacious information, propaganda, fear-tactics, and more. To have intellectual perseverance requires a certain level of health (energy) and time at the least to be able to persevere through what may be intellectually challenging.

**Intellectual fairmindedness** – I find this one interesting because it is the one most related to one of the standards - fairness. As a standard, we are using it to judge the quality of our thinking. As a trait, it is more about what I embody. Someone who knows me might say, She is a fair-minded person. That would mean that I regularly discuss or present ideas while considering other points of view, also while considering the impact they have on others. Presenting other points of view fairly.

**Confidence in reason** – I think about this as something of a belief that reason exists and that it is inherently a good thing, that people have the innate ability to develop the quality of their reasoning, and that it is the best interest of the individual and our society that people are free to develop that quality. That development of reason is what keeps people engaged in the betterment of self and society.

**Intellectual courage** –Intellectual Courage seems something of a catalyst that can enable us to develop some of the other traits. Because of the hold egocentrism and sociocentrism have on our reasoning, it would seem to require intellectual courage to step out of the safety those beliefs have created for us. If we are too afraid to confront our faults, distortions, and other problems in our reasoning, it would be difficult to develop the other traits, especially intellectual fair-mindedness, humility, perseverance, empathy, integrity, and justice.

**Intellectual empathy** – Understanding the need to put ourselves in someone else’s reasoning as a way to put into question our own potential mis-understandings or egocentric interference and to add to our understanding of different points of view and experiences.

**Intellectual autonomy** – the ability to think for oneself and in terms of critical thinking it is the ability to analyze and evaluate beliefs on the basis of reason and evidence. It requires a commitment to continual engagement in the practice of critical thinking.