Chapter 4: Analytical Thinking as a Component of Critical Thinking

4.1 Definition of Critical Thinking

The definition of critical thinking has changed somewhat over the past decade. Originally the dominion of cognitive psychologists and philosophers, behaviorally oriented psychologists and content specialists have recently joined the discussion (Huitt, 1998).

The following are some examples of attempts to define critical thinking that include analytical thinking as a component:

- The critical thinking is the ability to analyze facts, generate and organize ideas, defend opinions, make comparisons, draw inferences, evaluate arguments and solve problems (Chance, 1986, p. 6);

- It is the intellectually disciplined process of actively and skillfully conceptualizing, applying, analyzing, synthesizing, and/or evaluating information gathered from, or generated by observation, experience, reflection, reasoning, or communication, as a guide to belief and action (Scriven & Paul, 1992);

- Involving analytical thinking for the purpose of evaluating what is read (Hickey, 1990, p. 175);

4.2 Assumption of Critical Thinking and Its Importance

Critical thinking itself is based on an assumption. This assumption states that there is a logic to what you are trying to think about, that it can be figured out and reasoned through. Thus, there are some instances where critical thinking may not be appropriate. For example, is there logic to romance? Is there logic to matters of personal taste or preference? It may not be appropriate to spend a great deal of effort analyzing why one likes certain colors, architectural styles, music, art, etc. But if a situation or decision needs to be figured out or thought through, then a critical thinking approach is needed.
Critical thinking allows us to listen to our emotions, without being controlled by them. "Got feelings" and intuition are often valuable in our decision-making processes. In fact, recent research indicates that some elements of intuition that escape rational analysis may be very important in visual memory and in establishing individual tastes and personal preferences. However, emotions can also mislead us, making us feel that we are right, even when we are not. Critical thinkers do not suppress their feelings nor are they overly influenced by them. The natural response of emotions and feelings can be constructively tempered with critical thinking. Critical thinking provides a way for us to sort through our feelings and emotions to evaluate and identify those most appropriate for a given situation. Thus, critical thinking is not a cold and unfeeling analytical process, but involves emotions and passions, in a positive way. (Hassel, 1992)