
Letters to the editor

Letters received from readers in response to articles and ideas published in ANS are regularly featured, providing an opportunity for constructive critique, discussion, disagreements, and comment intended to stimulate the development of nursing science. Unless otherwise stated, we assume that letters addressed to the editor are intended for publication with your name and

affiliation. As many letters as possible are published. When space is limited and we cannot publish all letters received, we select letters reflecting the range of opinions and ideas received. If a letter merits a response from an ANS author, we will obtain a reply and publish both letters.

From the editor

THE ART OF CRITICISM

There is a growth process that has no adequate name in the English language. This phenomenon may exist more as a dream than a reality, but it probably flourishes in the context of many positive learning experiences, and it is real enough to be familiar to most of us.

The phenomenon is overtly demonstrable when a voice, either another person or an inner voice, speaks a truth with nothing withheld, with the motivation of care and protection, and with the intent of producing growth, not harm. The motive is conveyed by the fact that even though the message may be difficult to hear, some component of it indicates a direction toward growth. Most important, as a result of the message, both the speaker and the hearer gain a sense of the meaning of whatever human experience is being addressed.

This phenomenon is "the art of criticism." The critical message contains a more pointed, subjective element than is implied by the term evaluation. Criticism is not a judgment, which suggests an authoritative evaluation. The message of constructive criticism is more complex than either evaluation or judgment in

that it takes into account the experienced reality of the "other" (the receiver of the criticism) and of the "self" (the person giving the criticism). Delivering this type of criticism, whether to oneself or to another, is an intrapersonal skill that is not ordinarily learned as part of the usual socialization process.

In the arts, critics focus attention on a work of art. The work being criticized is placed within the context of the artist's other works, the social and artistic milieu, and sometimes, the political milieu. The technical and creative adequacy of the work is evaluated as the critic sees it, not necessarily as the critic thinks others will see it. The critic's view is made public to inform others, to expose an interpretation that might not be widely shared, and to convey a sense of meaning to the work. The critic's view is usually focused on a dimension of meaning that may not be obvious to the casual observer—the subliminal message of the work, the motive of the artist in producing the work, or a hallmark of potential direction for the art. The motive of a useful growth-producing criticism is not to self-aggrandize the critic, but to reveal the meaning of the art within a certain context, artistic, social, or political.

One who guides learning is a skilled and

constructive critic. Criticism of the learner's work is provided with the intent of helping the learner to grow and to improve and acquire skills and knowledge. As the learner performs new skills, the critic/teacher is candid in sharing perceptions of the quality of the work and also conveys direction for further movement. In the most ideal learning relationship, criticism is provided apart from formal roles; the teacher and the student provide criticism for one another; each is the teacher and the learner. Although the learner's performance or work cannot be separated from the person of the learner, it is the performance that is criticized. The critic/teacher, in providing a constructive form of criticism, holds an essential respect and focuses on a sense of caring for the person of the learner. It is the element of caring for the learner that produces the investment in seeing the learner acquire the skills or competencies that are being learned. When criticism is motivated even partially from self-aggrandizement, the criticism takes on a character of relative harm and loses its effectiveness in producing growth.

This issue of *Advances in Nursing Science* was planned with the recognition that if there is to be growth and development of the discipline, there must be criticism of what it is and what it has been. The contents of this issue exemplify one further trait of constructive criticism; each critique stimulates a never-ending search for understanding. Each criticism provides new insights, but it also raises new possibilities, new directions, and new questions. These articles should not be interpreted as conferring judgment on the issues addressed; rather, they should stimulate thinking about possibilities derived from the critic's own context and frame of reference.

We need to recognize the value of constructive criticism and the learning that can occur from criticism that is given with the motives of care and protection. The practice and the science of nursing will benefit from a concerted effort to learn the skills required for artful, caring criticism.

—Peggy L. Chinn
Editor

CORRECTION

Three errors inadvertently appeared in the Lenz, et al article in ANS 7:4. The corrections follow:

- The credit line on page 49 was omitted. It should read: This study was supported by Grant #R21 NU-00829-01-02 from the Division of Nursing, DHHS. The authors acknowledge the contribution of Dr. Nayna Campbell to the more inclusive study of transition to parenthood of which this analysis was a part.
- Footnote 30-34 on page 52 should be 30, 31.
- The first author's name in reference #9 on page 61 should be Scanzoni.