



## Critical and Creative Thinking: A Brief Guide for Teachers

DiYanni, Robert  
Wiley, John & Sons, Inc., 2016

### Book Review

Tags: creative thinking | critical thinking | critically reflective teaching

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**Date Reviewed:** September 7, 2016

As teachers in religious studies and theology departments, one of our principal pedagogical claims is that we teach students to think critically and creatively, but we are not always clear on what this means in practical terms. This readable book by Robert DiYanni helpfully gathers research and writing from a wide variety of disciplines to help teachers define and apply critical and creative thinking for themselves. The book's organization makes sense as it leads the reader through concepts, practical concerns, and application. Brief "interchapters" unite the flow of the book around one master of critical and creative thinking, Leonardo da Vinci. Each chapter ends with a well-crafted list of writing prompts to help the reader – both teachers and students – to apply the chapter's concepts. For example, chapter 4 focuses on strategies and applications of critical thinking, and so the end-of-chapter prompts call on the reader to analyze arguments, evaluate scenarios, and deploy specific critical thinking strategies. Chapter 5, which examines approaches to creative thinking, provides prompts that invite imagination, innovation, and inventive solutions to problems.

Essentials of critical thinking such as asking questions, seeking clarification, gathering evidence, evaluation, and reflection are discussed at length with colorful examples from notable historical events and popular culture. For instance, one chapter features a collection of headlines and other snippets of news coverage of the murder of Kitty Genovese. DiYanni invites the reader to consider what sorts of inferences and judgments various news sources made in response to this famous case (71-74). Another section examines the methods that Sherlock Holmes used in his legendary detective work (109-112). DiYanni argues, however, that critical thinking is not sufficient by itself and can even be reductive and dangerous (xi) if it is not joined by robust creative thinking. He persuasively shows that creative thinking is a

necessary adjunct to critical thinking and leads to innovation and whole-minded approaches to problems. DiYanni's coverage of creative thinking likewise draws on a wealth of examples from creative people such as choreographer Twyla Tharp and checklist-innovator Atul Gawande.

DiYanni's book thoroughly covers critical and creative thinking, but it may not live up completely to its subtitle, *A Brief Guide for Teachers*. There is not much by way of specific advice to teachers on how to teach students to be more critical and creative thinkers. Rather, the book reads like a textbook for a class whose subject matter is creative thinking itself. As such, the exercises in the book would have to be adjusted for application to religious studies and theology courses. Another small critique is that DiYanni argues early in the book that cultural forms and social locations, including religion, are "blocks" to critical thinking (10). While we can agree that people's contexts can limit and define their worldview, religion professors know that it is not particularly helpful to consider religion as a hamper to thoughtfulness. These criticisms aside, this book is a helpful addition to the literature on critical and creative thinking, and its focus on application – even if not explicitly linked to pedagogical advice – provides welcome tools to promote critical and creative thinking in ourselves and our students.

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