
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