A Pragmatic Reasoning Schemas Approach to Improving the Teaching of Deductive Reasoning.

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Abstract:
Psychological studies of deductive reasoning have raised two interesting questions: (1) Do people use abstract, domain-independent inferential rules to think about everyday events? (2) Can reasoning be improved by formal instruction in the use of inferential rules? In respect to the curriculum taught in standard logic courses, most psychologists have answered these questions in the negative. The results of their studies raise serious questions about the teaching of logic, particularly the teaching of context-free, syntactic rules in undergraduate deductive logic courses. I will discuss what certain psychologists have to say about this and will consider some of their data and arguments. In addition, I will present some data from logic courses taught at my university and will discuss their bearing on these issues. Of particular import is where my classroom results seem to verify and depart from the results produced by psychologists. I conclude that psychologists are generally on the right track in terms of how best to train everyday deductive ability, and I'll indicate what that means for changing the deductive logic curriculum. Particularly, the pragmatic reasoning schemas approach will be explored, along with examples from my own classroom, it terms of its promise for replacing the context-free, syntactic rules approach in undergraduate deductive logic courses.