

Why Critical Thinking?

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Education has been standing out as one of the most critical issue on the Agenda of various stakeholders both at national and international level during the past years. Considerable effort has been put in place by the Governments and donor community to mainstream education reform processes around the world, including via Education for All, Fast Track Initiative, Millennium Developmental Goals initiatives.

Much emphasis has been put lately on key competences citizens need for life-long learning, and critical thinking is the core of it. USAID's 2005 Education Strategy – improving lives through learning. At the heart of the strategy is basic education: facilitating the acquisition of basic skills, such as literacy, numeracy, and critical thinking that enable people and nations to thrive in a changing economic environment. The same strategy states in its Objective 2 Beyond Basic Education the following: „Today's global economy is being shaped by rapid advancements in technology. To be competitive, countries require workers with both the basic literacy and critical thinking skills needed to be productive and to adapt to ongoing changes in the marketplace”.

In the proposal for a Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council on key competences for life-long learning dating back to 2005, it is stated that „critical thinking, creativity, initiative taking, problem solving, risk assessment, decision taking, and managing feelings constructively play a role in all eight key competences” of the Framework presented by the Commission).

Regardless of how many strategies are adopted, no strategy will fit all individuals at all levels, but strategies can be developed, directed by a single goal, that will be adaptable enough to respond to changing cultural conditions and educational necessities. Research shows that infusing critical thinking skills should begin as early as possible in the educational and developmental process and should continue throughout the individual's school and adult life.

The United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), in its Education and Empowerment: Moving from Information to Action Program, highlights the life-skills education and „the life-skills approach employs participatory and interactive methodologies, including role-playing and other theatre techniques, exploration of feelings, analysis of gender stereotyping, training in negotiation skills, and question and answer sessions. The idea is not just to impart information, but to foster critical thinking, problem-solving and interpersonal communications skills that can lead to informed, responsible and voluntary decisions”.

Social skills, critical thinking and negotiation skills were also part of a life skills approach for better health outcomes, including sexual and reproductive health, which was endorsed by several UN agencies (WHO, UNFPA, UNICEF, UNESCO) in 2003.

In December 2002, the United Nations General Assembly adopted resolution 57/254 to put in place a United Nations Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (DESD), spanning from 2005 to 2014, and designated UNESCO to lead the Decade. The DESD breaks down the traditional educational scheme and promotes:

- Interdisciplinary and holistic learning rather than subject-based learning
- Values-based learning
- *Critical thinking rather than memorizing*
- Multi-method approaches: word, art, drama, debate, etc.
- Participatory decision-making
- Locally relevant information, rather than national

Today policy makers, educators, practitioners are trying to link the “critical thinking” concept with the emerging issues and new opportunities for the Educational sector as well as other areas for development. One of issues is Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) and the debates are around “Can information and communication technologies (ICT) foster critical and entrepreneurial thinking at the bottom of the pyramid?”. The debates don't center

around the long-term sustainability of the ICTs as such, but rather on how can it can help move education systems in emerging markets away from the hierarchical, rule-memorizing approach.

Research has proven that „critical thinking” skills is one of the key to success to economic and sustainable development and growth. The “Critical Thinking” component can be effectively integrated into the curriculum, policies and reforms that are currently promoted around the world in various developmental areas.