

ARTinED online: A new approach to education using the arts



e-ARTinED Background Report

The relevance of the Arts to develop Critical Thinking

ID project: KA201-01226718



Co-funded by the
Erasmus+ Programme
of the European Union

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Introduction

“Critical thinking is self-guided, self-disciplined thinking which attempts to reason at the highest level of quality in a fair-minded way. People who think critically consistently attempt to live rationally, reasonably, empathically.

They use the intellectual tools that critical thinking offers – concepts and principles that enable them to analyze, assess, and improve thinking.



They work diligently to develop the intellectual virtues of intellectual integrity, intellectual humility, intellectual civility, intellectual empathy, intellectual sense of justice and confidence in reason. They embody the Socratic principle: “The unexamined life is not worth living”, because they realize that many unexamined lives together result in an uncritical, unjust, dangerous world (Elder L., 2007).”



Critical thinking entails many kinds of intellectual skills, including the following examples:

- Developing well-reasoned, persuasive arguments and evaluating and responding to counterarguments;
- Examining concepts or situations from multiple perspectives, including different cultural perspectives;
- Questioning evidence and assumptions to reach novel conclusions;
- Devising imaginative ways to solve problems, especially unfamiliar or complex problems;
- Formulating and articulating thoughtful, penetrating questions;
- Identifying themes or patterns and making abstract connections across subjects.



Critical thinking is a central concept in educational reforms for skills to use in all subject areas and that students can apply in educational, career, and civic settings throughout their lives.



Critical Thinking in school and workplace

Many of the fastest growing jobs and emerging industries rely on workers' creative capacity – the ability to think unconventionally, question the herd, imagine new scenarios, and produce astonishing work” (www.21centuryskills.org).

Nonroutine creative thinking is a basic competence needed for job categories predicted to increase in the next decade, 80 percent of which haven't been conceptualized (Chairman, Cisco Systems, in speech at the Wake Forest University).



Students will need skills such as critical thinking to successfully navigate the modern world, excel in challenging careers, and process complex information.

Teachers should experiment with their students on questioning, reasoning, reflecting on experiences and make informed judgements.



Educating children to critical thinking through the arts

A powerful statement for arts-based education is that the arts engage students in creative problem solving and use of new technologies that prepare them for a world guaranteed to change in unimaginable ways (Pink, 2006).

Pink joins many who realize personal and professional success is more about having empathy, taking risks, and doing innovative thinking than high test scores.



The arts deliver precisely the kinds of thinking needed in the workplace of the new millennium:

- Higher order thinking such as analysis, synthesis, evaluation, including critical judgement
- Imagination and creativity focused deliberately on content and quality end products
- Prudent risk taking and experimentation
- Teamwork that relies on collaborative problem solving
- Technological competencies
- Flexible thinking and an appreciation for diversity
- Self-discipline, persistence, and taking initiative.



The arts are deeply cognitive. No art is created or understood without higher level thinking informed by careful observation, pattern finding, taking new perspective, making qualitative judgements, visualizing and use of metaphors and symbols (Eisner, 2002).

The arts compel us to consider diverse views with artists, actors, musicians and poets. Their provocative nature charges us to respond by using higher order thinking to make sense.



Students need to learn to use critical thinking to judge their own work and that of others. In doing so they learn that opinions matter but need to be supported with evidence.

Schools that integrate the arts develop essential thinking such as “careful observation of the world; mental representation of what is observed or imagined; abstraction from complexity; pattern recognition and development; qualitative judgement; symbolic, metaphoric, and allegorical representation” (Rabkin & Redmond, 2004).



Conclusions

Teaching children to memorize facts and do rote skill application – too often the focus of schooling – does not prepare children for their future.

Learning should become embedded with artistic ways of thinking and working, essential to contemporary life.

Complex thinking is a major goal of education, but it is difficult to teach. The arts provide a rich context for cognitive development because they thrive on changing points of view and mental experimentation. Mistakes are not seen as failures and children feel safe using paint or clay, songs and dance to think through problems.

Students love details and patterns that occur in interesting art contexts and provide clues to meaning making.



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