

Questioning as we learn: An introduction to critical thinking

Material for Higher Education students in Sierra Leone by INASP, UK



Provided by the Critical Thinking Taskforce (CTTF) within the project AQHEd-SL

Unit 1 - Snippet 09

Does critical thinking pay off?

Read the following text about critical thinking and identify any terms that you are not familiar with. Look the terms up in the dictionary.

Critical thinking has become something of a buzzword. Not only philosophers and psychologists, but also employers, educators and policymakers are insistently claiming that critical thinking is a **must-have** skill in the 21st century.

How do we know whether what reaches us via the internet can be taken at face value? How do we know that someone is not trying to fool us, let us believe something that we should not believe, get us to do something that we would not do if we knew better? A significant component of the answer to these questions is: because we can think for ourselves, because we can learn critical thinking.

This interest in critical thinking roughly coincides with the sharp increase in access to a wealth of data and information made available to us by the internet, which has had a huge impact on communication, culture and learning.

According to Robert H. Ennis, a professor of philosophy of education at the University of Illinois, US, critical thinking is reasonable reflective thinking focused on deciding what to believe or do. Educator Diane Halper believes: "Critical thinking is the use of those cognitive skills or strategies that increase the probability of a desirable outcome. It is used to describe thinking that is purposeful, reasoned, and goal directed – the kind of thinking involved in solving problems, reaching conclusions, calculating likelihoods, and making decisions, when the thinker is using skills that are thoughtful and effective for the particular context and type of thinking task."

[Halpern, D. (2003). 'Thought and Knowledge: An Introduction to Critical Thinking', Fourth Edition, Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, New Jersey, p. 6.]