

Critical thinking in the Albanian school reality

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1. It is largely stated that schools are the inventions of human society, designed to operate in accordance with the requirements and needs of the society. Therefore, in order to bring about and cope with the challenges of any time, the teachers and professors, today and at all times, need to know not only how schools are now, but how they will be in the future.

Hence, among a great number of school problems, it remains imperative the issue of changing and improving such methods as aiming at developing students' thinking.

Thinking is defined in different ways, but the most common and acceptable is the one which determines it as *a psychological process, a form of general reflection of reality in human consciousness through concepts, judgments and justifications.*

Thinking is something we carry out at any time and often without realizing what we are doing. In the meantime, it might occur that we stop and “wonder” about the issue we are thinking or we need to think. For example, we come across a problem and need to make a decision; we write a paper and need to think deeply about what we have to say; a student is called for during a class and he/she thinks deeply when dealing with an issue, etc.. Different authors call it “*conscious thought*” which can be influenced by the pedagogical work of the educators.

Consequently, conscious thinking enables students to understand the others' ideas, the outgrowth and the development of new designs; it cheers them up to become active participants at school and in the society.

The majority of the educators take it for granted that pupils and students will consciously learn if they are able to do so. But, genuinely, the schools attempt to promote conscious thinking, which is achieved through different techniques, methods and strategies.

Conscious thinking presupposes first and foremost critical thinking, which arises everywhere and implies the ability of those people who assess their views and those of others, who are able to provide alternatives, formulate hypotheses and draw reasonable conclusions.

Nowadays critical thinking has become a worldwide philosophy and practice. On an organized and institutional ground, the theory and practice of critical thinking is being implemented in Albania and today, it has a “facet” of its own, which can be elaborated in several aspects:

First, *philosophical*, because this aspect is consistent with the main purpose of

education which is to prepare people capable of meeting the challenges of the time. Without this basic ingredient, the Albanian education will no longer have consistency and permanency.

Secondly, *psychological*, because having been an experience already tested in many countries around the world, it is being adapted to an open-minded environment and is influencing in return the Albanian educators not only become visionaries, but also “liven up” the learning process, unchain the students, and make them learn “on their head” and not become slaves of textbooks and lectures, but absorb knowledge critically and creatively.

Thirdly, *pedagogical*, because critical thinking strategies, not only do not impoverish and do not deny the Albanian school practice, but implement new ideas and techniques, which, once properly applied, does not have to be “a hole in the head” or “an albatross around one’s neck” for the Albanian school.

Fourth, *pragmatic*, because the philosophy and practice of critical thinking implies higher purposes, aiming at inducing Albanian schools catch up with their counterparts in the world and move side by side with them.

2. Based on a nearly fifteen year experience since the commencing in Albania of a great and fruitful project called CTRW (Critical Thinking during Reading and Writing), today we can fairly say that **Critical Thinking**, as a discipline, a module and as a way of thinking and acting, as a philosophy and methodology, is amply widespread in the Albanian school reality and is largely supported by most Albanian educators. This drawing can be materialized through some meaningful upshots:

- If time ago there were a number of them who were skeptical and even opposing to it, today, the reality is completely reversed. From a group of 30-40 professors and teachers, who were initially trained by U.S. teachers, today there are hundreds of those who have learned well the philosophy and practice of critical thinking and know how to masterly apply it with their pupils and students. Critical thinking is already speaking in Albanian, not only in the adoption of relevant terms and concepts in Albanian, but also in becoming a mindset and daily practice of our school.
- As in many other parts of the world ‘Critical Thinking’ has become part of school curricula, as well as a separate discipline or a module developed with the students in the faculties of education. The students are involved in activities including research papers or diploma thesis presented for the graduation process in different programmes of the educational domain.
- Today to critical thinking there is preserved a much elaborated library², including books, manuals, text-books, handbooks, articles etc., which are translated or compiled by Albanian educators. It can be useful for designing a detailed bibliography on critical thinking which might be beneficial for the teachers and professors in the Albanian schools.
- Various authors of texts written especially in social sciences have undertaken

2. We can mention here some of them: Udhëzuesit për të menduarit kritikë (1-8); Studio gjithëqka arsyes vendim e parë; Modele për një mësimdhënie të suksesshme; Për gjithë shqipte dhe mendimin kritikë; Metodologji të mësimdhënies; ABC-ja e të menduarit kritikë; Mësimdhënia dhe të nxënësit ndërpreprues (shkencat shoqërore; shkencat natyrore etj.); Psikologji e edukimit; Fuqia e të menduarit kritikë etc

concrete steps through using different techniques of critical thinking in the theoretical information as well as the practical approaches they have chosen to include in their classroom teaching material.³ Such techniques as: Ven Diagram, Analysis of the semantic features, Cinquain, Association of ideas, Cubing, Essay, Free Writing, and many others are currently applied in successful pedagogic material of the texts written for the pre-university courses. Even though the authors apply the above techniques without entitling them, they try to make them understandable for the students. A typical example of this may be described as follows: “Reveal the common and the particular features between *philosophy and science* and represent them in a diagram made up of intersected circles”, or: “Show the common and the particular features between the *time and place modifiers*. Represent them in a scheme similar to the one used below.”⁵ In the above examples the authors do not mention the term “Ven Diagram” (even though they should), yet they use it appropriately by applying it to the right activity; like in the following example: “Represent in a Ven Diagram the common and the particular features of the casual discourse and colloquial speech”⁶

Meanwhile, I think the authors of the texts do not properly embody in their texts the questioning technique according to the level of thinking, being satisfied only with reproductive character questions that are of a low level, questions that do not promote a high level of thinking at high school and university.

Alongside, there are other facts that lead to the conclusion that the philosophy and the process of critical thinking is accepted by too many Albanian teachers and lecturers, who are moderate in the introduction of new things in the learning process, although Albanian pedagogical environment is quite “ionized” because there are still invisible practice methods for the education of children.

The school is not, therefore, the only satisfactory means, no matter how powerful it might be. Critical thinking, as a philosophy and practice, should be part of everybody’s mindset and activity, including politicians, leaders of different strata, scientists, philosophers, lawyers, businessmen i.e., all of them who are considered as “the actors” of the Albanian social life, because to put in the words of the authors of *The*

Power of Critical Thinking, “Critical thinking is vastly expanded in various territories. It is applied in all the disciplines of the public life, in all the scientific fields, in all business departments as well as in all of the professions.”⁷ Only in this way the society will move forward.

3. It can particularly be observed in reference to those authors who have been part of the CIRW project.

4. Retrived from the course book *Filozofia, klasa VII*

5. Retrived from the course book *Gjuba shqipe, klasa VII*

6. Retrived from the course book *Gjuba shqipe, klasa VIII*

7. See *Lewis Vaughn, Chris MacDonal, Fiqia e t  menduarit kritik, CDE, Tiran  2010*

References

- *Udhëzuesit për të menduarit kritik* (1-8), Tiranë, 2000;
- *Studio gjithçka arsyet vendin e parë (antologji me artikuj)*, AEDP, Tiranë, 1998
- A. Jashari, *Për gjubën shqipe dhe mendimin kritik*, Tiranë, 2000;
- B. Musai, *Metodologji e mësimdhënies*, Pegi, Tiranë 2003;
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- Joyce N. French, Carol Rhoder, *Teaching Thinking Skills (Theory and Practice)*, Garland Publishing, 1992