

## THE LACK OF CRITICAL THINKING IN THE ROMANIAN EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM: A SIMPLE COMMUNICATION PROBLEM?

Marcela GANEA<sup>1</sup>

1. Assist. Prof., PhD, Artifex University, Bucharest, Romania  
Corresponding author: y4ww@yahoo.co.uk

### Abstract

Critical thinking helps to formulate the right questions to evaluate responses to formulate value judgments about the credibility of sources and information and to formulate your own value judgments based on evidence.

Although continuously reformed over the past 20 years, the Romanian higher education has not yet internalized study subjects to ensure the development of critical thinking. Students still do not realize that must ask themselves: *Why?* and formulate value judgments considering the consequences of their statements or actions. Although theoretically academics know that a modern educational system synthesizes the earlier stages of learning, knowledge and generates prospective relationships transferred in the future in an attempt to understand the needs of human nature, to look beyond known landmarks and find new steps of waiting, basically they are limited to the present the evolutionary precepts and principles of education modernization without adding practical component to effectively develop skills designed to continue the evolution of human civilization. The lack of awareness of the need to shape a critical thinking could it be only a matter of communication? How can teachers and decision makers of Romanian higher education debate the issue of critical thinking and to reach reliable conclusions, without the results to be evident in practice and students to stick to the retrieved value judgments and avoid their own efforts of detection, corroboration and interpretation of data?

**Keywords:** *formative, informative, effective training, development and critical thinking.*

Education, the educational process, should not be a simple and repetitive process but must include analysis and capacity tools of inter-relationships that allow the reinterpretation, reviewing the past, to adopt various new combinations, both for formative purposes, to form new skills, new approaches to the same issues seen from new perspectives, new skills and abilities, and in order to inform, to reach new inferences, assumptions and reformulations, beginning from the existing basis.

Besides the information that accumulates over time, throughout history, and becomes the basis

for valuable documentation that we relate to at times when we formulate value judgments on specific topics of debate, there appears constant new information that follows its path towards accumulation. It is to this information that the systems of thought and analysis must be applied without restrictions to stimulate critical thinking.

It is required the use of a thinking technique well targeted on the subject and at the same time without borders. The questions *Why?* and *What if?* are the best guides in the formation of an effective critical thinking. The detachment from the existing concrete limits and diving into potential assumptions opens the door to multiple solutions, many of which will be correct and effective. We need to redefine the relationship student-university teacher, the relationship student- informational society and to trigger the psychological search mechanism of information for the student to gain the courage to think. Assaulted by the infinite of the world of information, the student, on the one hand, is overwhelmed by information, and on the other hand, feels inferior and stupid, so it seems useless to him to seek answers and to formulate value judgments in a world where everything already exists. He no longer feels the need to develop and it seems enough to him to take over the thought and creativity products of others.

More and more it is felt the restrictive tendency of students to seek documentation resources on the Internet for a minimum of information without resorting to personal reading without considering the information through the personal filter to reach their own conclusions, and to form an apparent general knowledge from the Internet and media, thus becoming thus unable to see the importance of reading in shaping their personality who and the development of vocabulary. Thus

technology becomes an end in itself and not a means of evolving to new stages of knowledge through the facilities it offers. This trend must be reversed by triggering the psychological mechanism of information search, of data analysis and corroboration for the student to realize that although the reiterability apparently exists, it is not perfect and it does not take place 100% leaving room to the news element at any time of development of human civilization. Thus the student will gain courage to think.

During various interviews and television programs in which students were asked to say: What they liked and did not like about the Romanian higher education system, as well as in informal discussions, most often the students said they do not like: a) that the Romanian higher education still relies on memorizing and retelling and sometimes even on memorizing and retelling some obsolete information, and not value judgments, and b) that they do not feel that they can speak freely during the classes since most teachers talk and do not listen, they are not close enough to students and their manner of communication creates psychological barriers between teacher and students.

Beyond the influence of too much freedom misunderstood in Romania and of the superficiality encouraged by deprofessionalized institutions, which could cause a diverted thinking of young people, the affirmations should however give food for thought to the teachers in the present day Romanian education.

Teachers, through their teaching and life experience, the maturity and the defining purpose to contribute to the improvement of the educational process can adjust the learning process so that students make the most of the time spent in universities and build their learning skills to help them further their personal development after graduation. Although this is well known and realized by the teachers, they are likely to forget to apply them in practice in the design of lesson plans and in the interaction with students. The problem could be a plain old habit of communication usually based on monologue rather than dialogue and exclusively on teaching forgetting about listening.

Indeed, a modern education system not only synthesizes earlier stages of knowledge but

rather generates prospective relationships, in an effort to understand the needs of human nature and to look beyond the known landmarks, new steps of expectation.

The information gathered in the past does not remain a permanent condition but it is always filtered, reinterpreted and reevaluated.

The education, the educational process so should not be a simple and repetitive process but it must include analysis tools, databases, interrelationship capability allowing various new combinations both for the formative purpose, to form new skills, new approaches to the same issues seen from new perspectives, new competences and abilities, and in order to inform, reach new inferences, assumptions and reformulations from the existing basis.

All these ideas have to accompany the message with information value that the teachers send to students to finally gain the the formative value necessary for the development of critical thinking. Specifically, the shaping of a critical thinking and of analysis and synthesis skills is done in time, taking care to make use of analytical tools, applied to databases, to the interrelationship capability allowing various new combinations, so that at a certain time to notice to students new skills and new approaches of the same issues seen from new perspectives, new competences and abilities.

The critical thinking is crucial in human life. A student who is taught to think critically, from exam problems to major decisions in life, will act accordingly as one of the best abilities which will be created for him is to foresee the potential effects of his actions.

To teach a student to think critically, he practically must be taught to: ask questions, identify possible hypotheses and to consider different points of view. The critical thinking helps formulate the right questions, evaluate responses, to formulate value judgments about the credibility of sources and information and to formulate his own value judgments based on evidence.

Critical thinking must be part of the educational curriculum. Science without critical thinking skills turns the student into an individual who repeats without filtering through his own mind.

The human being with advance thinking does not need to know all the answers but to be able to ask questions and evaluate hypotheses.

Critical thinking is practically an analytical thinking through which we try:

- to develop a calm detachment to maintain our clarity of thought;
- to prepare our thinking for a diversity of affirmations and opinions;
- to take the time to look at things from multiple perspectives;
- to become less emotionally influenced;
- to get to distinguish between the logical and the illogical.

Obviously to get to the relevant value judgments it is necessary for the student to accumulate in advance knowledge on which they can make value judgments and to be able to relate to so as to avoid issuing false value judgments.

In a study at St. Petersburg College, Florida, USA, in 2007, and meant to be included in its coursebooks, based on which the College receives accreditation, it is mentioned that "80% of Americans believe that the U.S. government hides from citizens the existence of aliens and 3 million Americans are confident that one day they will meet aliens". This study was therefore included as an example of the need to develop the critical thinking of the embedded human being in the social or professional life.

Thus, this study draws the attention to a very important fact: in the future career the critical thinking is very important in solving duty tasks and, generally, to properly interface with the surrounding reality:

- in the medical field - in the correct assessment of patients' symptoms;
- in technology - to find precise technological solutions;
- in intelligence services - for the data analysis and the deduction of the main threats to national security;
- in the police and justice activity- to find the guilty;
- in the activity of state administration - for finding optimal solutions to problems of state special importance;
- in education - to analyse whether the learning process has indeed the expected results from the students;

- in journalism - for understanding and communicating information accurately
- etc., etc..

To train critical thinking in the educational process in higher education institutions of major importance are:

- a) the information;
- b) the documentation and reading;
- c) the assessment /the self-assessment of topic which is subject to the educational process;

### **a) The information**

Besides the information that accumulates over time, throughout history, and becomes the basis of value documentation that we relate to at times when we formulate value judgments on specific topics of debate, there is constant new information to be accumulated. Note that information developments do not occur spontaneously but in time, following a specific process in each field of activity.

Confronted with the phenomenon of globalization, we realize that there are common scientific interests of the world community that we synchronize with. Science is directly related to the problems of globalization. The need for scientific information propagates chain and requires great efforts, impossible to be achieved by just one state. As the economic life becomes worldwide in the same way the needs for science, knowledge, training, and exchange ideas grow.

The volume of information has increased, so more than ever the problem of adequate formation of the person able to select efficiently arises. The beneficiary of information must have:

- a minimum of basic concepts in order to provide his access to documents, publications
- a minimum of working tools to facilitate his identification, selection, understanding, analysis, and synthesis of the accessed information, things that he can't do unless he has received a good education.

The information does not determine only the creative areas of science and technology, of socio-political and cultural thought but also the multilateral and harmonious development of every member of society.

The information must be subordinated to personal formation and the personal formation

is not achieved by itself but only by having the information as work material with which to shape oneself.

The personal formation is not restricted, limited to school structures only but it extends to further improvement after graduation. One widely used current concepts embodied in programs developed by all European countries following different schemes, depending on the internal needs and for which the European Union allocates significant amounts of money is *Longlife Learning* – learning throughout life.

### **b) The documentation and reading**

Although it represents the basis of training, the reading and the documentation are becoming less and less a driver of the process of learning in Romanian education. Often it is actually needed to reminded or even to explain to students why reading and documentation are so, no matter how obsolete it may seem, it might be necessary at the beginning of each academic year, teachers to begin the activity by explaining how and why to read , why study notes are needed and how to manage the individual work time individually to guide them for a positive perception in this respect and to help them learn efficiently.

More and more it is felt the restrictive tendency of students to seek documentation resources on the Internet for a minimum of information without resorting to reading and to pass the information through the personal filter to reach their own conclusions when they do their homework, and to form an apparent general culture from the media, unable to see the importance of reading in shaping personality and even in vocabulary development.

We often encounter students who do not utter personal opinions on a certain subject, or have difficulties in finding the words when they want express something, or have no critical thinking appropriate to the level reached in the educational process and formulate simple value judgments.

Indeed, the media should help the students to know the age they live in and the problems, and not to become a way of escape and an abusive presence. The media can not form a personal culture it can only complete it.

The reading is the most complete way of perception and training. The written word is a force that fills in for the sound and the visual. The reading develops the imagination and encourages reflection. A guided reading, gradual and selective develops the sense of value.

Motivation is decisive for the students and it is therefore necessary to clearly define the parts that can compile motivation. Preparation, vocation and will as well as establishing clear goals make up motivation. The learning and the educational process must be efficient.

The pupils and the students should be encouraged to combine the individual study with the teamwork which has the advantage that it shortens the work time and ensures opinion exchange which avoids possible erroneous conclusions.

### **c) The assessment /the self-assessment of topic evolution which is subject to the educational process**

The evaluation / the self-evaluation reflects the results of the educational process, the evolution and how this process took place, allowing the deduction of some conclusions to assist in eventually adjusting the educational process where improvement is required.

In a study by Dr David Nicol from the University of Strathclyde and Debra Macfarlane-Dick of the University of Glasgow on the formative assessment in higher education and published in June 2004 by The Higher Education Academy Generic Centre UK institution that cooperates with universities and institutions of higher education in the UK in order to disseminate best practices designed to improve the learning and training of students, clearly demonstrates how assessment drives learning. In a working scheme in which learning goals were scored, it was measured the students feedback to see if they were satisfied with the learning/teaching process and achievements gained; this feedback is equally necessary to teachers to adjust their methods of teaching according to students reactions, up to changing the educational curricula. The feedback on performance in class or homework allows students to reformulate the understanding and to restructure the skills as

well as to release innovative ideas and new skills training.

The feedback must come not only from the teachers but also from classmates. Classmates can sometimes see new aspects that teachers themselves have missed may provide new options for solutions, and moreover the value judgments received from peers are more acceptable than those of the teachers.

The key points to be studied and which provide most of the information to be used to adjust teaching are those in which students are confronted with difficulties. The goals are: improving students' learning skills and improving teachers' teaching by integrating the feed-back received from the teaching style.

Students always have motivations, perceptions influenced by various external or internal factors and personal interpretations of the tasks they have to fulfill. The interpretations are determined by their own feedback but also by the feedback received from the teacher. As Ivanic, Clark and Rimmershaw explain in their work, students often do not understand teachers' feedback. This fact draws our attention again on the manner of communication and possible communication barriers between teachers and students.

They must therefore be devised ways to enhance students' ability to self-assess realistically and constructively.

In the specialized research literature there are examples of cases where students do not understand the feedback given by teachers, so the inherent need to increase the efficiency of

feedback arises, rather through dialogue than only by simply transmitting information.

"The European universities are not only for students but primarily for teachers; they do not have only the task to forward information but also to further research, to broaden the area, to discover new truths. The mission of universities is to ensure the progress of science", Nicholas Bagdasar used to say. (N. Bagdasar, p 28)

Because otherwise, as the *Financial Times* also mentioned in one of its daily mottos, we find ourselves in the situation that "Too many people misunderstand what they know with what they think they know."

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