

Concept and Context of Critical Thinking in Higher Education

The importance of critical thinking and its development is unquestionable as a goal of higher education. Critical thinking is emphasized in the educational policy documents of international and national organizations, in the inaugural speeches of rectors, in the activity reports of higher education institutions, and the goals of study programmes.

It may therefore appear that neither the very concept of critical thinking nor the practice of its critical thinking development should be questioned. But is that the case?

Many researchers confirm that, in most cases, critical thinking is easier to grasp as an aspiration than as an outcome, and that neither the concept itself, nor the possibilities to recognize its manifestation in study results are easy and clear. At the same time, it raises the question of the readiness and ability of teachers themselves to develop critical thinking coherently and methodically.

This presentation points out the following questions: 1) Is it necessary to have a clear conception of critical thinking and a philosophical-methodological underpinning for the development of critical thinking? 2) How important is the context for critical thinking education? 3) How is critical thinking perceived and recognized by teachers and students? 4) How is critical thinking developed by lecturers themselves? 5) How and at what level does critical thinking need to be developed to meet declarations of strategic documents? 6) Whether the development of critical thinking is a "real demand-based order" or just a formal slogan.

These questions will be reflected upon in the light of international and national research, as well as personal professional practice, and will invite discussion about the opportunities and obstacles for the development of critical thinking.