

CRITICAL THINKING AND CAREER EDUCATION: SITUATION ANALYSIS AND ASSESSMENT QUESTIONNAIRE

CZECH REPUBLIC

1. Please, introduce in short structure of your education systems (school levels, age groups and etc.)

Our school system offers education from quite very early age.

Pre school education is offered for children in the age from 3 to 6.

During last years in this age group various programs were developed (e.g. for Gypsies, handicapped children, Waldorf school)

Primary school is for children from 6 to 15. Many of these schools try to specialize - so they offer special programs (e.g. languages, various kinds of sport, math) for talented children. Usually it is from 3rd grade. These children have the same subjects as the others but they have more lessons from their "specialty".

In practice it looks like that in one building are taught children who were chosen to these "special" classes and the rest of children are taught in "normal" classes. Many teachers criticize this fact. Also good students can go to Gymnasium at the age of 12. Some schools try to integrate children with some problem (mainly physical handicap). Primary schools also can participate at some programs (Healthy Schools).

Secondary schools offer different education. Gymnasium prepares mainly to universities and colleges and other secondary schools (vocational) prepare mostly for profession but it is also possible to go to university. Students at these schools have to pass exam called "exam of maturity".

Educational establishment – are schools mainly for children from primary schools who do not want to continue in studies and want to prepare for some kind of profession. These schools are completed by closing exam.

Universities and Colleges – last from 4 to 6 years.

Most schools on all levels are state schools that are free but there are also private schools – mostly on secondary level where students have to pay charge.

Our school system is going through big reform. After 10 years of difficult work, in the year 2000 the "**White Book**" / **National Program of Development of Education in Czech Republic**/ was finished.

This is really coherent educational conception, which "thinks" in European consequences what is very important as all other school documents have to come from this governmental document (White Book). The aims and principles formulated in "White Book" are very similar to these that are in the project "MIND/Critical Thinking for Successful Career in EU. The problem is (but not only this one) that many changes cannot be done in reality the Parliament did not approve the bill of new School Law.

Nevertheless – it does not mean that the school reform concerning the ways of teaching, new approaches would not exist.

2. Is professional career education introduced in your education? If yes, how? In what way? What age groups?

At Primary School there is a new issue called "Choice of profession" which is involved in the subject "Family Education". It is in the 8th grade (13-14 years old children). The teachers are trained in methods that could be involved in professional career education. But there are some teachers who try to teach the whole subject "Family Education" in this way. The same is with Civics. In both subjects many teachers use their experiences and curricula from workshops Health Education Project. The teachers try to use interactive methods where children are involved in action. Also there are some teachers who try to use it in other subjects, but the percentage is very small. Such teachers are almost in all levels but the percentage is quite small.

3. Is critical thinking skills' development introduced in your education? If yes, how? In what way?

There is no system. It depends on the teacher, on school.

There are teachers and schools on all levels, which search such methods that help to develop the whole personality of a student. They do not want to “feed” a student’s brain with a lot of theoretical information, they attend various seminars, workshops, and they participate at some projects to have the inspiration how to change the learning and teaching environment at school.

Their effort is mostly very difficult for them – from many reasons. We will mention some of them:

- (1) If such teacher works in a new way alone at the whole school:
 - he/she feels lack of understanding and support from the colleagues
 - the students often do not know how to move in quite “free” rules of new methods and the result is that this teacher after some time feels tired and gives up
 - parents – nevertheless they complain of the school, that it is the same as it was when they attended the school – often do not support new ways and in fact very often demand old approach.
- (2) Even though society asks from school to prepare educated, well-bred, responsible people with moral qualities, almost every day students are confronted (mainly through media) with quite different qualities and reality in society and what more – it is very often connected with success and money. The result is – that the teacher who asks respecting moral values looks like “naïve” or even “stupid”.

3. Are critical thinking and career education issues/subjects developed in your institution? How? In what way?

We try to use these issues in Civics, Family education, and in some way in professional subjects. The problem is in fact that there is almost nothing in which we could continue. These children were mostly quite unsuccessful at primary school and they have mostly very negative approach to school. They are quite passive in education. It is different with children who come from Special /Primary/ schools where they educated by special methods. Approach to school of these children is much better and they cooperate much more. It is very difficult work.

4. Please grade the development of professional career education:

(a) in your country?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

(b) in your institution?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

5. What do you think how we could improve the above stated situation?

It is necessary to create system and prepare infiltration into all subjects.

On the level of preparation future teachers at the university:

- Create such kind of creative teaching in intentions of critical thinking. /Semester, regular courses/

On the level of in-service training:

- Prepare such kind of trainings (with curricula) which would not only inform about new methods but motivate the teachers to use it in practice
- Prepare such kind of training which would be for the staff of the whole school
- Prepare some kind of workshop where parents would be informed and convinced about necessity of new methods

In these changes in education we see one big problem:

Teachers have to develop and support in students such aspects of personality as self-esteem, ability to accept change, making decision and accepting responsibility, tolerance, and diversity.

How to do it, when many of them miss these qualities and some of them do not understand that it is necessary for human life in contemporary society.

It is very necessary to work with teacher’s personality.

7. *What educational materials (programs, textbooks, methodical materials, brochures and etc.) do your schools use to develop critical thinking and career education?*

All the schools have now possibility to use various kinds of textbooks for many subjects. They can choose. Some of these textbooks are written in the way that students are involved in action and are not passive as it was before. But as we mentioned that it is up to the choice of teachers – it is more complicated as many of them are used to old ways.

This situation is in the whole school system – it means that in special education too.

Some textbooks are full of facts – but some of them have practice books for students /then it is often question of money – to have practice book for each student/.

In our school - methods of critical thinking are mostly used in Civics and Family education. Teachers of these subjects use very often curricula of Health Education Program.