

Critical thinking and why it is important in health education

What is critical thinking?

Health education in the New Zealand Curriculum has relied on critical thinking as an important part of learning and knowledge building. It is recognised globally as an important skill for learning and for work.

Health education uses the definition that:

Critical thinking is about examining, questioning, evaluating, and challenging taken-for-granted assumptions about issues and practices.

Critical thinking helps students to become adventurous 'big picture' thinkers who can generate innovative solutions to problems, by use their reasoning skills to analyse and evaluate situations and to plan and think strategically.

Critical thinking enables students to:

- Evaluate their own thinking and behaviour on wellbeing issues
- Make fair, reasonable, and defensible decisions about issues impacting their own, others, and community wellbeing
- Take individual and collective action to address social, cultural, economic, and political inequities
- Challenge actions that fail to do this

Questions for critical thinking

- What do you know about this issue or situation?
- How did you come to know this?
- How do you feel about this issue or situation?
- What is the evidence for this knowledge?
- What are your beliefs about this knowledge? Why do you believe this?
- What information is missing from this picture? Why is this information missing?
- Have the social, cultural, economic, political, and/or ethical aspects of this situation been considered?
- Whose voice is heard in this writing, article, or classroom activity?
- Who is being advantaged? Whose interests are being served? Who has the power in this situation?
- Who is being disadvantaged? Who is not being heard or whose interests are not being served?
- What are the inequalities that exist in this situation?
- What needs to change?
- How can you contribute to this change?

Source: Based on Brookfield, 1995, and Smyth, 1992 in the New Zealand Curriculum.

In The Curriculum in Action: Making Meaning Making a Difference, Ministry of Education (2004).

If you are interested in learning more about critical thinking in health education, visit 'The Curriculum in Action: Making Meaning Making a Difference' <http://health.tki.org.nz/Key-collections/Curriculum-in-action/Making-Meaning/Teaching-and-learning-approaches/Importance-of-critical-thinking/> and The Foundation for Critical Thinking contains many resources for use across the curriculum <https://www.criticalthinking.org/>