

Pan African Student Summit 2010

“Sankofa Critical Thinking”

28-31 July 2010

Sankofa Beach House, Langma (West Kokrobite)

The **2010 Pan African Student Summit** will focus on the elements and importance of “critical thinking” in the daily lives of the students. The Summit will present a series of presentations and workshops to assist students to understand and utilize critical thinking skills as they relate to their personal development and the development of their communities, country and the continent of Africa.

The theme of the **9th Pan African Student Summit** will be entitled “**Sankofa Critical Thinking.**” In addition to standard approaches to the critical thinking dialogue, the term “Sankofa” has been added to the equation so that the students can look back at what we have experienced and where we have been as an African people and determine that which is useful to us today and that which is not useful.

The following is to be used as a guide for those students who intend to participate in the 2010 Pan African Student Summit.

Critical thinking is self-guided, self-disciplined thinking which attempts to reason at the highest level of quality in a fair-minded way.

Critical thinking can be seen as having two components: 1) a set of information and belief generating and processing skills, and 2) the habit, based on intellectual commitment, of using those skills to guide behavior. It is thus to be contrasted with: 1) the mere acquisition and retention of information alone, because it involves a particular way in which information is sought and treated; 2) the mere possession of a set of skills, because it involves the continual use of them; and 3) the mere use of those skills (“as an exercise”) without acceptance of their results.

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People who think critically consistently, attempt to live rationally, reasonably, empathically. They are keenly aware of the inherently flawed nature of human thinking when left unchecked. They strive to diminish the power of their egocentric and socio-centric tendencies. They use the intellectual tools that critical thinking offers – concepts and principles that enable them to analyze, assess, and improve thinking. They work diligently to develop the intellectual virtues of intellectual integrity, intellectual humility, intellectual civility, intellectual empathy, intellectual sense of justice and confidence in reason.

Critical thinkers realize that no matter how skilled they are as thinkers, they can always improve their reasoning abilities and they will at times fall prey to mistakes in reasoning, human irrationality, prejudices, biases, distortions, uncritically accepted social rules and taboos, self-interest, and vested interest. They strive to improve the world in whatever ways they can and contribute to a more rational, civilized society.

At the same time, they recognize the complexities often inherent in doing so. They avoid thinking simplistically about complicated issues and strive to appropriately consider the rights and needs of relevant others. They recognize the complexities in developing as thinkers, and commit themselves to life-long practice toward self-improvement. They embody the Socratic principle: The unexamined life is not worth living, because they realize that many unexamined lives together result in an uncritical, unjust, dangerous world.

Why Critical Thinking?

The Problem

Everyone thinks; it is our nature to do so. But much of our thinking, left to itself, is biased, distorted, partial, uninformed or down-right prejudiced. Yet the quality of our life and that of what we produce, make, or build depends precisely on the quality of our thought. Shoddy thinking is costly, both in money and in quality of life. Excellence in thought, however, must be systematically cultivated.

The Result

A well cultivated critical thinker:

- raises vital questions and problems, formulating them clearly and precisely;

- gathers and assesses relevant information, using abstract ideas to interpret it effectively comes to well-reasoned conclusions and solutions, testing them against relevant criteria and standards;
- thinks open-mindedly within alternative systems of thought, recognizing and assessing, as need be, their assumptions, implications, and practical consequences; and
- communicates effectively with others in figuring out solutions to complex problems.

Critical thinking is, in short, self-directed, self-disciplined, self-monitored, and self-corrective thinking. It presupposes assent to rigorous standards of excellence and mindful command of their use. It entails effective communication and problem solving abilities and a commitment to overcome our native egocentrism and socio-centrism.

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