

1. ONE: My Views of Critical Thinking:

There are some people in this world that have been lucky enough to have parents or grandparents who have established a path for them. People for whom going to school was never a dream, for whom eating an adequate meal every day is taken for granted. Their parents have made it, and so they are destined to make it in life as well. Others grow up in a misery that can only be understood once lived, once experienced. This kind of misery teaches the soul that poverty is something that cannot be changed. It teaches the mind to be and remain passive. It makes one to forcefully believe in their being subhuman. It genetically mutates the existential power of the mind.

By the time I was 11 my parents found themselves on a fast downward slope, like a car on a steep hill with no brakes, where fatality is doomed to happen. While I was at this very young age, my parents, who were my safe haven, had the rug pulled out from under them. Mobutu's government was overthrown in 1997, and this period of political unrest was accompanied by rampant looting and inflation. My Dad's business crumbled under the mess of circumstances. My parents' decisions since this time have defined our life path.

My parents, having hit rock bottom, dragged all of us along with them. We were broke, and miserably broken, and despite all of this my mother continued to have children. We did not know what breakfast, lunch, dinner or supper meant, but we knew how many children we were becoming. I still can't recount these memories without getting emotional, because it is the story of my life.

I never had a childhood; I never understood what it was to be a teenager. I grew up so fast and had very little room for mistakes or errors. I never knew how to smile or laugh—in all of the pictures of my childhood I have seen, none of them have me smiling.

This state of extreme poverty took its toll on my parents. We were treated so badly, showered with hurtful words and negative criticism that crushed us every single day. We were raised to have no self-esteem. We were physically abused, and whipped as a method of education, to learn that discipline with violence was the only way to become obedient children. However, what it really felt to us was that we were not worthy, we were the cause or the curse of our parents' misfortune. We were ostracised by our own family, uncles and aunts.

Our house was called "chicken coop" by others who mocked our misfortune. I felt my life was doomed for failure. One day, as I sat thinking under a mango tree in the shade, bare feet, bare chest, with wild untamed hair, I happened to spot a broken piece of mirror not far from where I sat. I looked into it and I saw myself in that small piece of mirror. My face looked very depressed and I remember telling myself, "I have become the boy that I have watched my society create". I had become a carbon image of my parents, of my family, of my society.

As I looked at myself into the mirror, I said, "I am my own rescue. Not my parents, not my family, not anyone, I am my own rescue!" This was my second chance, and I had to figure out how to get myself out of that hell.

Going through this kind of life bankrupts one's mind in every single stinking manner. I had no pride to protect, I had no personality to safeguard. Every potential I had was completely destroyed throughout the years. The idea that I could have an innate gift never crossed my mind, and as such I was not doing anything with my gift—the gift of critical thinking.

I looked at myself at fourteen years old, in that mirror and I said, "I am going to rescue myself, I am going to transform myself". I never asked to be born, least of all to be born in such chaos. Being an underprivileged kid, growing up in a chicken coop, with parents who are broke and broken, in a country with the most corrupt government, a country torn by war, a country that is experiencing a forgotten genocide, I had 100% chance of becoming chaos myself.

And at no point along the line have I stopped being me – because people stuck a finger in my face and told me that I was not good enough! And when situations became difficult, I did not start looking for someone to blame -- I understood back then that the world is not always made of sunshine and rainbows. But it can be a very mean and horrible place and it does not care how soft or tough you are. It will beat you to your knees and keep you on your knees permanently if you let it.

No one and nothing can hit you as hard as life can. But it is not about how hard you can hit back at life, it is about how hard life can hit you and despite that you keep moving forward. It is about how much you can take in and keep showing up –that’s how critical thinking is done!

If you know what your price is, go out there and get what you deserve – but you must be willing to take in the hits, and keep showing up, without pointing fingers, and whining about not being where you wanted to be because of this or that or someone else! Only people with no critical thinking play the victim. But when you make use of critical thinking you --- Adapt, --- Improvise and ---Overcome!

Critical thinking begins with questioning: questioning reality, our habits, questioning oneself, one’s parents, one’s lecturers, one’s society, and one’s world views. Critical thinking **agitates** our comfort zone; it makes us understand that progress and comfort are mutually exclusive. Progress and Comfort have NOTHING in Common. Critical Thinking kills procrastination and inertia, and does not let ourselves be defined by our circumstances. Critical thinking makes us understand that there is only one life, one moment, one opportunity, one chance, one body, one brain and we have to ride this one until the wheels fall off.

2. TWO: How being on this project WHY has impacted on me

During my journey at UWC, I was emotionally beaten up every single day. I didn’t have that much self-esteem to my count. Some lecturers and students made fun of me, because I failed to understand what they did, or at the same pace as they did, and for that my whole being was reduced to shame. I felt unwelcomed, I felt that the lecturers were up here and I was down there! But being on this project WHY, made me feel important and appreciated, it made me realize that I am not;

The repercussion of things my family did, I am not that noisy voice inside my head. I am not life’s broken pieces. Neither am I the consequences of mistakes that I have endured or any other events that have conjugated the pain inside -- I am not a broken spirit crushed by the unattained dream I left behind. –

It made us understand that we were not the color of our eyes, we were not our age, we were not our race and we should not let ourselves be defined by the color of our skin ... It made us realize that we are not our English accent, we are not our failures, we are not their opinions --

- But instead it made us realize that we are the intelligence defined --- we are the singers of the universe ‘s song – We are the depth of the infinite ocean, we are a piece of diamond that makes UWC shine – We are the creators of critical thinking! It helped us understand that our mind was never disabled, and like Eagles we don’t need to fly in packs!

Eagles being high altitude birds, push some birds to think they are arrogant and pompous --- But that’s not true! The truth is that Eagles are regal, majestic and proud. There is a natural majesticness to an eagle. ---And on the other side you find a kind of bird, called: buzzards. The inferiority complex of Buzzards leads them to step on the head of others to gain elevation. But the worst kind of bird is a (thanksgiving meal) turkey!!! A turkey’s got wings but cannot even fly. All they do is pretend, show off, portray themselves to be something they are truly not. ---

So, now I want to ask you, UWC administrators; What kind of bird do you want us students to be?

3. Last not least: How the project could be expanded to benefit more undergraduates:

Let’s look at the future and let’s imagine that the project WHY has been implemented for the entire student body! --- The benefit will be that more UWC students will go out there and really do amazing work, to solve some of the world ‘s most pressing problems, because they will be equipped with the necessary tools for critical thinking. And what we think, we become. This is the power of the mind!!

However, in the present, there are many students out there who are absolutely unaware of critical thinking, -- and many others are going through similar hardship AS I DID. To these audiences, critical thinking might be the only intellectual pathogen cure. It is my conviction that exposing students to critical thinking will not only equip them with mental capabilities to solve problems and express their creativity, but more importantly it will transform them into healthy intellectual social beings.

We know what kind of resistance or discomfort may derive from other faculties or departments or lecturers, or students in the implementation of critical thinking curriculum. However, it is my belief that this resistance or discomfort is due to the fear of our own imperfections.

As Socrates said, “The only true wisdom is in knowing you know nothing”.

For all the amazing achievements UWC has been lucky to share with us, a lot of it has shaped us more than Our churches, traditions, cultures and families --- Even if we mostly get judged by; “the depth of our bad ideas instead of by the depth of our good ideas”. --- Even if sometimes our work is often measured in half steps. --- Even if sometimes we do things just to get there – But , There are potentially millions of human beings who will complete their undergrad here at UWC, Whose fate in large part, depends on the choices UWC administrators make, on your ideas, and persistence and willingness to engage the future.

But (UWC) will miserably fail if (you) fail to expend (your) critical thinking to benefit more undergraduates.

While we are playing around and lowering our stake and our standard other universities are going big. --- Will UWC, be able to engage the future? Then it needs to start now and get ready to play its game with an injection of Critical Thinking in its undergrad curriculum.

It is my view that ; Critical thinking should be the first subject an undergrad student should be exposed to before any other subject. Extending critical thinking to the undergraduate programme will add tremendous value to UWC.

Suppose that we teach just two-hour lessons per week on:

How to Start an Experiment

How to Ask questions (How many students burn inside with questions and can't express them?)

How to Write properly

How to Read books (especially to the black child who has never experienced reading bedtime stories)

How to Exercise one's mind

How to Be bold (UWC students compared to UCT, European and American students, lack boldness)

How to Start thinking

How to Get rid of bad feelings and memories (Leave them where they belong)

How to Test oneself under pressure

How to Help Others (I am appealing to students, please those who are fast, should help the slow learners)

How to Be disciplined

How to Deliberate (Empowering Student's Emotional Intelligence)

How to Train one's mind (to the capacity of exercising Critical Thinking)

The list will go on and on, and the benefit will be that, UWC will then become the top African University. That's my dream, and in my humble opinion, this collective dream will become real, only through the expansion of critical thinking in UWC's curriculum.

Thank you for your time!