

# case study

## Business and entrepreneurship: the Sustainability Center's education for the 21st century

### *United States*

In New York City, the Sustainability Education Center, a local NGO, is using critical thinking and reflection to shape the ways that youth conceptualise business and entrepreneurship. Business and Entrepreneurship Education for the 21st Century, a full-year course developed for the New York City Department of Education, builds student skills for business ventures that are in harmony with prosperity and the long-term health of their society and the planet.



The course integrates multiple rounds of critical thinking about the role of business in the world, and the relationships in business between ethics, personal values and beliefs. Students are prompted with critical questions asked within the context of society and the planet so that they can reflect on how business ventures interact with larger social issues and the environment. What are my values and beliefs? What problems need to be addressed in the world? What is the relationship between business activity, a healthy society and a healthy ecosystem?

The course engages students in thinking, envisioning and planning in way that reflects their values and goals. As an outcome of the course, students learn how to develop a business plan, guided from envisioning all the way through to reflecting on the completed Plan.

Sustainability Education Center and the Center for the Study of Expertise in Teaching and Learning (2003)  
*'Business and Entrepreneurship Education for the 21st Century'* <sup>30</sup>

## Challenges of critical thinking...

Critical thinking requires that people ask profound and sometimes complex questions about the world, confronting conventional notions and assumptions along with deeply rooted personal values. Such a process can be challenging for people, and can often take time for questioning and reflection on their journey to a deeper knowledge about the world. Educators can support this process by prompting people with strategically open ended questions, which help them to uncover assumptions and values in the process.

My capacity to think critically is so rusty! I know so little... I can get quite frustrated with the process of critical thinking... If I am going to question everything, how can I ever achieve a constructive conclusion?... I feel like the ground is shifting under all my preconceptions... Critical thinking is a skill that needs to be developed in all if [sustainability] is to become a reality... Critical thinking encourages us to question the decisions and statements that come from the "top"... We must learn to detect bias, to challenge thinking, to recognise when we are being manipulated, to understand the motivation of those who would control our thinking... I have never thought like this in my life!... Never questioned enough... I am amazed at how my thoughts and feelings are developing... ʘ

*Excerpts from the personal reflective journal of Amanda Keogh,  
education for sustainability<sup>31</sup>*