

Evens Prize for Education – Critical Thinking as a Practice of Freedom

Critical thinking has figured as an educational goal for almost a century, and many high-level educational policy documents declare it to be an essential ability in a democratic culture. However, it is also a concept that has acquired different meanings and is widely debated.

The Evens Foundation aims to contribute to rethinking and building a European reality committed to the values of diversity, freedom, responsibility, and solidarity. We see critical thinking as a social practice that stimulates (young) people to think actively and deeply about an issue at hand in order to see and understand it from different perspectives before reaching a conclusion. Critical thinking creates dialogical and shared learning experiences that are crucial in diverse contexts. Not only does it foster better understanding of one's own thoughts and openness to new ideas and other viewpoints, it also helps us to understand how interpretation and knowledge are socially constructed, gives voice to people or groups who have been silent or silenced, and allows us to discuss complex issues.

Through our work in the field of conflict transformation, teaching controversies and media literacy, we have identified an acute need for such empowerment through education if we want to begin to address the increasing discords, polarization and disinformation that are challenging our democracies. We believe that it is essential for pluralistic democratic societies that citizens are able to think and work together to build a common world while respecting each other's differences.

What are we looking for?

To counteract the fact that practice and research are often two worlds apart, the new Evens Prize for Education, Critical Thinking as a Practice of Freedom, invites applications in two categories:

- *Embedded practices that support critical thinking about social questions*
- *Scholarly but practice-oriented work that furthers our understanding of practices, pedagogies, curricula or projects that foster critical thinking, and the conditions in which education for critical thinking can thrive*

Looking for inspiration and new ideas to foster the motivation and abilities to think critically about social questions, this call is open to a broad variety of practices implemented in institutional and non-institutional spaces by teachers, scholars, students, educators, youth workers, artists, civil society organizations, citizen groups, etc. This includes formal, non-formal and community-based education for youth as well as adults.

Aware that critical thinking about an issue might require substantive knowledge of the domain to which the issue belongs, we are particularly interested in practices that address questions relevant to today's democratic and diverse societies. However, we are also open to other domains on the condition that the respective practice or research insights are widely applicable.

Selection criteria for jury deliberations

Ideally, the practice or research:

- understands diversity in its broadest sense, emphasizing differences not only between but also within groups;
- focuses on both the motivation and the development of intellectual dispositions and abilities to think critically and on the integration of imagination and emotional growth;
- values the process of thinking and learning together;
- reflects on the different and sometimes conflicting conceptions of critical thinking held by participants from diverse backgrounds;
- takes the particularity of each context into account while at the same time working towards the sustainable development of critical thinking ability and motivation across contexts.

The Evens Foundation, aware of the ambitiousness of the criteria, invites candidates who meet some but not (yet) all of the criteria above, especially if efforts are being made to meet more of these criteria in the future.

Formal criteria (must be fulfilled)

- Only applicants based and operating in Europe* can participate.
- Only ongoing or recent (initiated in the past two years) practices and research are eligible.
- The laureates of the prize must be willing to take part in future projects of the Evens Foundation related to the focus of the prize, in particular regarding the dissemination of the winning practice or research.

Additional information for research applicants

- Applicants should be academic staff members of a post-secondary institution or a research center linked to a post-secondary institution located in Europe.
- This is a call for a prize, not a grant. This means that only completed research or research underway will be considered.

* For this prize, applications from the following countries are eligible: 28 EU member countries, official candidate countries (Albania, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia, Turkey) and potential candidate countries (Bosnia Herzegovina and Kosovo).

- As long as it is practice-oriented research, we are open to a broad variety of research methodologies.

Procedure

Submissions should be made in English using the application form available at www.evensfoundation.be, and should be sent to Marjolein.Delvou@evensfoundation.be by 15 March 2020 at the latest.

If your *practice* qualifies for consideration, the Evens Foundation will contact you by 31 March 2020 to organize an online conversation in *the first half of April 2020*. If your practice is shortlisted, you will be contacted soon after in order to organize a site visit by a staff member of the Evens Foundation.

If your *research* qualifies for consideration, the Evens Foundation will contact you by 30 April 2020 to organize an online conversation in *the first half of May 2020* to discuss potential questions of the jury.

The *prize money*, €25,000 per category, will be awarded by an international expert jury and the Evens Foundation. The sum is intended to be divided between the awardwinner and an initiative to further disseminate the winning practice or research, implemented by the laureate in cooperation with the Evens Foundation.

The part of the prize money awarded to the laureate can be spent freely according to the laureate's wishes. For the part dedicated to dissemination, an agreement with the Evens Foundation must be reached. Ideas for dissemination projects include but are not limited to: a seminar, a video, a symposium, a campaign, a publication, etc. The dissemination budget cannot be used for overhead expenses charged by an institution, nor for infrastructure costs.

The jury will decide how the amount will be allocated. The jury meeting will take place in the second half of June 2020.

Shortlisted applicants will also be invited to an exchange seminar on the occasion of the award ceremony for the laureates in autumn 2020. Travel and accommodation expenses will be covered by the Evens Foundation.

If you have any queries, please do not hesitate to contact Marjolein Delvou at Marjolein.Delvou@evensfoundation.be.

Background

The 2020 Evens Prize for Education gathers some of the concerns we addressed in our previous Prizes for Media Education and Peace Education. The former focused on identifying and recognizing good practices in media education and media literacy. Fields addressed included early childhood, social media, and visual literacy. The latter helped us to discover and share inspirational practices in the field of conflict transformation. The kind of issues brought to the fore included teacher training in conflict transformation, school community initiatives, social skills in early childhood, teaching controversies, etc.

After several editions, we noticed that the strongest applicants for both prizes tended to emphasize education that stimulates critical thinking. This prompted us to launch a new Evens Education Prize dedicated to the promotion of critical thinking as a practice of freedom.