*SLO V. Critical Thinking*

*Students will apply critical thinking and scientific methods of thinking (including logical and empirical reasoning) to issues regarding children’s well-being.*

Throughout my higher education I have had to become a critical thinker. To me this means investigating, experimenting, analyzing, observing, applying, evaluating, reflecting, and so many more. My Child Development major has allowed me to practice and improve these skills. As a soon to be graduate I plan to use my skills in critical thinking in my future career and personal life.

In some of my general education classes in my higher education I had to take some classes that were not really related to my major. I was not that comfortable with the materials so I had to investigate and experiment with the materials given. This allowed me to try new things and for me to step out of my comfort zone. These courses pushed me into studying areas I was not familiar with. This was useful for my abilities as a critical thinker.

One major focus in a majority of my courses in higher education has involved some form of observation. In fact I had a course that was solely on observation. In that class I learned about the proper way to write observation notes and to analyze what the data might mean. That topic transferred in my internship courses, I had to make observations and assess what I saw. Observations are a great way to see what needs to be implemented in a setting, using results to see how to improve a skill. One project that fits this description was an inquiry. I had to observe a specific area that I thought needed improvement and create an inquiry question that matched. Then I had to implement various activities and language to see if an understanding of the topic changed or improved. This project had me using my critical thinking abilities; I had to come up with an inquiry that I saw in a classroom and create a plan to improve on that skill. It was a valuable experience for me to have because it made me take something I saw and translate it into a project and investigation.

Another aspect my higher education experience has taught me is how to evaluate. In one of my courses we had to use an assessment tool and evaluate a child. First I had to write observation notes on a specific child. Then I had to look at the criteria for each section in the assessment tool and try to see where the child fit into the levels. This lead to an evaluation on the child based on what I saw and perceived the child to be. The project was never used as a true evaluation for the child but was a great way to practice evaluations of children. The process took an entire semester and required me to think very critically.

Another important part of being a critical thinker is reflection. Being able to reflect on what you are doing or did is a valuable skill to have. In a career you have to be able to reflect on what you are doing right or wrong, that way you can work towards bettering yourself. In my higher education experience there have been a large amount of classes that use self reflection as a teaching tool. Being able to think critically about your self is not an easy task, it takes practice and effort. I have had numerous assignments that had me thinking about what I did right in a situation and what I think I should have done.

Critical thinking is a lifelong process. Being able to stay focused and aware of the skill is necessary. If you stop thinking critically you might lose some valuable lessons and opportunities to grow as a learner or a person. As a lifelong learner I will continue to push myself to be better and to think more critically.