Reflective Narrative 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.*

Being a critical thinker means being a critical consumer. As a critical consumer, I am able to filter out bias information and treat hypotheses with skepticism. I am able to take what I have learned from our higher education and professional experiences and apply it to situations where I can be advocates for children and families. Until proven valid and credible, I do not automatically accept everything we hear or read as being accurate and true. I am able to apply our knowledge of what a critical thinker entails to a variety of situations and base my logic and reasoning for what is best for children on empirical evidence.

Having the ability to decipher objective, reliable, and valid information from biased, unreliable, and invalid information is what comprises critical thinking skills and abilities. As a critical thinker, I have the ability to not take information given to us at face value, but instead take it one step further and examine the true meaning so that we are then be able to form conclusions that are based on objective and accurate facts. Additionally, as a critical thinker, I have the skills to assess given information and determine the reliability and validity based on certain criteria, such as: the currency of the information, the relevance, the authority, the accuracy, and the purpose of the information.

As part of my undergraduate coursework for the Child Development major at California State University, Chico, I took the Methods of Inquiry in Child Development course. Through the duration of this course, there were many opportunities that facilitated my understanding of critical thinking and scientific methods of thinking. First, I acquired the fundamentals of scientific methodology. Second, I increased my knowledge of qualitative research methods. Third, I acquired quantitative skills in measurement and statistical evaluation. I applied these skills through the process of review, evaluation, and communication through writing. Additionally, in this course I identified the major dimensions of research strategies used in the field of Child Development, all of which require critical thinking and scientific methods of thinking to issues regarding children’s well-being. All of these areas just mentioned helped to foster my understanding and growth in becoming a critical thinker.

In addition to the Methods of Inquiry in Child Development course I completed, I took a supervised Child Development Practicum course which allowed for me to create and implement a developmentally effective plan for children and then critically assess the children's developmental progress. I first identified a situation we wanted to investigate further and established a strategy for resolution. I then collected data and reported my findings. This process involved a high level of critical thinking and would not have been successful if I had not applied my understanding of scientific methods of thinking.

Aspects I have struggled with in this area include gathering information from numerous sources and compiling the information into one concise and accurate picture, and also not letting our personal biases influence our outlook on a child. Critical thinking and scientific methods of thinking are a crucial component in this process because it is essential to obtain only the most empirical, objective, and valid information when condensing information from a larger, variety of sources to a smaller, single source, and also when I am interpreting the behaviors of a child.

Some of the best examples of what I have achieved regarding the application of critical thinking to children’s well-being, include the ability to effectively identify main issues or concerns for a specific topic and I am able to draw accurate conclusions based on the evidence provided. I also no longer take information at face value just because it is what I am told. I am able to evaluate and recognize the credibility of the information and the sources from which the information is obtained, thus contributing to my ability to use empirical reasoning to issues regarding the well-being of children.

As professionals in the field of Child Development, I have the ability to recognize the importance of looking at research, and then based on the research, make informed and knowledgeable decisions. I am constantly looking for new ways to improve my learning in order to provide the best services to children and families. I have the necessary skills to convey important information to families and provide solutions that are based on critical thinking. I refrain from basing important decisions on intuition or my gut instinct. Instead I look at research in an objective way so that I am able to determine the most empirical solution and apply it to children and their families.

Two assignments that document my ability to apply critical thinking and scientific methods of thinking are a research paper and an inquiry project. As part of my undergraduate coursework at California State University, Chico, I took the Methods of Inquiry in Child Development course. I wrote a research paper on a topic of my choice that related to the discipline of child development. The process of writing this paper allowed for me to learn the fundamentals of scientific methodology and critical thinking because it encouraged me to evaluate the credibility of sources, gather the information into a methodical and comprehensive literature review format, describe appropriate methodology to address my research hypothesis or questions, analyze quantitative data, interpret the results of statistical analyses, and discuss the implications of my findings and think critically to facilitate the writing process of the paper.

The second assignment that documents our progress in critical thinking and scientific methods of thinking is a supervised Child Development Practicum course, taken at California State University, Chico, where we created and implemented a developmentally effective plan for children. This inquiry was based on an observation that was made in a classroom that was part of the Chico State Associated Students Child Development Laboratory. From this initial observation, we created a curriculum and implemented it in the classroom. Data was collected and the results were interpreted and then presented. This process was successful because critical and scientific methods of thinking were implemented.