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.*

My experience in higher education and as a child development professional has been significantly associated with this learning objective known as critical thinking. I would say that critical thinking is a way of empirically thinking with aspects of science, evidence and research behind an issue. In regards to child development, critical thinking is executed in a variety of settings whether that is during assessments, research papers, or when a professional is working directly with a child. Critical thinking in this discipline is typically psychologically based and at times consists of taking information from readings, and then critically consuming that information to then present solutions when working with children and families. I’ve learned that this process requires practice because evaluating and then implementing logic in regards to decision-making can be challenging.

Critical thinking skills and abilities are comprised of several aspects like question-based surveys, being aware of potential biases, researching different studies for the purpose of staying up-to-date, and practicing the scientific method. Being able to research and find accurate studies is crucial in relation to credibility. A critical thinker needs to be able to demonstrate listening skills, and communication skills to be able to take all the information in, reflect, and then respond accurately in order to reach a potential solution. When I worked as an interventionist for children with communication delays, I had to practice these skills whenever a behavior or challenge was presented. For example, when I was interacting with a child demonstrating avoidant behavior towards adults, I thought back to the attachment theory. I was able to work with that child based on Bowlby and Ainsworth’s studies on why attachment is so important, and I learned how to educate parents on why specific behaviors were present based on my previous knowledge and understanding. My higher education has helped me expand my critical thinking skills by placing us in internships with children and other professionals. These experiences allowed me to apply and increase my critical thinking abilities and skills in classrooms, which I obtained from several different projects, research papers, presentations, and assessment studies.

In my higher education courses, I’ve had several experiences where I was positively provoked and challenged in order to grow and learn as a professional critical thinker. One specific example of this was an inquiry project in a practicum class where I was interning in an infant classroom. A partner and I were required to find a flaw or drawback in our internship classroom and then strategize ways to improve that setback. We realized that peer interactions were deficient in the classroom and the teachers weren’t necessarily promoting ways to get peers involved with one another. The older-aged infants were starting to show interests in one another, and my partner and I realized that we needed to help support their interest and implement ways for them to continue peer play in a structured setting. We used research and data from the Desired Results Developmental Profile (DRDP) in order to assess developmental domains. We then brainstormed how we were going to implement activities to challenge them and progress their development with peer interactions. This experience helped me practice on the spot critical thinking in order to think back to the information from the data, brainstorm potential solutions, and then implement and act on those solutions in the classroom.

Although my skills and knowledge of critical thinking have expanded and increased greatly over the last four years, I still have struggled along the way with how challenging this learning objective can be at times. Finding accurate empirical articles that have reliable and valid evidence with results can be infrequent and difficult to locate. When information from studies need to be communicated to parents, it is crucial that a professional knows how to deliver accurate and understandable information and suggestions so that precise decisions can be made to benefit a child’s wellbeing. Being able to find a study, understand the study, remember the information, and then find ways to incorporate that into my work with children has been difficult for me, and I’m still practicing this skill everyday. It’s important for me as a professional to continue researching and educating myself on new studies and issues so that I can continue thinking critically with current information to benefit children and families instead of always drawing from older theories.

I have attained and progressed within this learning objective in a variety of different ways. I would say that my ability to remain objective and remove my biases from observations has been my must successful achievement. As an intern in the infant room, I had to take observation notes in the class based on specific domains in the Desired Results Developmental Profile for infant age. This allowed me to practice thinking critically by assessing an action or skill that I had observed in a child, assessing what domain that action may fall under, and then critically evaluating where the child lands in regards to mastery. I had to remove my biases and relationship with that child in order to provide reliable and valid information for lead teachers to complete these final individual assessments. This process forced me to practice active listening and observing skills, and also professional writing abilities. The observation notes needed to be objective, with accurate spelling and grammar, especially in regards to spelling a child’s name correctly. After my time as an intern, I became a student staff employee, where I was constructing these objective observation notes on a daily basis, so I definitely feel confident and achieved in relation to my critical thinking skills within these observational types of assessments.

I can offer problem-solving abilities and skills in the work place in regards to critical thinking in a variety of circumstances and situations. In my higher education, I have practiced what it’s like to work with children and then reflect on my work to then brainstorm potential problems that may have occurred, and then what potential solutions or improvements could I do next time. This process has allowed met to think critically and practice more critical thinking in future experiences and instances. I can offer reliable and valid information to those I am communicating with whether that be co-workers, families, children or other professionals in this field. I will stay updated on research to make sure that I continue learning about new results and studies on different topics of child development. If I am asked a question, and am unsure about a response, I will make sure to research that information and respond to that question professionally. This will demonstrate to others in my environment that I will consistently obtain evidence-based information before making any quick solutions or decisions. In addition, I can offer solutions based on my experiences and knowledge about how children develop. I can draw from theorists like Bronfenbrenner, Vygotsky, Erikson and Bowlby in particular to provide examples and knowledge to families about why behaviors happen and how to go about working with children based on evidence.

This learning objective and content area of critical thinking and the assignment I am the most proud of was a research paper in a research methods course. A partner and I conducted an empirical article based on the association between parent’s motives, leisure activities, and children’s depression with parental relations. We collectively drew data from other studies conducted in the past, and then put together a methods, results, and discussion section. This assignment helped me expand my knowledge with critical thinking because we had to read several studies, find accurate evidence, conduct and implement statistical data, and then assess whether our hypothesis was accurate or not. I learned how to take, pull, and remove unnecessary information to make a professional and consolidated final product with knowledgeable information. The final paper demonstrated my improvements and growth with professional writing, as well, which has helped me in other courses. Being able to think critically is one aspect of this assignment, but I also had to write critically, which was foreign to me before this final assignment.

 The second assignment that represented my growth and abilities in critical thinking was in an observational techniques class where we had to observe pre-school age children in an observation lab. The first observation assignment consisted of a physical description of the children observed. This assignment was done with objective data notes, and accurate information was pulled based on where the child was, and what they looked like. The way we had to write and construct these observations required critical thinking because we had to remove all of our biases and practice writing in a way that was unfamiliar to me before. If my notes seemed like my opinion was integrated in any way, it had to be removed and demonstrated in a way that was strictly fact-based. These observations were very descriptive and detailed so that an accurate visual could be perceived by others. This was my first professional experience with being a critical thinker, and it has helped shaped my data-taking techniques ever since. As a child development professional, I will always have more to learn, but I am eager to continue conducting studies by staying up-to-date on current research on children, families, and development as a whole.