Student Learning Objective Five: Critical Thinking

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

This learning objective means students will be able to think critically about the sources they use and the materials that are being presented to them. They will be able to distinguish between reputable sources of information and sources that are not. They will understand the scientific method and what it involves. Students will be able to take these concepts or research and apply them in their own work in issues regarding children’s well-being.

Being critical and being able to effectively assess information are a couple aspects of critical thinking. This includes questioning information that is being presented. Does the information come from a scholarly source or from some other source? How was the information collected? Is the information bias towards one perspective and are possible bias disclosed? These are all questions a critical thinker needs to consider when taking in new information. Being able to dig deeper and find the full source of information and not just one small aspect of something is important. A person needs to be able to analyze a source for legitimacy and not just take it at face value.

The Research Methods class I took my first semester at California State University, Chico helped facilitate my growth for this learning objective. Before taking that class I knew how to access empirical sources and could pull important information from those sources, but that class developed my skills even more. I developed a deeper understanding of why empirical research is important. I learned how to quickly assess information for credibility as well as if the information is pertinent to my needs. During this course I also learned how to calculate statistics from research and decipher what those results mean. The course overall broadened my understanding of research and critical thinking.

The area I have struggled with the most is computing the results of research and reporting those results in technical terms. There was a lot of information that related to this that I was learning in a short period of time and it was a lot to comprehend and maintain in my memory banks.

The best I have achieved in this area has been taking these skills into my personal life and relationships. I try to come into situations and conversations with an open mind. I consider what is being said and the perspective of the person I am having conversations with. I recently had a conversation with a friend on a topic I am not studying in school and I wondered what type of research had been done on the subject and if there had been research what the research had showed.

As a member of the child development profession, I can offer my ability to find relevant and empirical up to date information pertaining to the profession. I can think critically about information that is being presented to decide the legitimacy of information and if it is something I can use. I can think critically about other situations when a decision needs to be made while keeping mind the interest of the agency and the clients we serve.

My first writing assignment in my Research Methods class gave me experience practicing finding empirical research and relaying information in a concise manner in an American Psychological Association (APA) formatted paper. I had to use my skills to find an appropriate article that fit the topic I was researching. I then had to decide which elements of the article were important and relay them in appropriate terms.

Another assignment that also shows my growth is the research paper I completed with a partner, also for my Research Methods class. For this we each were responsible for finding past research that related to our topic. We discussed the research we were reporting on. For this research we had to commute information from that had been collected as part of broader research study. We reported our findings and discussed what the findings meant. We also discussed areas for continued research.