

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.

Individual Outline

Critical thinking is important when thinking about children's well-being because it helps us make educated, evidence-based decisions about how we design our services toward them and their families. Children and families are delicate and are the foundation for the well-being of our society. Reckless and ill-informed decision-making regarding children have far reaching consequences that can span many generations. Critical thinking helps to insulate us from the unnecessary consequences of these decisions and instead helps us to plan for optimal development in children and families.

Critical thinking skills are comprised of the abilities to identify personal and professional biases and separate them from the actual presented situation and empirical facts. For example, although I love my classroom at the Associated Students Child Development Lab, my skills in critical thinking allows me to identify this bias and analyze the program for strengths and weaknesses. Doing this, I can target areas of growth in our classroom community and work to strengthen them. I also understand that I am unaware of many biases I have. Because of this, I welcome input and critique from others who have a different perspective and adopt suggestions and advice appropriately.

Critical thinking is a personal value of mine. This was first fostered in me in high school US History. My teacher, Mr. Shuttleworth, adamantly taught, "Just because it's legal, doesn't make it right". Through this lens, we analyzed and critiqued historical US actions, policy, and culture. I learned to think critically about everything, and took nothing at face value. I learned to think about things from the perspective of others.

One thing that I appreciate and value about research in Child Development is that the “subjects” are given a voice. Particularly if the group studied is one whose voice is not often heard, I appreciate when research illuminates issues that practitioners (teachers, social workers, policy makers, therapists, psychologists) do not often notice. I have begun to train myself to identify potential issues with actions we take and to actively address and avoid “blind spots”.

Something unique about critical thinking is that it’s an area where knowing really is half the battle. Understanding how things work and how different constructs affect each other plays a huge role in how well we can think critically. Conversely, limited world experience can hinder critical thinking. I have limited experience in the education system and expect to gain more in the next few years. I suspect that as I navigate the credential program I will gain more exposure and hone my critical thinking skills in this context.

The best of what I have tangibly achieved can be derived from assignments and projects completed I have completed in the major. From parent and child interviews, to research papers and assessments, the variety of assignments completed have provided me with the means to identify key issues and problems. By identifying issues and problems, I have gained the skill of raising appropriate questions that accurately target them in a relevant way. I have learned to question the credibility of research I have reviewed, to question and evaluate my practice with children through rigorous journaling, and come up with solutions with peers through small group and classroom meetings. Through the inquiry project and honors coursework, as well as other class presentations, I have learned how to communicate findings, both my own and of others to a group of peers and professionals.

As a member of the child development profession, I can offer my experiences. One advantage I have as an older graduate, is that I have acquired a diverse range of experiences in varying degrees of intensity. I have gotten to see how the world works through many different lenses. I have some knowledge of life overseas, Haiti in particular, but also in working domestically in grocery and manufacturing. I have worked alongside individuals from varying socio-economic and ethnic backgrounds. These experiences give me the tools to think critically about many services and opportunities offered to young children.

Assignments

When I came to Chico State I enrolled in American Government: National, State, and Local, a class which required that students identify a problem in government policy and derive a solution for it. Both were presented to faculty and peers during the Town Hall Meeting event offered at Chico State. The specific assignment included identifies the problem of CalFresh, or food stamps, inefficiency and specifies that this problem stems from the inefficacy of the software system used for enrollment and allocation of CalFresh resources. With substantial instructor support, we developed a solution for this issue. Using credible and recent news sources, I outlined arguments for and against CalFresh reform while remaining neutral in my explanation. Finally, using my knowledge of course concepts I defined concepts as they to the policy problem and assignment. Because of the nature of the issue, my interpretations were somewhat arbitrary and I did not really have a frame of reference to understand the intricacies of the issue to develop a meaningful or realistic solution.

However, as I neared the end of my time at Chico State, and after receiving a lot of instruction and support in providing curriculum services to children, I am now able to reflect on my curriculum implementation in a more meaningful way. The assignment

included showcases my personal reflection skills as I provide feedback on curriculum I implemented. I have begun to understand how competency on a topic influences critical thinking ability. I give meaningful feedback and realistic solutions to issues faced during implementation.