

### **SLO 5 Critical Thinking**

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

A student that is educated in the field of Child Development will be capable of applying critical thinking skills to specific situations that occur when working with children and families. Students have the opportunity to learn the fundamentals of critical thinking throughout their General Education as well as in the introductory classes of the major. For example, in the introductory classes students were taught a variety of child development theories from scholars such as Piaget, Erikson, Vygotsky, Bronfenbrenner, Bandura, Bowlby, and so on. These theories helped explain why children and families develop and behave the ways that they do. This provides scientific and theoretical reasoning in order to describe and explain specific circumstances, and encourages Child Development professionals to use critical thinking skills to evaluate them against relevant criteria and standards provided by theories and research. Furthermore, it is the upper level courses and applied internships that the students experience that allows them to practice and diversify those learnt skillsets. For instance, in the Methods of Inquiry in Child Development class students wrote a lengthy research paper throughout the course of the semester. This process helped develop my critical thinking skills by working with a peer to effectively identify specific theories to best support our research points. In order to do this to the best of our ability we called upon those scientific methods of thinking skills we acquired in the early child development classes. Additionally, in the internship

opportunities, students regularly encountered situations where they had to utilize their logical and empirical reasoning to best ensure the children's well-being and needs were being met. Whether this means taking Vygotsky's sociocultural approach by modeling appropriate behavior and giving the minimum amount of guidance in order to teach children to grow autonomous, or by recognizing the many factors that influence a child's microsystem using Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory. Having an array of critical thinking and empirical reasoning skills is crucial to being an effective child development professional, which is taught and practiced throughout the Child Development major here at CSU, Chico.

In the field of Child Development, critical thinking comprises an assortment of skills and abilities. Child development professionals are able to observe situations and behaviors objectively. Then analyze those observations by breaking them down and identifying the causes. Critical thinking also utilizes discriminating techniques, meaning the ability to recognize differences and similarities among children or situations. Critical thinking allows students to draw conclusions and make predictions based off of logical and empirical reasoning. This helps child development professionals prevent and/or redirect inappropriate situations or behaviors in a timely manner. Within the classroom, students practiced their critical thinking abilities through raising relevant questions, gathering information and evaluating the credibility of that information. Child Development students are encouraged to think open-

mindedly, recognize and assess their personal assumptions, and taught to communicate more effectively with others as well.

My experience in my Child Development Advanced Practicum course most facilitated my growth in critical thinking and logical reasoning skills. In the Fall 2015 semester, I interned at one of the preschool classrooms within the Associated Students Child Development Lab (ASCDL). I went into the internship fairly confident, as I had a great experience interning at the Boys and Girls Club the semester before and felt comfortable with my knowledge in my child development classes thus far. However, being a teacher in a preschool class was nothing like I had ever experienced before. I was encountered with situations that required conflict resolution and behavioral modification skills that I was not prepared for. My confidence in my critical thinking and logical reasoning skills were quickly diminished. It took all semester, with guidance from my supervisors and repeated practice directly working with children, to regain my confidence. I now know how to recognize and identify causes of behaviors, have the ability to make inferences and draw conclusions from these observations, and react/intervene in a timely manner to ensure the well-being of the children and families in the situation at hand.

My biggest struggle with my critical thinking skills was purely having the confidence in my own critical thinking and logical reasoning abilities in practical situations working with children and families. Specifically, I struggled in the category of response time and having the confidence in my decision-making

during times of conflict resolution and behavioral modification that required a timely, professional response.

Critical thinking is the art of analyzing and evaluating our own and other's thinking with the intention to improve it. Therefore, the best of what I have achieved in this area is recognizing and accepting my struggles of incompetency and lack of confidence. And remaining open to constructive criticism and guidance from superiors in order to overcome my own temporary limitations. With such an obstacle in my way, I almost gave up on the idea of working with children. But my perseverance helped me achieve confidence in my critical thinking and logical reasoning skills after all.

As a member of the child development profession, I can offer a community program an educated and beneficial resource as a supervisor or director. I have the experience, knowledge, and critical thinking and empirical reasoning skill sets to run an after school program effectively and efficiently. As a professional, I would employ the critical thinking skills of observing and gathering information efficiently, brainstorming effectively, and drawing well-reasoned conclusions and solutions to better the program as a whole. Additionally, in practical conversations and situations I have the ability to ask critical thinking questions, like questioning the research, analyzing the consequences, and making inferences on how the concepts discussed would be put into practice.

The first assignment that exemplifies my understanding of the critical thinking learning objective is a self-evaluation in my Advanced Child

Development Practicum course. This self-evaluation exemplified my understanding and acquisition of *SLO 5 Critical Thinking* because it demonstrated my acknowledgement of the struggles I had in the area of critical thinking and logical reasoning. The preschool setting was a new environment for me, and therefore my confidence in my abilities to work effectively with younger children quickly diminished. In the section labeled "Areas for Future Growth/Goals," I mentioned that I am the best child development professional when I forget about the rules and regulations and just give all of my focus and attention to having fun playing with the children in front of me. The advice the Head Teacher gave me was to do exactly that, and let the other skills come natural to me as the situations present themselves instead of over-thinking and stressing out. This advice helped me return to my confidence in my critical thinking and abilities, and let me overcome my insecurities in order to continue to learn and grow in the Child Development major.

Another assignment that showed my comprehension of critical thinking is the Observation 3 assigned in my Observational Techniques course. This observation also provided support for my knowledge of the *SLO 5 Critical Thinking* because it demonstrated my understanding of several guidance techniques preschool teachers use in order to ensure children's well-being. In the "Interpretation" section, I observed a teacher using Guidance Technique #11, in which they used their inference skills to intervene in order to prevent a harmful/dangerous accident from occurring. This is an example of utilizing

critical thinking abilities by analyzing observational skills, recognizing situational factors, drawing possible conclusions from the child's actions and behaviors, and intervening in a timely manner to ensure a safe environment.