Critical Thinking as a Knowledge and Skill for Professional Practice

WHEREAS, most faculty (99%) endorse teaching critical thinking as an important goal of a university education (DeAngelo et al., 2009) and most employers (82%) want educators to place greater emphasis on student outcomes that include critical thinking (Hart Research Associates, 2013).

WHEREAS, the belief that critical thinking will emerge naturally as a by-product from a higher education is based more on wishful thinking than actual evidence (Arum & Roksa, 2010).

WHEREAS, research suggests students are more likely to learn how to think critically when it is taught directly as a set of skills and practiced within a specific knowledge area (Abrami et al., 2015).

WHEREAS, critical thinking is increasingly recognized as an essential knowledge and skill across the helping professions, especially within an evidence-based context where the quality of clinicians’ decision making skills are the foundation for integrating best evidence, clinician expertise, and client preference (e.g., Finn, 2011; Gambrill, 2012; Huang, Newman, & Schwartzstein, 2014; Jenicek, 2006; Kamhi, 2011).

WHEREAS, critical thinking is a core competency of interprofessional education/practice (Interprofessional Education Collaborative Expert Panel, 2011), and interprofessional education/practice is an emerging priority of our professional association (ASHA, 2015a).

WHEREAS, critical thinking and its complementary dispositions, open-mindedness and fairmindedness, are an important foundation for understanding the perspectives of others and encouraging advocacy for broader social benefits (Barnett, 1997), and intercultural competence and advocacy are integral to our profession’s mission (ASHA, 2015a).

WHEREAS, critical thinking has been identified as a knowledge and skill for clinical doctoral programs in audiology (ACAE, 2005), in the guidelines for the clinical doctorate in speech-language pathology (ASHA, 2015b), and recommended for undergraduate education in communication sciences and disorders (ASHA, 2015c).

WHEREAS, the feasibility of critical thinking as a professional competency should be considered for all of our accredited programs in order to foster true excellence in professional practice.

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED, the Council of Academic Programs in Communication Sciences and Disorders appoint a task force to develop a document that (a) presents the rationale for critical thinking in professional practice, (b) describes the basic elements of critical thinking, (c) outlines different approaches for teaching critical thinking, (d) describes potential tools for assessing students’ critical thinking, (e) suggests methods for helping faculty to develop their knowledge and skills for helping students to think critically, and (f) describes different approaches for incorporating critical thinking into the curriculum. The task force will also consider the viability of critical thinking as a future professional competency.
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