

Synthesis of Theory and Practice Self-assessment

I. "MY SYNTHESIS PRODUCT SHOWS THAT..."

(adapted from the "Phases of research and engagement" in the Practicum course in the expectation that these are also relevant goals for students' work in moving towards the synthesis product)

A. I can convey who I want to influence/affect concerning what (Subject, Audience, Purpose).

I believe the thrust of my synthesis is very clear. The subject is teaching critical thinking, the audience is other critical thinking teachers, potential employers, or anyone interested in critical thinking skills. **

B. I know what others have done before, either in the form of writing or action, that informs and connects with my project, and I know what others are doing now.

For my practicum I had collected nearly 100 syllabi of critical thinking courses from around the country, in surveyed CT teachers and, of course was able to observe the professors in our own department. In addition I read some research material on teaching critical thinking. Vaske was especially helpful. **

C. I have teased out my vision, so as to expand my view of issues associated with the project, expose possible new directions, clarify direction/scope within the larger set of issues, and decide the most important direction.

I had a definite goal of teaching critical thinking when I entered the program, but my vision altered and expanded as I studied here. My concept of critical thinking has changed radically, and I have acquired many new teaching techniques which should prove valuable in my career. **

D. I have identified the premises and propositions that my project depends on, and can state counter-propositions. I have taken stock of the thinking and research I need to do to counter those counter-propositions or to revise my own propositions.

I have defended parts of my synthesis against counter-propositions where necessary, but I have also revised my position when I realized criticism were correct. In my synthesis I have stated what I think is important and why I think it is important. In the years ahead, I will be continually revisiting what I have written to compare and contrast it with my evolving thought and experience. **

E. I have clear objectives with respect to product, both written and practice, and process, including personal development as a reflective practitioner. I have arranged my work in a sequence (with realistic deadlines) to realize these objectives.

I have established several goals to attain after graduation: obtain a position teaching critical thinking, revive the CCT Think Tank, develop parts of my synthesis into papers that I can present at conferences, and continue work on examining the current state of critical thinking. The first two goals have reasonably clear plans for the immediate future. I believe these plans are realistic. The second two do not have formal plans, but I believe they are realistic projects. **

F. I have gained direct information, models, and experience not readily available from other sources.

I have gained a great deal of information from my professors, and I also have contacted other professionals in the field such as Dan Lloyd, Louise Loomis, and the authors of the collected syllabi. I have collected and collated data that gives me a unique perspective. My syllabi were great sources of information. In all I made contact with approximately 25 critical thinking professionals. **

G. I have clarified the overall progression or argument underlying my research and the written reports.

I considered presentation order when putting my synthesis together. I believe it has a logical progression to it. I have tried to follow Bertrand Russell's example when I write. My papers for my various classes were along similar lines. **

H. My writing and other products Grab the attention of the readers/audience, Orient them, move them along in Steps, so they appreciate the Position I've led them to.

I believe that my papers are very well written, and reasonably clear. I strive to tell the reader what I am doing in a straightforward manner. I realize that I tend to be verbose and try to write more succinctly, but I can usually improve when I revise. **

I. I have facilitated new avenues of classroom, workplace, and public participation.

I have had many opportunities to participate in the CCT program, and I hope my work on the think tank creates a major avenue of participation. I have opportunities to become active in the critical thinking community and fully intend to take advantage of them. **

J. To feed into my future learning and other work, I have taken stock of what has been working well and what needs changing.

I realize I still have much to learn, and I have some good ideas that need development. I feel that I have only begun to study critical thinking. There is much more to learn. I think my written work does well for me. I need to become more consistent in my oral presentations, however. **

II. DEVELOPING AS A REFLECTIVE PRACTITIONER, INCLUDING TAKING INITIATIVE IN AND THROUGH RELATIONSHIPS

1. I have integrated knowledge and perspectives from CCT and other courses into my own inquiry and engagement in social and/or educational change.

I believe I have done this exceptionally well. My entire concept of critical thinking has been modified by my experience. I also integrated my study of Darwinian evolution into my philosophical outlook. **

2. I have also integrated into my own inquiry and engagement the processes, experiences, and struggles of previous courses.

I have built upon every course I have taken. Some courses were more influential than others. I use free writing regularly. I have also incorporated methodological believing and problem-based learning into my regular processes. **

3. I have developed efficient ways to organize my time, research materials, computer access, bibliographies, etc.

My work process still seems chaotic, but I eventually organize my work into a manageable form. I organize, but then the organization slips. OK

4. I have experimented with new tools and experiences, even if not every one became part of my toolkit as a learner, teacher/facilitator of others, and reflective practitioner.

I have experimented with many of the new tools and learning methods. Some seem more comfortable than others, some I have not used at all; many of them will be part of my own teaching. We are offered a wealth of tools in the program, and some work for some people and not for others. I intend to teach many of these tools to my own students. **

5. I have paid attention to the emotional dimensions of undertaking my own project but have found ways to clear away distractions from other sources (present & past) and not get blocked, turning apparent obstacles into opportunities to move into unfamiliar or uncomfortable territory.

Emotional issues played into my project, but ultimately they were overcome. What was most important was to learn that the writing will come if I let it develop. I found that I could go from being clueless to having a polished product if I just had confidence that something would come. I think I was so happy to be in the program that I had fewer emotional issues than before. **

6. I have developed peer and other horizontal relationships. I have sought support and advice from peers, and have given support and advice to them when asked for.

My fellow students were a delightful part of my education. Such a diverse yet remarkably homogenous group! I was often surprised and amazed by them, and felt their support throughout the process. I received some valuable insights from several of my peers, and I endeavored to help my fellow students whenever they needed it. **

7. I have taken the lead, not dragged my feet, in dialogue with my advisor and other readers. I didn't wait for them to tell me how to solve an expository problem, what must be read and covered in a literature review, or what was meant by some comment I didn't understand. I didn't put off giving my writing to my advisor and other readers or avoid talking to them because I thought that they didn't see things the same way as I do.

It has never bothered me to have a professor point out problems with my writing; in fact, I encourage it. No one can see all the facets of an issue and often it takes a fresh eye to spot problems. Usually the comments I received were very cogent, and when I disagreed, I attempted to incorporate my disagreement into my writing. * *

8. I have revised seriously, which involved responding to the comments of others. I came to see this not as bowing down to the views of others, but taking them in and working them into my own reflective inquiry until

I could convey more powerfully to others what I'm about (which may have changed as a result of the reflective inquiry).

My synthesis included work I had done from several classes and the work needed serious revision to make my synthesis all one piece. I appreciated the responses I got and attempted to account for relevant criticism in my synthesis. Most writers need editors and the amount of revisions required by the CCT program is modest compared to what a professional writer would expect. **

9. I have inquired and negotiated about formal standards, but gone on to develop and internalize my own criteria for doing work—criteria other than jumping through hoops set by the professor so I get a good grade.

Having been in grad school before, I entered the program with my own set of criteria. I have never jumped through hoops to get a good grade. To me, a good grade is the logical outcome of doing good work. **

10. I have approached the CCT synthesis course and the CCT program as works-in-progress, which means that, instead of harboring criticisms to submit after the fact, I have found opportunities to affirm what is working well and to suggest directions for further development.

I leave this program with several on-going projects in mind. I also feel that I have much more to learn about critical thinking and how to teach it. As I said in a previous answer, I feel that I am just getting started with critical thinking. After all, I have been at it only a fifth of the time I studied philosophy. **