Critical Learning Activity

When you engage in undergraduate study you are usually presented with what are called key support materials, source materials or key readings. These underpin and extend your learning on a course of study. These and other materials you engage with as part of your studies, need to be examined and the results collated. This will help you to demonstrate critical engagement with a subject or course theme. One strategy for doing this is shown below.

Ask yourself: What sort of material is available? Is it a research article in a journal? Is it a Government report or a report from an international organisation? Is it a video presentation or a webinar or digital platform? Is it an online presentation taken from a University website or a chapter in a book? Did the source material (or the materials cited by those engaged in an online discussion) have relevance to the theme of the discussion or course of study? It is important to recognise material which has some authority. A bright and colourful website which supplies little academic evidence to support its view needs to be used with caution.

The type, range and scope of material determine its authority. However, when critically examined and taken together it is possible to identify issues, similarities, different academic positions and implications for practice.

- Was the significance of the material to your studies apparent? Is it appropriate to use this work for a course project or assignment?
- Was the theoretical position and or argument or relevance to practice made clear?
- If the material was a report of research in practice, was the construction explained, the findings clear and any discussion informative? (including tables, charts or figures)
- Did the material relate to professional practice? In what way?
- Did the material enhance your knowledge? In what way?
- Did anything in the content make you think and perhaps change or refine your view?
- Overall, was the material easy to follow and did it have a gradual focus towards key issues?
- Carefully, consider its relevance to the assignment and the course/module you are following.
- Will the material underpin/support/enhance/inform discussion between groups of students or individual students expressing their views about a theme or area of study online or as part of face to face discussion?

When you have done this, organise the materials into a grid such as the one shown below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Full reference and page numbers</th>
<th>What was the main focus?</th>
<th>Compare or contrast the key points from one piece with another.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Smith (2003) etc. (full reference)</td>
<td>Four well explained definitions of play ...</td>
<td>The definitions of play are useful, but they focus on a developmental approach and promote activity-based learning rather than promoting play opportunities.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Continued)
The grid allows you to compare and contrast ideas and viewpoints and forms a useful way of presenting an argument within an assignment or presentation. Remember this is ONE way of interrogating information and is a starting point for study. Other strategies can be explored (see Chapter 1).

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<td>Jones (2003) etc. (full reference)</td>
<td>Play describes what children do. Playing is a child’s way of being ....</td>
<td>This challenges the views of Smith (2003) and illustrates the debate about play and learning in practice. A child-focused, opportunity-based, playful approach is suggested.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>