Module 5 - Part 2

I see the following examples of strong sense critical thinking in my thinking and actions…

One of my cases as a coordinator for the Court Appointed Special Advocate program at Family Court involved 2 young children. I had chosen this case on two occasions. It returned to the court a second time when another incident occurred, putting the children in danger again. This case reached a crisis point where one of the parent’s threatened to kill everyone involved with the case. Almost everyone, including the Judge, walked away, removed themselves from the case. I had no intention of leaving the case but was faced with a dilemma that I couldn’t overcome. I could not find a volunteer to take the case because of the extreme nature of the circumstances and the criminal record of the parent. My last ditch effort was to ask one of my volunteers who was a federal investigator. He was not afraid at all but would not take the case due to concerns for his own family. This led to the director reaching out to one of the other counties in the state. There was a coordinator who said she would take the case but only if she could have the case without involvement from anyone else, including myself. As much as I wanted to stay involved, the most important thing, in my opinion, was that these kids had representation. I withdrew from the case. I told the director, who wanted me to stay involved, that it was in the children’s best interests that they have someone to represent them.

This was one of the most difficult things I had to do during my 15 years with the court but the most important thing was the children in this case. I believe I exhibited a number of intellectual virtues in this situation. Courage, by wanting to stay on the case when everyone else was leaving it. Trying my utmost to find someone to take the case, and when I no longer could find someone, I gave up the case for the benefit of the children. In my thinking, it was the right thing to do and the only thing to do. I could have remained on the case with the other coordinator, but it would have created a lot of conflict, that was not needed or desired at all in this situation. I believe I operated with integrity, humility and perseverance throughout this situation. I cried alone about it and wrote to my supervisor about it, explaining in more detail why I withdrew from the case. I believe she respected me even more than she previously did, seeing me quickly remove myself from the case, knowing that it was absolutely the right thing to do, under the circumstances. Revisiting this in my thinking is somewhat difficult but I am grateful to be able to share such an example that I still deeply care about.

I can admit to the following examples of weak-sense critical thinking in my thought and actions…..

This situation involved a case involving a teenage girl who was in foster care due to her parents fighting, drug and alcohol abuse and dependency based on these things. The mother was almost non-existent. In the courtroom, she and the father would focus more on themselves rather than their child. They were both immature, in my opinion. I think that I was not as empathetic as I might have been, due to a bias possibly from seeing this situation continue, like many of these cases where the parents don’t do what they are court ordered to do to get their child back. When the child was arrested for an altercation at the group home that she was living at, the public defender was trying to impress on her the seriousness of the situation. She and her father were laughing about it. The child was going to have to wear an ankle bracelet. She was so happy and excited, and she said that she had always wanted one of those like her friends had.

She was given the opportunity for a few home visits, that did not end well. There was almost no supervision. Nothing much changed except now the parents did not have to be responsible for her. Eventually she was allowed to return home although nothing had really changed other than the mother and father not living together. After the case was closed, the Judge commented outside of the courtroom, that she was going to go back to dad anyway when she turned 18, two years later. I commented, said, isn’t it our responsibility to keep these kids safe while they are in our care? I think she still should have been in the State’s custody, but I didn’t say that. He knew, that is what I thought. She was not safe in that home, and we heard a little later, that she was pregnant.

I think I was accurate in the way I was thinking but not that tolerant in my thinking as the case proceeded. I think I had certain assumptions that I think were potentially accurate and that proved to be so. I do not feel better at all because of that. I wish the father had done what he needed to do but he had his own issues that he did not address. I don’t think the court situation helped him much, if at all. He just became more dependent on the system than he was previously. It was a sad situation.

I can improve my thinking and my behavior in the following ways, based on this analysis….

If I were still in that working environment, I would pay even more attention to the case plans for the parents. There is some fault on the part of the social workers. Sometimes they can be lazy and not follow up on things that need to be addressed. Most of those case plans were boiler- plate in nature, not very beneficial, in the long run. What something says and what actually takes place, can be very different things and they often are. Could that be an assumption that I am making?

I can take a broader, more in-depth look at things, in general. I want to catch myself, and apply my thinking about the elements, the standards and the virtues in everyday life, no matter how small the item, or issue may be. I want to create a system for myself that helps me to utilize all of these valuable things that I am learning.