



# CRITICAL THINKING: A NEED OF THE HOUR FOR NURSING STUDENTS: CHALLENGES TO NURSE EDUCATORS

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## **Abstract:**

Nursing students are the future generations to uplift the image of the nursing profession. They come from different background of education and economic conditions. Nursing would not have been an option for students many years ago, now the scenario is changed gradually and many come forward to do nursing course in recent years. The motivation to do nursing may vary but many choose with the commitment since it is rewarding with varied career options and upward career mobility. The social responsibility involved in the profession makes the profession more unique. Student nurses are trained to become nurses with a focus on promotion of health, prevention of diseases, caring the sick and rehabilitating the chronically ill people. Critical thinking is the core competency they should develop to synthesize, analyse and interpret appropriate care to the patients. The methods followed to acquire critical thinking can be many but few methods such as experiential learning, simulation, Reflective practice, Field Trip, Problem Based Learning and Research Project would help them to acquire critical thinking. Nurse educators play a major role in developing the students to acquire the skill.

## **Introduction**

Nursing is a noble profession which needs high level of acceptance, respect for the profession and special training to provide quality care to patients. Students are novice as they enter the college or school of Nursing. They should be equipped with adequate knowledge and skill to practice the profession. As they study various subjects and nursing competencies in the classroom and laboratory, the teacher as a facilitator guide the students to perform those activities in the clinical field. The teacher may not be available all the time and the students have to manage the situation in the clinical field, may be hospital or community. As students, they need more of critical thinking to make clinical decision and to reduce error while providing care to patients.

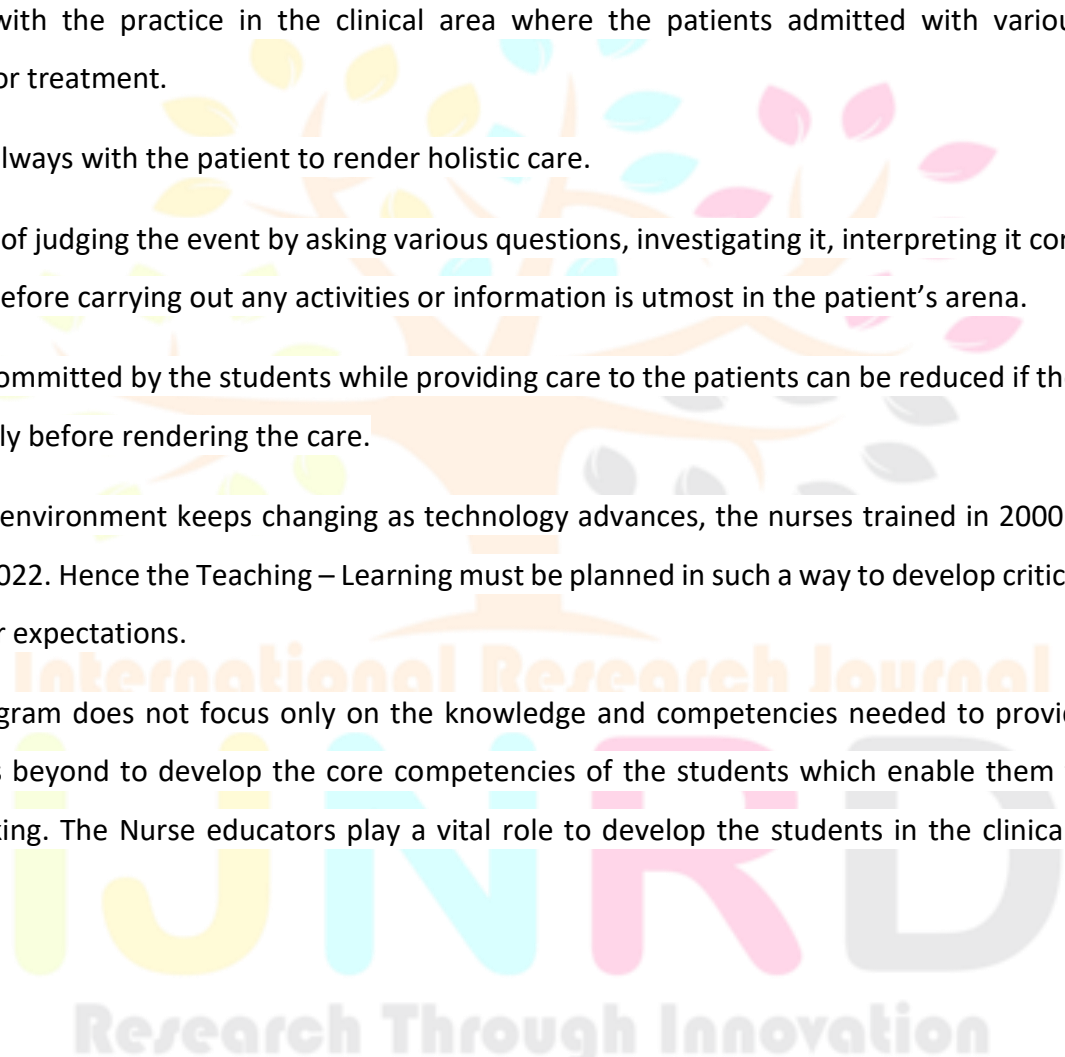
## What do we mean by critical thinking?

*According to Yildirim (2011), Critical thinking is “the process of searching, obtaining, evaluating, analysing, synthesizing and conceptualizing information as a guide for developing one’s thinking with self-awareness, and the ability to use this information by adding creativity and taking risks”.*

**Eoghan Ryan (2022)** defines that **Critical thinking** is the ability to effectively analyse information and form a judgment.

## Why is critical thinking important in nursing education?

- Critical thinking in nursing education is paramount since the theory which is learned in the classroom is integrated with the practice in the clinical area where the patients admitted with various disease conditions for treatment.
- Nurses are always with the patient to render holistic care.
- The process of judging the event by asking various questions, investigating it, interpreting it correctly and evaluate it before carrying out any activities or information is utmost in the patient’s arena.
- The errors committed by the students while providing care to the patients can be reduced if the students think critically before rendering the care.
- Health care environment keeps changing as technology advances, the nurses trained in 2000 is not the same as in 2022. Hence the Teaching – Learning must be planned in such a way to develop critical thinking & meet their expectations.
- Nursing program does not focus only on the knowledge and competencies needed to provide patient care, it goes beyond to develop the core competencies of the students which enable them to acquire critical thinking. The Nurse educators play a vital role to develop the students in the clinical area and classroom.



## What are the Methods that can be used to develop Critical Thinking in Nursing Students?



### EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING:

According to David Kolb, Experiential Learning is the learning process whereby knowledge is created through experience. One of the methods to introduce to the first year nursing students is “**Community orientation program**” where the institution adopt a rural village and orient them to the life style of people living in the particular area. Give a chance to stay in the village for a week to experience of living in the rural community. Make them do social mapping and survey to understand the locally available resources in the village. Allow them to observe the families in their natural settings and interview them to obtain information about various health problems and practices, understand the structural and cultural beliefs of the community, appreciate the health care facilities available in the community, provide health education based on their needs and assist in conducting health camp. This type of exposure helps them to examine their actions and their thought processes, and even their emotional responses towards the need of the people. This experience allows them to prepare themselves to critically think and provide quality care to patients according to the culture and custom, improve the relationships with client who comes for care, and recognize their emotional needs while they are admitted in the hospital.

### SIMULATION:

Simulation is one of the educational strategies and innovative teaching methods used in most professional courses, especially in health care courses. It is considered as an international gold standard for skill development. It is a form of experiential learning and it is student-centered. This method is gaining a lot of popularity and forms the basis of foundation in teaching for the undergraduate nursing program. With the advancement and progress in the sciences including academics, the nursing education programs are also faced with increased pressure to produce graduates who are capable of providing safe and quality based nursing

care and services to patients. It provides hands-on experience without fear and anxiety in the laboratory since they practice on real life scenario, allow the students to learn on their own pace to promote the cognitive, psychomotor and affective domain, encourage the students to develop confidence, critical thinking, and clinical decision-making skills, enable the faculty capacity building in order to promote the Teaching – Learning process. The Indian Nursing Council (INC) has recommended for all the institutions to use simulation as one of the important methods in Teaching – Learning process and it further recommends that up to 30% of skills and procedures may be fulfilled through skill lab/simulation laboratory. Nurse educators have undergone simulation training conducted by INC & PediSTAR. This will make a huge impact on the quality of teaching and learning aspects in nursing education.

### **REFLECTIVE PRACTICE**

It is a Professional activity in which the practitioner thinks critically about their practice and as a result may modify their action or behavior and/or modify their learning needs (CSP, Information paper 31, 2005). Reflection is a tool used as part of student nurses' education and in clinical practice. Supported by the use of reflective models. It can help demonstrate everyday learning. Useful for processing thoughts after a critical incident. Provides an action plan for future practice. Promote personal /professional development and optimum care for patients. A way of studying the students' own experiences to improve the way they work and it is an on going process of examining and refining practice. It is focused on Personal, Pedagogical, Curricular, Intellectual, Societal and Ethical context. Reflection is a critical thought practice and a valuable lifelong learning tool. Useful tool for quality improvement, enhance self-awareness and critical thinking. Offer 15 minutes to the students after the patient care is over to reflect the care given by them and write it in the reflective journal or diary.

### **FIELD TRIP**

It enhances the critical thinking and leadership skills of the students. Educational trip is excited, going to another place is pleasant and fun which is also an interest driven learning experiences for the students. It helps them to acquire new knowledge, behaviour, values and skills. It stimulates the thought process by reflection, problem recognition, clinical decision making and implementation. Giving them a chance to plan and execute the trip helps them to develop leadership skills and the teachers need to be the facilitator. It helps them to look at the objectives of the visit in different perspective. Accessing to different environments stimulates the motivation to learn by comparing the facilities available and foster a love of learning even in the most weaker students.

## PROBLEM BASED LEARNING

It is a student-centred approach in which students learn by themselves in group on the assigned topics. Teacher is the facilitator who gives open ended problems to solve. The problems drive the motivation and the learning of students. The students critically think to analyse a problem, identify relevant facts, and apply existing knowledge and experiences to solve a problem. It leads to deeper learning and understanding of the scenario. The team works together to gather the information and reflect on the facts to answer the questions, even the complex issues can be solved easily. The PBL is a multistage group work. Each stage the teacher calls for a discussion to check the level of achievements related to the given assignment of the students. The teachers determine what they need to learn more and where they can acquire further information and tools necessary to solve the problem. The students with a guidance of the teacher and by their own effort thinking critically to solve the problems.

## RESEARCH PROJECT

Project-based learning is similar to problem-based learning and the learning activities are organized around achieving a shared goal. The project may be individual or group. The research project is focused mainly on finding new knowledge for better products or service. The students have to take lot of effort to identify the topic of their interest, review literature on their own to identify the methodology which drive them to do the research. Learners are likely to encounter problems related to the research which generate more ideas to solve the issues. The teachers are the facilitators to give feedback, suggestions and guidance to produce better results. The project method is the excellent learner centred instructional strategies.

## CONCLUSION

Critical thinking is the intellectual disciplined process which is nurtured through various methods of problem solving and problem posing activities. Critical thinking bring changes in their attitude and behaviour towards holistic patient care. Students who develop critical thinking can perform the activities on a higher level since they are able to comprehend, analyse, synthesize and evaluate the situation. Artificial Intelligence is introduced in education now which can meet the needs of the students according to their ability to learn but it may not help the students to acquire so much of critical thinking needed for patient care. Nurse educators must take it as a challenge to bring changes in students to provide quality care by using various methods in learning to develop critical thinking.

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