

The Importance of Critical Thinking for Nursing Students

Kanjana Srisawad¹
Saisamorn Chaleoykitti²

Abstract

Critical thinking is the ability to use the thinking process with the aim to decide whether to believe something by carefully pondering the information to make decisions and lead to a reasonable conclusion. The concept of critical thinking skills, according to Facione (2015), includes critical thinking skills and the disposition component of critical thinking. The professional nursing practices require critical thinking because nursing is a holistic process that requires both science and art in the application of knowledge to treat patients. The Nursing Council of Thailand has set critical thinking as one of the nursing profession's competencies, and this is consistent with the studies conducted in the 21st century that focus on students' thinking skills. Critical thinking is important to the practice of nursing professionals in order to maximize patient benefits.

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¹Lecturer, Faculty of nursing, Kasem Bundit University

77 Romklao Road, Minburi, Bangkok 10510

e-mail: naza_cmu@hotmail.com

²Assistant Professor , The Royal Thai Army Nursing

317/6Royal Thai Army Hospital, Ratchavithi Road, Phayathai Ratchathewi, Bangkok 10400

e-mail: saisamorn2006@hotmail.com

Introduction

Critical thinking is important to the nursing profession. The rapidly changing social conditions and the advancements in technology and communications impact on health (Jennings, 2011). The changing diseases result in the demand for health services and nursing changes. Nurses provide care to patients with acute and chronic diseases that require quite complex medical equipment and technological development (Cohen, et al., 2010). Nurses are faced with the problem of knowledge that is ever-changing. Nurses equipped with expertise in nursing techniques alone cannot meet the needs and provide maximum benefits to patients. They need to have the skills to think critically in order to practice the nursing profession (Akyuz & Samsa, 2012).

Nursing requires critical thinking since nursing profession practitioners must have unique knowledge of the profession in order to describe the focus of nursing science. This is done by thinking rationally to conclude that the description of nursing science is complex and dynamic. Therefore, nurses need to continuously develop their knowledge. All of these require critical thinking. Nursing is a practice that requires knowledge and understanding of the nursing theoretical concepts and the

ability to apply nursing science with other sciences in order to properly practice professional nursing. The nursing profession's practitioners need to have critical thinking skills (World Federation for Medical Education, 2009).

Critical thinking in nursing is mostly from knowledge gained from the professional nursing practice and the integration process of ideas that are rationally independent. It is a contemplation that focuses on deciding whether to believe something, and nursing is a holistic process. It requires both science and art in the application of knowledge to treat patients. Nursing requires critical thinking and synthesis skills to decide appropriately on the basis of information in accordance with the situation. This is consistent with the study conducted in the 21st century that focused on students' thinking skills with the insertion of thinking skills in lessons, especially critical thinking skills (Christopher, Michael & Ian, 2014). The Thailand Nursing Council (2004) has determined that critical thinking is the core competency of nursing and midwifery in the practice of the nursing profession with considerable emphasis on critical thinking skills. It is the key skill of the nursing professional practice. It is the advanced intelligence process that allows nursing students and nurses to

accurately and appropriately decide on patient care (Facione, 2015).

The Definition of Critical Thinking

Critical thinking is mostly defined without focusing on the specific. Nursing science defines critical thinking as the focus on the thought process and decision making. Facione (2015) defined critical thinking as a decision that is intended to be a self-directed decision. This is the result of the interpretation, analysis, evaluation of arguments, and the conclusion of rational reference. This is done by considering the evidence, concept, and context together. Meanwhile, many scholars have defined critical thinking that focused on thoughts and decisions. There have also been definitions of knowledge and rational decision-making skills. Ennis (1994) defined critical thinking as a process that requires both knowledge and skills to act on a decision. Critical thinking is thinking that is focused on deciding what to believe. This is consistent with the definition of Moore and Parker (2001) as to carefully think and to rationally decide whether to accept or reject anything.

The said critical thinking definition can be concluded to be the ability to use the thinking process, making decisions on believing anything or not,

and carefully pondering the information to make the decisions that will lead to a reasonable conclusion.

Elements of Critical Thinking

Elements of critical thinking are based on the concept of Facione (2015). It is the decision-making process with self-control with the clear aim of making decisions. It is a rational thinking process with evident reference that is contemplated. Critical thinking is comprised of two key components:

1. Critical thinking skill refers to the ability to think carefully according to the situation.

- 1.1 Interpretation refers to the ability to understand a given situation to interpret it with no direct statements to be reasonably concluded.

- 1.2 Analysis refers to the ability to summarize the problem or dispute the obvious argument with a reason or a message from the given situation.

- 1.3 Evaluation refers to the ability to classify the reliability or the reference used by a reason based on the consistency between text and circumstances that apply to the alleged reason.

- 1.4 Inference refers to the ability to identify the possibility of the supposed conclusion based on the

relationship between the conclusion and reasons with evidence.

1.5 Explanation refers to the ability to reasonably describe the relationship of the available data.

1.6 Meta-cognitive self-regulation refers to the ability to rationally monitor, reflect, and fix the fault in their thoughts.

2. The disposition component of critical thinking refers to personal characteristics that are unique for the way of thinking, reasoning, decision-making, and other characteristics recognized by others, which are comprised of the following:

2.1 Truth-seeking refers to the character that needs to seek the truth, to question the aims to relentlessly find the truth, and reassess when new information is known.

2.2 An open-mind refers to the patience to not show the characteristic behavior indicative of prejudice against others whose views differ from their own and sensitivity to their own prejudices.

2.3 Analyticity refers to characteristics that regularly conduct analysis to rationally see the importance of the information. This requires the ability to define the data, forecast situations, and connect the observations from clinical trials with knowledge of the theory.

2.4 Systematicity refers to the systematic characteristic in working with a clear and sequenced plan of work.

2.5 Critical thinking self-confidence refers to the characteristic of those who are self-confident, dare to think and make decisions for their own reasons, the ability to effectively solve problems and make decisions, and the ability to perform appropriate critical thinking that is not too high or too low for reality.

2.6 Inquisitiveness refers to the characteristic that is keen to curiosity and research all the time. If there is any interest in any matter, it will be seriously investigated.

2.7 Maturity refers to a character that solves problems using guidelines based on the standard with regard to ethics.

The Importance of Critical Thinking for Nursing Students

Critical thinking is a process that is an essential component of the nursing profession's practice for the health care of patients. The nursing profession's practice is unique and is constantly evolving. The practice of nursing care is a holistic process that requires both science and art in the application of knowledge to treat patients. The nursing profession's practice requires critical thinking skills.

The Nursing Council of Thailand has set critical thinking as the core competency of 1st class nurses and midwives from all of the 14 core competencies. This matches the 13th competency: to continuously self-develop to build self-esteem. The nursing competencies are creativity, critical thinking, self-awareness, compassion, emotional stress management by continuously searching for knowledge and expertise, and being aware of their right to protect public health.

Additionally, there must also be critical thinking. It is necessary to fully develop nursing students with critical thinking before graduation due to the following seven reasons: (Leaboontawatchai, 2000):

1. Humans with their brain and intelligence have to think all the time to improve the world, society, and their families to have a better quality of life. Critical thinking will lead to better knowledge and effective decision making.

2. The National Education Act of B.E. establishes guidelines for the reform of education with student-centered learning to cultivate and create a desirable trait in students. The learning process must be for the students to use

their thought with more focus on critical thinking.

3. Nursing science is a science that is ever-changing. Nursing practitioners need to track progress and use critical thinking in judging new knowledge to understand it and apply it properly.

4. Nursing profession practitioners must treat patients and make decisions on methods of care to commonly or urgently provide for patients. Nurse practitioners have to make correct decisions because these are made to help patients. Nursing practice requires the nurse to collect information to be considered on the nursing diagnoses. The consideration requires the ability to analyze data and nursing procedure planning. The plan must also be evaluated. Therefore, critical thinking is needed for the practice of the nursing profession.

5. For ethical decision making, analyses are needed in the practice of the nursing profession because ethical problems in the nursing profession are issues that must be decided between acting or not acting in different situations. The nursing profession's practice requires careful consideration and critical thinking.

6. Past forms of instruction in higher education have been mostly teacher-centered. It is the teaching method mainly used in lectures.

Students listen and memorize the content. The knowledge has been evaluated in terms of content that needs to be remembered.

7. The rapid advancement of science and technology in all disciplines leads society towards being more globalized. This requires critical thinking to be able to live appropriately in an ever-changing society.

Summary

Critical thinking is the ability to use the thinking process to make decisions with the aims being to believe anything or not and to carefully ponder the information to decide on a reasonable conclusion based on the concept of critical thinking of Facione (2015) that includes two components: 1) Critical thinking skill is the ability to carefully think in various scenarios that

are comprised of interpretation, analysis, evaluation, inference, explanation, and meta-cognitive self-regulation, and 2) The disposition component of critical thinking that includes their unique personal characteristics about the way they think, reason, and make decisions in situations. This includes the other characteristics of truth-seeking, having an open-mind, analyticity, systematicity, critical thinking with self-confidence, inquisitiveness, and maturity. Thus, critical thinking is vital to the nursing profession because nursing is a holistic process. It requires both science and art in the application of knowledge to treat patients. Nursing requires quite a lot of critical thinking skills. It is deemed a key skill for the practice of the nursing profession. It is an advanced intelligence process that allows decisions to be made regarding patient care.

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