



Reflection on Problem-Based Learning and Critical Thinking

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ABSTRACT

Many pedagogies in nursing education are developed to boost students' critical thinking skills. Problem Based Learning (PBL) is the widely used methodology to enhance nursing students' critical thinking skills and to solve the practical problems in the clinical and academic areas independently. Globally many studies have examined its effects on nursing students' learning outcomes and others have studied the association among the outcomes. In this scholarly research paper the author has reflected on the importance of PBL and the associated hindering factors for the nursing students.

Keywords: Problem based learning; Critical thinking; Self-directed learning; Problem-solving

DESCRIPTION

An important concept that helps students in all disciplines for better and in-depth understanding of all core concepts is critical thinking. It is a cognitive process that students use for better judgment, rational analysis in clinical reasoning and finally for reaching a sound decision. It has summarized critical thinking into three phases in the milieu of teaching: (i) To understand assumptions because our choices, actions and decisions are based on these assumptions; (ii) asking and exploring a different view point, others' perspective to check for validity and accuracy of these assumptions; (iii) and reaching a sound decision founded on these multi-perspective assumptions. Today our health care system is patient centered and our healthcare industry is facing many challenges of advancement so in order to compete with these complexities we need to accept the importance and need of critical thinking in education and practice [1-3].

The importance of higher order skills for nursing students in order to achieve academic and practical competencies needs to be understood because, nurses are considered responsible and accountable due to their reasoning abilities and for the actions they take in clinical area that requires skills [4]. It states that "facts learned in youth have become insufficient and in many instances actually untrue; skills learned in youth have become outmoded by new technologies". Therefore, to make nursing

professionals competent and skilled in this growing multidimensional environment we need to incorporate different skills of critical thinking. Although various strategies are used for enhancing critical thinking but Problem Based Learning methodology (PBL) is a best strategy for development of critical thinks. It helps nursing students in analyzing and reaching to a best solution to problems they encounter during their clinicals and helping in bridging theory-practice gap [5].

PBL is an educational strategy that is student centered so in this methodology students are conscientious for their teaching and learning, however, the teacher plays the role of a moderator. Explicitly in this pedagogy an open ended problem is given to a group of few students with the expectation to solve it under the best theoretical and practical approach. The students comment and counter-comment and are allowed to ask, what, why, how while all members of the group play an active role and argue with the best research evidences in a holistic way [6,7]. The overall goal of PBL is to enhance students' critical thinking skills to make them a critical being. The paper under discussion will enlighten the effects of PBL and its relationship in developing critical thinking among students in nursing profession.

DISCUSSION

In this study two groups of students from different institutions were exposed to traditional lecture method and problem based

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learning and assessed by “Critical-Thinking Ability Scale for in College Students” (CTASCS), problem solving and self-directed learning scale developed in Korean context. In the PBL group they administered questions reflecting CT, self-driven learning and problems solving. However, the statistical results did not showed any significance difference between the experimental and control group [8-10]. The findings show a positive correlation between critical thinking, self-driven learning and problem solving and vice versa in the PBL group. The study did not produced expected results may be due to limited time (2 hours/week for 16 weeks) and due to inadequacy in delivering instructions compared to same studies done in the past. Time period should be increased in order to get productive results as the duration was one whole year indicated by literature. The population also consisted of first year nursing students and may be this is one of the reasons because as a freshman students are under other stressors which suppress the learning [11]. These findings are not consistent with studies conducted outside Korea but literature supports this association of critical thinking and PBL within Korea.

The literature supports the positive effects of PBL so that's why problem based learning should be incorporated in the nursing curriculum because it enhances the quality of care provided by the nursing students.

CONCLUSION

The institutions can play an important role by training nursing faculty because only a trained and qualified teacher can generate the interest of students using these innovative learning methods. Therefore, teachers have a great responsibility to maintain psychological and intellectual environment in the class which could lead to effective learning while maintaining a physical environment is the responsibility of institution. We use to teach big classes and are preoccupied to give a passing result of 100% but I think it is more important to illuminate the criticality of a nursing student and develop them competent instead of make them grades oriented. Further research with different population and large sample size is suggested in order to understand applicability and generalizability of PBL. The author also suggests increasing the intervention time to minimum of 40 sessions per year as evidenced by literature. In this way nursing students at all levels can benefit from PBL the strategies used to enhance CT.

In extension to all above discussion and experience that I have gained as a teacher and from my TCT teacher I conclude that it is vitally important to craft nurses think critically in this modern era. The implications are long lasting and it helps students to learn the core concepts instead of rote learning. Therefore, it is challenging for the faculty to think, develop and use this strategy in limited resources in respect to our need and requirement to produce competent nursing professionals.

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