

Thinking critically about critical thinking in nursing: a challenge for nurse educators.

Critical thinking (CT) is purported to be an essential component in the practice of nursing for determining the most appropriate patient care and ensuring that the care is safe and effective (Brunt, 2005; Rubenfeld and Scheffer, 2010, 2015; Alfaro-LeFevre, 2009). However, despite attempts to define CT for nursing practice, there remains a lack of agreement of the definition of CT as it applies to the nursing discipline. For example, some researchers maintain that CT includes wider dimensions such as, “critical reflection”, “clinical decision making”, “complex judgement” and “clinical judgement and reasoning” (Benner, Hughes and Sutphen, 2008), while others argue that it is a rational approach which favours logic over emotion (Benner, Tanner and Chelsa, 2009). Without a clear consensus of what CT is, and what it involves for nursing practice, it is difficult for nurses to apply it.

This presentation first examines what exactly CT is, how it can best be defined, why it is needed, and how its use can be taught. It also examines debate around generalist versus specificist perspectives on CT and philosophical and educational perspectives on its transferability. It then presents evidence from literature and experience that the teaching of CT in higher education and for nursing is compromised by the lack of agreement in defining CT. The presentation concludes with an endorsement of the views and recommendations of Brookfield (2005, 2011) as offering a helpful definition and process for CT and a useful way forward in the CT debate and the application of CT for nursing.

References:

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