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Opinion
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Cultivating Learning through Deep Thinking Techniques: Is it Enough?

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Opinion

The application of theory to practice has been an ongoing issue amongst nursing students for decades. As educators we have made several attempts to emphasize the need for critical thinking but still struggle with practical methods of developing effective strategies to meet the demands to today's learner. Deep learning strategies may be one solution to foster student learning and recall of information but is it enough to develop critical reasoning behind using tangible objects to define a situation? Associating items with knowledge and recall may be short-term. If not used in an actual situation that information may become lost. How can educators ensure students are developing critical thinking techniques to best apply theory to practice?

At a recently attended conference in the United Arab Emirates, the topic of deep thinking strategies sparked my attention. The use of objects to transform learning in clinical practice came to mind; however, the question of how do we foster critical thinking in the classroom with theoretical content was still a question. Situations involving plastic tubes with holes could be easily associated with abnormal health conditions to enhance student learning but do students actually know what is taking place to have caused the holes in the plastic tube? How is learning measured? How can educators ensure successful knowledge transfer?

Creativity from the educator is a necessity in this very instance. Being adaptive and accessing the resources is a required element of using tangible objects as a deep thinking strategy. Perhaps an ideal way of remembering what abnormal health condition exists within a piece of plastic tube with holes. What remains missing is the ability of students to process the application of why the holes are present in the tube and to explain what is happening. Taking it one step further is where the lack of critical thinking exists. As educators the theory must be explained and tested to identify if the learner if making a connection between a health condition and a practical situation.

Differing methodologies of teaching are welcoming to any program of study. Picking and choosing which strategy will best fit the learning need is the requirement of the educator and the area of study. Doing so will foster a culture of deep thinking and ultimately bridge the gap between theory and practice. As students learn and stack new information to previous content, they must remember to process the content at a level of comfort and understanding. Content that is not referred to will likely be lost in the shuffle and not available for future use. Learning ripens with use and adds knowledge to our everyday practice. As health care providers we need to develop a repository of information rich in content and suitable to multiple health conditions and ailments.