

Asking the Right Questions: Using Scaffolding to Promote Critical Thinking in Novice Nurses

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INTRODUCTION

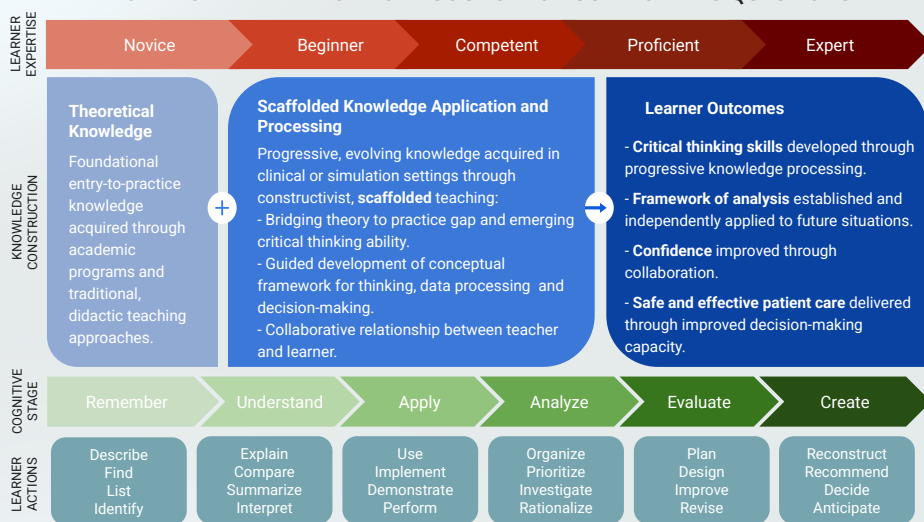
- Nurse educators/teachers influence success of novice nurses and must therefore be prepared with strategies to enable novice nurses in developing critical thinking:
 - Traditional, didactic teaching approaches common in academia are increasingly proving to be ineffective at developing critical thinking in clinical learning environments.
- Critical thinking:** advanced, high-level processing and application of knowledge to contextualized situations, recognizing complexity and nuances, analyzing data and evidence-based information, evaluating options, and self-reflecting.
- Scaffolding questions:** guided questioning intended to expand and promote evolution of learner's thinking and knowledge according to their individual learning needs, while teacher's support is gradually withdrawn.

(Bechok, Blevins & Goss, 2024; Coffman, Iommi & Morrow, 2023; Jessee, 2019; Oyelana, Olson & Cairne, 2022; Seibert, 2023; Thonney & Montgomery, 2019; Tilley et al., 2007)

THESIS

- Scaffolding questions is more effective for teaching critical thinking skills and bridging the theory-to- practice gap than traditional unidirectional teaching strategies.
- Through scaffolded education, teachers can guide the nurse toward desirable learning outcomes:
 - Progressive, evolving knowledge application,
 - Develop adaptable conceptual framework,
 - Confidence in decision-making.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK & RESOURCE FOR SCAFFOLDING QUESTIONS



(Adams, 2015; Benner, 1982; Bloom, 1956; Brandon, 2010; Krathwohl, 2002; Seibert, 2023; University of Florida, n.d.)

DISCUSSION

- In comparison to traditional, didactic teaching methods, literature overwhelmingly supports the use of creative, constructivist teaching strategies to teach clinical reasoning and critical thinking.
- Outcomes of scaffolded education are aligned with the learning goals of nurses achieving proficiency and expertise, and higher-level cognitive skills:

PROGRESSIVE, EVOLVING LEARNING

- As novice nurse learning needs change and evolve, the teacher's approach will evolve as well.
- Through the scaffolded process of facilitating, followed by withdrawal of support, educator is challenging learner.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK FOR CRITICAL THINKING

- Learning is sustained to be applied to future experiences.
- Teachers are promoting self-directed lifelong learning skills and exposing learners to elevated ways of thinking.

CONFIDENCE & SATISFACTION

- Expert teacher and novice learner form trusting relationship, are both engaged in knowledge co-construction.
- When nurses are more self-confident in patient care, quality indicators improve.

(Coffman, Iommi & Morrow, 2023; Higginson & Williams, 2018; Kiel & Linkov, 2025; Seibert, 2023; Tilley et al., 2007; VanTassel-Baska, 2012; Zhou et al., 2025)

LITERATURE REVIEW

- Articles were searched in the Athabasca University (AU) and Humber Polytechnic (HP) electronic library search engines.
- Initial search was targeted at gathering information and understanding the landscape of existing literature directly addressing the topic of this paper: scaffolding questions as a teaching strategy.
- Next, I searched for terms that were more specific to my thesis and arguments, such as critical thinking gap novice nurses, didactic teaching ineffective nursing, and shift from traditional teaching nursing.

CULTURAL RESPONSIVITY

- Safe, high quality patient care delivery is sustained by culturally responsive health care teams:
 - Considerate, respectful communication,
 - Meaningful inclusion of diverse voices,
 - Cognisant of how individual lived experiences are valuable in decision-making,
 - Sensitive & responsive to sociocultural context.
- Scaffolded learning is better suited to inclusivity of diverse voices than traditional, didactic teaching approaches, the latter of which emphasize the teacher as the dominant voice.

(Day & Beard, 2019; Krasnoff, 2016)

IMPLEMENTATION & CONCLUSION

- Instead of teachers unidirectionally providing information or knowledge to the learner, teachers will ask intentional questions or prompt the learner to facilitate the learner's arrival at their own answers and conclusions while thinking along a particular scaffold.
- To implement scaffolding questions, teachers will:
 - Prepare by identifying where the learner is along cognitive and expertise continuums. This requires building rapport.
 - Review learner actions expected at each cognitive stage.
 - Ask questions to elicit expected learner actions/abilities at their stage, assessing and encouraging their mastery of the stage.
 - Then expand their thinking by asking questions relevant to the next stage learner actions to progress their cognitive stage and expertise.

(Bechok, Blevins & Goss, 2024; Seibert, 2023)

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