

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

#### 1.1 Background of the study

The aim of any professional education is clearly the development of practitioners who are not just knowledgeable and skillful but capable of responding to changing needs in the world of practice. In nursing, the real world of practice does not often present well-defined problems to the practitioners (Wong, et al; 1995). Consequently, a nurse practitioner will need to have multiple experiences in order to learn how to cope in a ever-changing health-care environment. Learning from experience is profoundly important in nurse education.

In addition, Schon (1987) concurs by saying that the real world is dynamic and each client encounter is unique. There are no pre-set solutions to real-life problems. Schon explains further by saying that the practitioner needs to see the world on their own and come up with their own interpretations of the reality. The individual will have to learn 'how to learn' in order to add knowledge and skills for further improvement and professional development.

The challenge of the nurse educators, therefore is to find ways to help the individual learner to deal with everyday situation in a competent manner (Wong et al 1995). Reflection has been identified as an effectual learning strategy that can achieve the aim of assisting a learner to learn from his or her daily work experience (Boud et al 1985; Murphy & Atkins). According to Jarvis (1992), reflection helps to turn each experience into a potential learning situation and enhances the development of professional competency.

The concept of reflection has been widely discussed in the field of teacher education in the 1980s. Loughran (1994) conducted a longitudinal research study on the development of reflective practice in a group of student-teachers during a pre-service education program. Results indicated the success in translating the concept of reflection in a meaningful way. Besides applying it in practice for themselves, the teacher educators can model it for their own students.

Since the beginning of 1990s, the nursing literature began to feature conceptual and empirical work on reflection. Schons' (1983, 1987) work on reflection was the most widely cited in the literature (Durgahee 1996; Hallette, 1997; Malik, 1998; Stoddart,1996; Wong et al, 1995,1997). Schon was also credited as the most important educational theorist who developed the concept of reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action. It is believed the practice of these two concepts will help an individual in finding ways to deal with the ill-defined problems of the real world.

Topics discussed in most of the nursing literature seemed to center around the concept of reflection and how its processes can be used as a learning strategy in the practice environment ( Burrows, 1995; James & Clarke, 1994; Johns & Graham, 1996; Lyons, 1999 ). While Burrows (1995) advocated the need to introduce students to the art of reflective discussions and writing, Johns & Graham (1996) spoke about having a structured approach to develop students' reflective skills.

Compared to conceptual literature on reflection, empirical work on reflection is considerably less in number. Not surprisingly, much of the published work on reflection or reflective practice tended to focus on examining the effectiveness of reflective practice as learning tool(Davies, 1995; Snow et al 1994; Mountford & Rogers, 1996), the assessment of students' reflection (Wong et al 1995; Richardson,1995), and the preparation and skills needed to reflect ( Shields, 1995; Stoddart, 1996).

In general, the concept of reflection has been accepted in nurse education in a number of countries. In Malik's (1998) study, Australia was mentioned as a country where reflection was included as a domain within the competency statements issued by the Australian Nurse Registering Authorities. Malik also mentioned that in the UK structured reflective model was beginning to appear within new curriculum documents for the pre-registration diploma programs.

With reflective practice gaining a strong foothold in nurse education, there will be a need to have more empirical work done in order to shore up the value of reflection as an effective learning strategy. It is believed that an integrative review of

some of these empirical studies is timely and will provide added knowledge for future study.

## **1.2 Statement of the problem**

The concept of reflection in nurse education began to feature prominently in nurse education during the 1990s. The upsurge in interest is reflected in the number of conceptual and empirical work carried out during that period (see Table 3.1). Despite the amount of conceptual work published in the nursing literature, many nurse writers still commented that the concept of reflection and reflective practice was still inadequately defined (Andrews, 1996; Durgahee, 1996; Getliffe, 1996; Paterson, 1995; Shields, 1995).

Lyons (1999) finds the effort of trying to understand reflection as strategy for teaching and learning in professional nurse education and practice as both fascinating and frustrating. The complexity of the phenomena of reflection makes it difficult to define reflection and operationalization of the concept is just as problematic.

A review of the nursing literature has shown that most of the empirical work on reflection was done around 1995 and 1996 where a total of ten articles was published (see Table 3.1). These work focused mainly on the effectiveness, assessment and skills of reflective practice. Given the fact that reflective practice has gained a strong support in nurse education, more research work is still needed in order to legitimize and clarify further the concept of reflection and to find out more about the best ways to teach reflection.

The present meta-analysis study on research done in the area of reflective practice can provide a synthesized report on the nature and the results of empirical work done in the 1990s.

### **1.3 Objective of the study**

The objective of this project is to carry out a meta-analysis study on the concept of reflective practice. The meta-analysis consists of fifteen research articles published during the 1990s and these articles are the samples in the present study. The focus of this study will be on the samples' three key variables of: 1) objectives and purposes, 2) the methodologies, and 3) the research findings.

### **1.4 Research questions**

With respect to the statement of the problem and objective of the study outlined above, the following research questions are raised:

1. What are the themes within the objectives and purposes in the research articles on reflective practice?
2. What are the research methodologies used in the research articles on reflective practice?
3. What are the findings in the research articles on reflective practice?

### **1.5 Significance of the study**

In this study, fifteen published research articles on reflective practice are analyzed by using the methodology of meta-analysis. Within these fifteen articles, the main areas under investigation cover various aspects of reflective practice which include examining the effects of reflective practice, assessing the level of reflection and the skills and preparation for reflection.

Findings of this meta-analysis study will enable the nursing profession to have a better understanding of the concept and process of reflection. In addition, the findings will provide practical information on how reflection can be used effectively as a learning strategy for student nurses. Nurse educators can utilize the findings on reflective journals and clinical debriefing to develop reflective skills in their students.

As the study also reports on the assessment of the level of reflectivity, the information will prove useful to educators who wish to measure the student's reflection. Finally, results provided by this study can be of help to nurses interested in carrying out research on reflection.

### 1.6 Limitation of the study

Time and resource constraints did not permit this study to include all the published research articles on reflective practice. Out of the twenty-one articles obtained, only fifteen were considered eligible for this meta-analysis study. The sample also did not include unpublished studies like dissertations and conference papers. A meta-analysis that is restricted to only published studies between the year 1990 and 1999, and not rated for qualities may produce distorted results.

While it is useful to have two independent observers extract the data in order to avoid errors, the researcher is the only personnel involved in extracting the relevant data to provide answers for the three research questions.

In addition, the findings in this study is limited to the three key variables being studied in this meta-analysis study. This limitation does not allow for the generalisability of the findings from the current study.

However, it would be appropriate to note here that the limitations faced in the present study did not in anyway negate the findings of this study. The methodology of meta-analysis has enabled the researcher to synthesize the selected variables from the fifteen research articles. With various checks and balances used in ensuring a credible pool of data, the systematic analysis of the articles have contributed additional knowledge to the study on reflection.