

CHAPTER 5 SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

5.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter recapitulates the objectives and methodology of the study and summarizes the major findings. Included are some of the recommendations for the consideration of the nursing profession with a special interest in reflective practice. Suggestions for further research are also prescribed in this chapter.

5.2 Objectives and methodology of this study

The purpose of this study is to find out the followings:

- 1) what are the themes within the objectives and purposes of 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 reported in the research articles on reflective practice?

The research methodology of meta-analysis is used in this study. The sample under study comprises fifteen research articles on reflective practice published between the year 1994 and 1998. Various forms have been developed specifically to collect data from these fifteen research articles. The data collected were :1) objectives and purposes of study, 2) research methodologies, and 3) research findings. Data analysis was mainly descriptive using frequency count and percentage. Thematic analysis was used to analyze the data on objectives and purposes of the fifteen research articles.

5.3 Summary of major findings

To facilitate discussions, the major findings of this meta-analysis study are summarized under three sections : 1) objectives and purposes, 2) methodologies, and 3) research findings

5.3.1 Objectives and purposes of the fifteen research articles

Thematic analysis of the objectives and purposes revealed three major and two minor themes. The three major themes are :1) effects of reflection, 2) learning stool, and 3) assessing reflection. While the first major theme of 'effects of reflection' was recorded by 40% of the fifteen research articles (N=6), the theme of 'learning tool' had 26.60% (N=4) and 20 % (N=3) for the theme of 'assessing reflection'. The two minor themes are : 1) strategies of reflection and 2) reflection models. Each of these two minor themes are reported in one article out of the fifteen research studies.

5.3.2 Methodologies of the fifteen research articles

The present study is based on a method known as meta-analysis which involves merging findings from many studies that have examined the same phenomena. The phenomena being examined in this study is reflective practice. The concept of meta-analysis can be likened to 'analysis of the analysis'.

The sample of this meta-analysis consists of fifteen research articles published in the field of nursing research on the subject of reflective practice. Searches for these articles were done mainly through the on-line database of Cumulative Index and Allied Health Literature.

The total number of research participants from the fifteen studies was three hundred and sixty nurses. Majority of the nurses were students, making up a total of 90.8% (N=327). These nurses were either students enrolled in pre-registration courses (20%, N=72) or post-registration programs (70.8%, N=255). The remaining small percentage of research participants came from nurse educators with 5.3% (N=19) and nursing supervisors 3.9% (N=14).

On the methods of data collection, findings show a total of seven methods which include interviews, reflective diaries, questionnaires, observation notes, reflective group discussion, tutorial recording and teleconference recording. While ten research studies used interviews, seven studies used reflective diaries. The methods of questionnaires, observation notes and reflective group discussion were used in two

studies each. The remaining two methods of tutorial and teleconference recordings were used in one study each.

With regard to the data analysis method, the only technique used in all the research studies was content analysis. This was largely due to the nature of data collected through the seven methods mentioned earlier. Most of these data were subjected to content analysis looking for themes to report the research findings.

5.3.3 Findings of the fifteen research articles

Meta-analysis of the fifteen research articles' findings has shown the nurses' positive acceptance of reflective practice as a useful tool in helping students learn from their clinical experience. Findings suggested that reflection could promote insight into one's thinking pattern, build confidence and help students to acquire as well as generate knowledge by reflecting on their clinical experiences. The two reflective activities of diaries and clinical debriefing sessions had been identified as effective methods in enhancing students' reflective skills.

Reflective diaries were reported to be able to show evidence of reflective thinking. Consequently, there were studies attempting to measure the level and extent of reflectivity from student's diaries. Findings suggested the reliability of categorizing students as non-reflectors, reflectors and critical reflectors based on Mezirow's model when analyzing the diaries. Overall students did achieve lower level of reflection, but the identification of finer levels of reflection was problematic and less reliable.

Findings also highlighted the need to have experienced and knowledgeable educators to facilitate reflective sessions for the students. Teacher's support during clinical debriefing sessions was found to be important and students looked up to the teacher as educator, counselor and facilitator for change. In addition, a relaxed and non-threatening environment was reported to be desirable for a successful reflective session.

5.4 Conclusion

The aim of professional education is clearly the development of practitioners who are not only knowledgeable and competent but who can respond to the changing needs in the world of practice. There is credibility in adopting reflective practice as a learning tool in nurse education especially in the clinical teaching of student nurses. The nature of nursing is such that nurses need to learn from their experiences in the clinical settings which offer rich sources of knowledge and skills.

It is believed that reflection is a skill, one which can be taught and learned through comprehensive understanding of the concept. The way to do it is by examining the focus of reflection, the process of reflection and by having the attitudes of open-mindedness, responsibility and wholeheartedness (Dewey, 1933, cited by Boud et al, 1985).

Reflective practice in nurse education is certainly a path worth pursuing. Reflecting on experience can lead towards an education where nurses learn to understand the meaning of their experiences, towards a profession that values its practical experiences, and a research tradition that has a language that adequately expresses the work of nurses (Palmer et al, 1994).

5.5 Recommendation

As a teaching and learning method, reflective practice is perhaps best taught formally to teachers, especially clinical teachers, as well as students. A short course or module on the concept and practice of reflection can be made part of the nursing curriculum for nursing students, both pre and post registration.

Nurse educators can use a structured approach like the Johns' model of reflection (Appendix A) to facilitate students reflective learning through clinical debriefing sessions or the writing of reflective diaries. It is recommended that these two reflective activities be carried out in a quiet part of the ward and in a relaxed and supportive environment. Whenever possible, reflective group sessions should also be kept small.

To avoid student's anxiety and discomfort, it is suggested that beginning student's diaries should not be assessed for level of reflectivity or evidence of clinical competence. If there is a need for assessment, then the aims and purposes of assessing the student's diaries must be explained and understood by the students.

Based on findings of the present meta-analysis study, future research in the area of reflective practice should focus on developing a reliable and valid tool to assess student's level and extent of reflectivity. There is also a need to involve more educators and nursing supervisors as research participants in future studies if reflective practice is intended to become part and parcel of nursing practice.