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Introduction

Healthcare in the 21st century is globally characterised by a dynamic, fast-paced environment. Nurses are required to keep up by adapting, adopting and changing in order to remain competent and deliver quality patient care. In a healthcare environment often plagued by scarce resources, changing disease profiles and advancing science and technology, nurses have to be self-aware and self-directed. It is also imperative that nurses continuously evaluate their competency and development needs.

Reflective practice is recommended by the nursing fraternity to assist nurses' self-evaluation and ability to cope in this frequently changing nursing context. This study aimed to explore and describe the facilitation role of educators in developing reflective learning by students. Reflective learning is a powerful tool for supporting self-directed learning, theory-practice integration and critical thinking (Kuiper & Pesut 2009:76). Students must therefore be encouraged and supported to develop reflective learning abilities. Educators can provide this support through appropriate teaching and learning activities.

However, for the reflective learning approach to be effectively implemented, well-planned activities by a facilitator who understands the reflective process are required (Jacobs, Vakalisa & Gawe 2011:54). This places a huge responsibility on educators who lack training in the use of reflective learning or who lack personal experience in reflective learning and practice. Educators skilled in reflective practice are actually more effective in promoting student reflective learning (Frick, Carl & Beets 2010:421).

Aim of the Study

The aim of this quantitative study was to determine if educators in one of the nine provinces in South Africa, had common practices and views with regard to facilitating reflective learning by students, and whether the findings may be generalised to the greater population of educators in South Africa.

The purpose of the study was to explore and describe the role of educators in the facilitation of reflective learning by students.

The research objectives that guided this study were to:

- explore the reflective teaching practices of educators
- describe the various types of learning activities educators use to promote reflective learning by students
- determine whether the learning environment is conducive to promoting reflective learning and teaching

Ethical Considerations

Ethical clearance was obtained from the University of South Africa, where the researcher was registered as a student. Permission to conduct the study was obtained from the nine nursing education institutions selected for the sample. A letter with detailed and relevant information about the study was attached to each questionnaire. The researcher's contact details were also included in the letter in the event the respondent required further information. Therefore an implied consent was acknowledged when the respondent returned the completed questionnaire. No name or other identifier could be traced back to any institution or respondent thereby maintaining their anonymity.

Methodology

An **exploratory descriptive design** was deemed to be most suitable for meeting the study objectives.

The **population** selected for the study were educators registered with the South African Nursing Council (SANC), which is the professional licensing body for nursing in South Africa.

The **eligibility criteria** for participating in the study were:

- the educators had to be practising at a registered nursing education institution.
- the institutions based in one of the provinces in South Africa, had to offer a SANC accredited programme that led to registration as a nurse.

Since there was no available sampling frame for educators in the province, the nursing education institutions were used in the sampling procedure. There were 89 institutions of which 23 met the eligibility criteria. The total of 23 comprised three types of nursing education institutions which were proportionately different in size.

Therefore a **Stratified Random Sampling Method** was used to ensure representativeness of the sample:

Type of institution	Number (%) in eligible population	Number in sample
Private colleges	12 (52%)	6
Universities	4 (17%)	1
Public colleges	7 (31%)	2
Total	23 (100%)	9

All educators at the nine randomly selected NEIs were included in the study. The sample comprised of 231 educators.

For the data collection a structured questionnaire was the instrument of choice. The questionnaires were delivered and collected from the respondents using a 'home delivery' method. This resulted in a 52% return rate with 121 of the 231 handed out questionnaires returned.

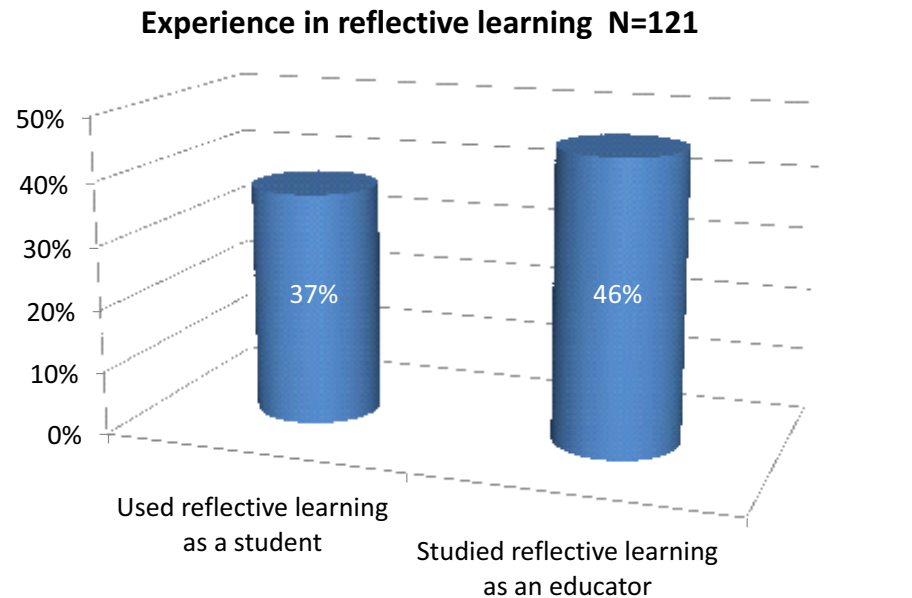
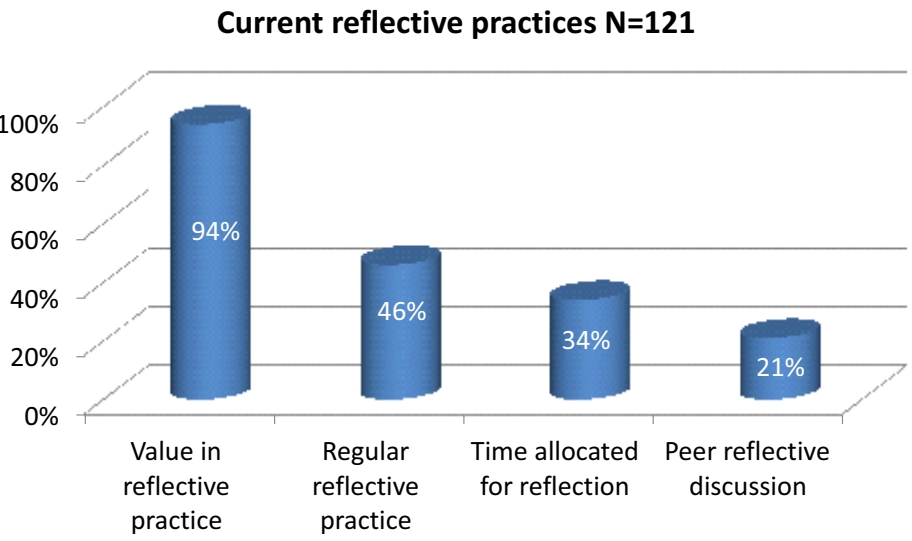
The data was analysed using a SAS JMP version 10.1 computer programme.

Results

The most significant **demographic findings** were that the educator group is an aging population with 59% of the respondents being over 45 years of age. Also of note was that 54% of the respondents had less than 10 years nursing education experience, indicating that they entered the field of education later in their careers.

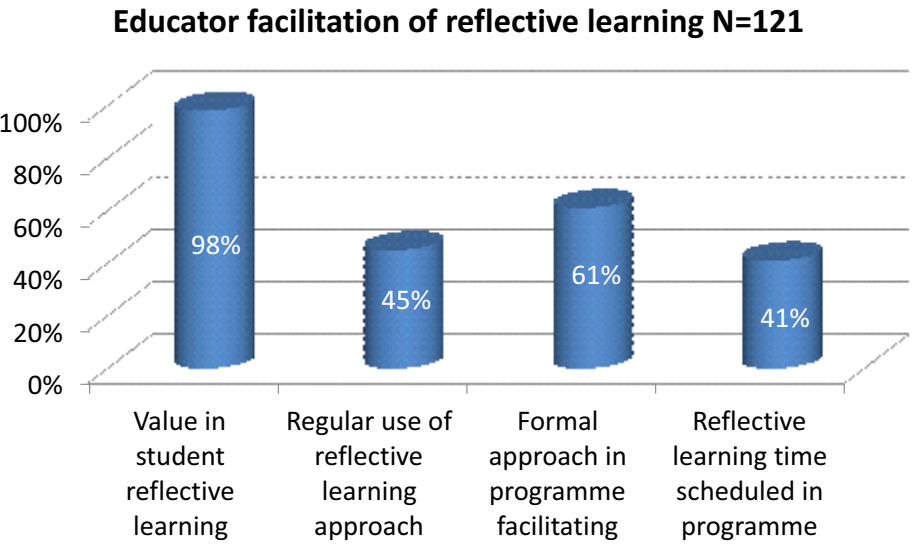
REFLECTIVE TEACHING PRACTICES OF EDUCATORS

The respondents' current reflective practices and experience in reflective learning was explored.



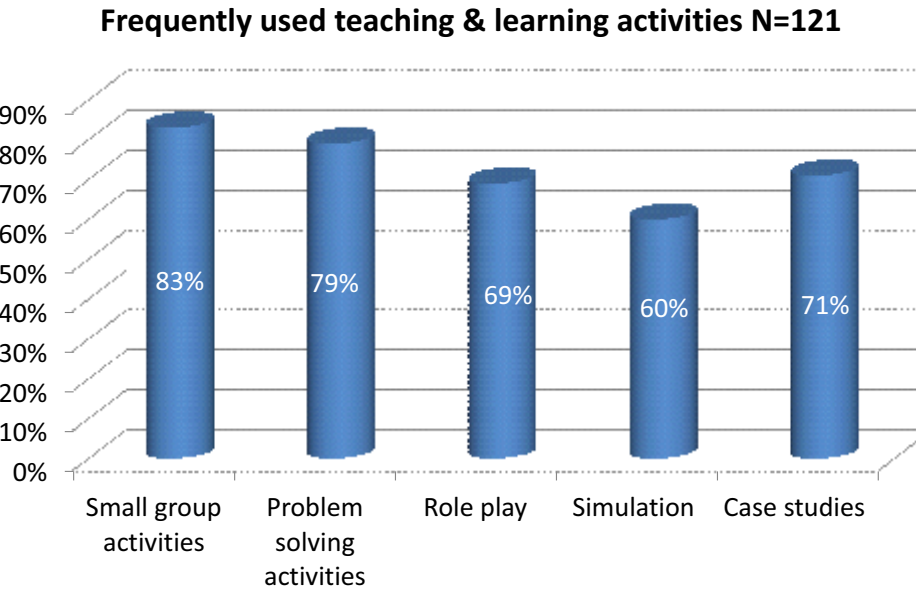
ESTABLISHING A REFLECTIVE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

To determine if the learning environments were conducive to promoting student reflective learning, the respondents' facilitation of reflective learning was explored.



USE OF REFLECTIVE LEARNING ACTIVITIES

The various types of teaching and learning activities the respondents used to promote student reflective learning was determined.



Discussion

The overall findings indicate that the respondents did acknowledge the value in their own reflective practice and student reflective learning. However, the respondents did not practice reflective teaching as a norm.

Most respondents were inconsistent in their reflective practice which could be linked to their lack of personal experience and training in using reflection. For reflection to be effective the concept has to be understood and developed over time with continuous practice. However, the respondents did attempt to promote student reflective learning, despite the challenges encountered.

Most institutions did not allocate time for reflective learning activities in the programmes of study. However, the respondents created opportunities within scheduled teaching and learning activities to include reflective learning exercises. The most common teaching and learning activities were small group and problem solving activities.

The respondents felt they were able to establish a conducive reflective learning environment. Yet the understanding of the importance of establishing a safe, trusting, non-judgemental, reflective environment was not evident.

They also did not consider being a role model of reflective practice important for effective facilitation of student reflective learning. The respondents' lack of experience in reflective practice and training in facilitation of reflective learning could be the reason for their limited understanding of establishing a reflective learning environment and use of more effective reflective learning activities.

Recommendations

- Reflective learning must be included in undergraduate nursing programmes for nurse practitioners to develop the necessary reflective practice abilities.
- Reflective learning must also be included in nursing education programmes so that the educators develop the necessary understanding and skills to facilitate reflective learning by students.
- Nursing education institutions should adopt a reflective culture thereby ensuring a conducive reflective learning and teaching environment.

Conclusion

It is evident in the available literature that reflective practice can assist nurse practitioners to provide consistent quality patient care. Therefore nursing students need to learn to reflect during their training. This means that educators must have the skills and experience to efficiently facilitate reflective learning by students. The study findings indicate that there is a gap in the educators' ability to effectively facilitate student reflective learning which stems from their own lack of experience and education in reflective learning. Educators need to practice reflection and have a good understanding of reflective learning activities to be able to successfully support reflective learning by students.

References

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