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STUDENT NURSES' PERCEPTIONS OF REFLECTIVE JOURNAL WRITING:
A POSTSTRUCTURALIST APPROACH

by

LORRAINE CHICK

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Faculty of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies
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ABSTRACT

Within the profession of nursing, reflective journal writing is enthusiastically endorsed as an essential pedagogical strategy for producing reflective practitioners. Despite a lack of empirical evidence to substantiate the claims associated with reflective journaling, the prevailing belief in contemporary nursing education reflects an assumption that this practice is essential in the production of critically engaged nurses. This has resulted in a totalizing discourse that presents the adoption of reflective journaling within nursing curricula as unproblematic. This study combines the methodological principles of grounded theory, along with a poststructuralist approach, to explore the experience of reflective journaling from the perspective of university nursing students. Application of a Foucauldian analysis demonstrates how assumptions related to the utility of reflective journal writing are embedded within a variety of powerful discourses that shape how we think and speak about this practice. Of particular relevance is Foucault's exploration of the impact of surveillance, observation and disciplinary power. Reflective journaling is identified as a ritual of confession that produces self-regulating and compliant students. This study reveals that journal writing is largely viewed as a prescribed activity and assumptions are made by nurse educators regarding the ability of journals to facilitate critical reflection. The discourses that emerged from this analysis reflect different aspects of the socialization process that ultimately results in the construction of an "authentic" nurse. In closing, students and nurse educators are encouraged to develop alternative discourses that challenge the uncritical acceptance of reflective journal writing within contemporary nursing education.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCING THE PROBLEM

The impetus for undertaking a qualitative study originates from the desire to explore a particular topic or focus of inquiry. At the most basic level, engaging research topics are largely determined by the interests of the researcher. Often, research problems represent perplexing issues that are potential sites of ambiguity and conflict. However, there are multiple ways to interpret the same problem and for this reason, formulating a research question serves to limit the focus of inquiry. Once a research question is developed and refined, study objectives locate the study theoretically, and guide the focus of inquiry.

This chapter describes in detail the steps involved in generating a feasible and researchable problem. The evolution of this study is outlined beginning with identification of an engaging topic of interest, moving to the development of the research question and solidification of the study objectives. The factors that influenced my decision to embark upon this research project are described. In addition, I explore the impact that my interest in poststructuralist theory has had in shaping my methodological choices throughout this phase of the research project. This degree of transparency invites the reader to critically appraise the study.

But how do researchers identify topics of interest and research problems? Cheek (2000) explains that the inspiration for embarking upon a particular study may arise from a variety of sources. In the case of this project, a review of the professional literature helped me to identify the initial research problem. The practical applications of this research project and my personal experience with reflective journal writing provided additional impetus for pursuing this topic. Regardless of where the original source of inspiration comes from,

Cheek (2000) points out that formulating a clear, practical research question has implications for the methodological and theoretical frameworks chosen for the proposed study.

The broad topic of interest related to this research is the concept of the reflective process as a pedagogical strategy. Journal writing is commonly utilized as a tool to facilitate reflective learning and thinking. Therefore, this study focuses its attention on reflective journal writing within nursing education. During my graduate studies in nursing, I had the opportunity to carry out a literature review on reflective practice. This task provided me with the opportunity to examine many of the issues and concerns currently identified with respect to this pedagogical approach. Deeper exploration of this topic helped me identify the following key observations.

First, despite a lack of convincing evidence to support the claims associated with reflective learning practices, the profession of nursing continues to enthusiastically endorse reflection as a way to promote critical thinking skills, improve professional competencies and narrow the theory-practice gap (Astor, Jefferson & Humphrys, 1998; Duke & Appleton, 2000; Durgahee, 1996). Considerable debate is positioned from the understanding that reflection, if done properly, will have a positive impact upon clinical practice. Interestingly, while this debate remains largely theoretical, the concept of reflective learning has become increasingly popular within nursing education. By way of grounding this observation in real life, I contacted 12 universities in Ontario and asked if they use some type of reflective narrative in their undergraduate nursing programs. They all incorporate of this type of learning strategy within their curricula. However, examples of the use of reflective journaling in nursing education are not confined to North America, and there is enthusiastic

endorsement of the concept of reflection in countries such as England and Australia (Burnard, 1995; Burton, 2000; Duke & Appleton, 2000).

However, it is not only within the scope of nursing education that reflective practice is afforded such authority. The College of Nurses of Ontario (CNO) includes reflective practice as a compulsory component within its Quality Assurance Program. Since 1997, nurses practicing in Ontario are required to participate in on-going reflective practice activities in order to meet licensing requirements. Goals include ensuring competence and providing the best possible health outcomes for clients (CNO, 1996). Reflective practice is embraced as a useful approach to meet those goals. Currently, the CNO is implementing an anonymous, randomized survey in an effort to determine if reflective practice is making an impact upon nursing practice (personal conversation with Karen Ellis-Scharfenberg, CNO, 2003). Identification of reflective practice as a key component of professional nursing practice illustrates the extent to which this concept has been endorsed within the profession of nursing.

Second, because reflective learning strategies are attached to specific types of outcomes, the need to demonstrate the impact of reflective learning on clinical nursing practice exists (Duke & Appleton, 2000; Durgahee, 1995; Kim, 1999; Wong, Kember, Chung & Yan, 1995). In the absence of clearly articulated concepts and definitions, this remains a contentious process within the profession of nursing. Since the overwhelming belief exists that reflective learning plays an essential role in assisting nursing students to attain specific professional goals, it is understandable why a significant amount of energy is directed towards exploring this process.

Third, assumptions are made about the ability of students to meaningfully engage in the reflective learning process. These assumptions include taken for granted ideas that the students are comfortable communicating in writing, that they find this process meaningful to their learning and that they possess the necessary cognitive skills to critically reflect (Atkins & Murphy, 1993; Scanlan & Chermonas, 1997).

A variety of approaches might be employed to identify and interpret a particular research problem. For example, empirically-based studies attempt to substantiate the utility of reflective journal writing by producing quantifiable results. A different approach might be to focus on how to make the reflective learning process meaningful for students. However, questioning the underlying belief that journaling is an essential component in creating thoughtful and critically astute practitioners represents a different alternative. Each of these perspectives contributes to our understanding of the complexities associated with the reflective process.

An examination of the key points mentioned earlier reveals that each theme is associated with a different set of assumptions. For example, empirical studies position themselves from the belief that the reflective process can be measured and quantified. Studies that seek ways to promote reflective journaling as a meaningful tool rest their assumptions on the basis that journaling is useful to students. However, I am interested in examining the assumption that students find journaling meaningful for their practice, and this observation forms the basis for the research problem.

The Research Problem

A review of the literature points to an interesting trend: the overwhelming majority of nursing research reflects the assumed importance of incorporating reflective teaching

strategies into nursing curricula. While some researchers are interested in challenging universalizing assumptions that suggest reflective journal writing is necessarily beneficial for nursing students (Wellard & Bethune, 1996; Taylor, 1997), critical appraisal of the utility of reflective journaling is largely absent within nursing research. I agree that challenging the notion of reflective journaling is necessary, and this study assumes that the uncritical acceptance of reflective journal writing as a pedagogical tool, within nursing curricula, is problematic.

If the overriding belief exists that reflective learning plays an essential role in assisting nursing students to attain specific kinds of professional goals, a significant amount of energy is required to substantiate this position. Since the literature suggests that this is true, the following question is relevant: is there a risk that the assumed importance of one learning strategy might result in the exclusion of alternative possibilities that could work towards promoting the same learning outcomes? In addition, the degree to which the discipline of nursing endorses reflective journal writing provides little room for dialogue that includes acknowledgement of both the strengths and limitations of this practice. This sets up conditions that constrain the ability for both nurse educators and students alike to engage in a critical appraisal of the value of this learning tool.

Underlying Goal of the Study

The underlying goal of this research is to explore some of the assumptions associated with the belief that reflective journal writing is meaningful for nursing students. In doing so, this study provides nursing educators with the opportunity to critically interrogate the practice of reflective journaling. This type of analysis challenges the practice of reflective learning in several ways: (a) why has the concept of reflection been afforded such a high

degree of legitimacy within nursing education? and (b) what conditions are necessary in order to maintain this level of authority? This type of inquiry reflects my interest in poststructuralist theory, and it is through this theoretical lens that reflective journal writing is subsequently problematized.

The Research Question

Some researchers remain committed to empirically demonstrating the impact of reflective journal writing upon the professional development of nursing students (Scanlan & Chermonas, 1997; Wong et al., 1995). An alternative way of approaching this issue might be to pose questions about how the reflective process works with queries that are directed towards understanding *what* are the underlying assumptions related to reflective journal writing. This position could then be followed up by asking *why* the discipline of nursing has afforded this particular learning strategy so much authority. The major difference between these two philosophical approaches is that the former makes an assumption about the importance of journal writing, and the latter does not. Therefore, what is taken for granted as being a “given” or a “truth” is opened up to the poststructuralist challenge. For example, rather than merely describing how a particular practice functions, poststructuralist thought provides us with the tools to explore how practices are constructed in the first place. Poststructuralism prompts questions regarding what kinds of taken for granted assumptions have shaped how various practices operate and how these assumptions serve to exclude or marginalize different understandings of that same practice (Cheek, 2000).

This study examines the impact of the use of reflective journal writing from the perspective of nursing students. However, I am interested in avoiding the inevitable debate centered on accepting or rejecting the utility of journal writing. Rather, the focus of attention

is grounded in the understanding that uncritical acceptance of any practice presupposes the importance of that same practice. By utilizing a poststructuralist approach, I intend to explore how the assumptions attached to the importance of reflective journal writing reinforce the idea that this teaching strategy is necessarily meaningful. Interviewing student nurses provides me with the opportunity to more fully understand how reflective journaling impacts this population. For this reason, the following research question is proposed: How do student nurses perceive reflective journal writing?

Research Objectives

As with any study, inquiry positioned from a poststructuralist perspective must declare clear aims and objectives. The following study objectives locate this study theoretically and help to guide the development of the study by making explicit the practical applications of this project as they relate to nursing education.

1. To interview undergraduate nursing students for the purpose of gaining a more informed understanding of the student perspective as it relates to reflective journal writing.
2. To establish the beginnings of a conceptual framework that illustrates a more fully-developed understanding of the impact of reflective journal writing on the professional development of nursing students.

Practical Application of the Study

The professional literature provided the initial inspiration for developing the research problem and question. Intellectual curiosity aside, practical considerations played a role in shaping the decision to move forward. Specifically, would a more developed understanding of reflective journal writing enhance the meaning of this activity for students? Research

ideas and interests are viewed as being most useful when they are grounded in reality (Patton, 2002). In practice-based disciplines, value is often placed upon the utility and application of research findings to solve problems. However, while the usefulness of applied research and its ability to solve problems is undeniable, poststructuralist research prompts nurse researchers to ask questions that invite exploration of alternative ways of thinking. This type of theoretical scrutiny can influence and change practice (Cheek, 2000). This study combines the creativity of a poststructuralist approach along with the practical applications of learning more about the experience of reflective journaling from the perspective of nursing students. Grounding this research in the personal experiences of nursing students establishes the opportunity to critically appraise assumptions related to how they think and learn.

Access to a population of undergraduate nursing students who are required to do reflective journal writing provides a rich source of information regarding the perceived utility of this learning strategy. A wide range of viewpoints exists regarding the strengths and weaknesses of reflective journaling. This study provides the basis for serious exploration of a specific aspect of current educational practice. The practical application of exploring the utility of reflective journaling rests in the fact that modifications of approach might result in more efficient use of energy and resources.

Personal Experience

The final consideration that shaped my interest around this particular topic relates to my personal experiences with journal writing both professionally and in my personal life. This reflection prompted me to reconsider some of my own feelings regarding this particular learning strategy. The questions that originated from this process encouraged me to explore

why the profession of nursing remains firmly entrenched in the belief that reflection is necessarily a valuable process for nursing students. From my perspective, one of the more puzzling questions related to the use of reflective journaling centers around the distinction that appears to be made between professional reflection and reflection as a personal, lifelong process. The former is attached to specific learning outcomes, the latter to a process of discovery and learning that considers the complexities of what it means to be intellectually curious in all aspects of our lives. If we understand the process of reflection to be a creative activity, how well does this fit within structured learning activities?

Reflexivity

Writers such as Linda Tuhiwai Smith (2001) describe how critically informed qualitative research has made “insider” methodology more acceptable. Insider methodology is characterized by a subjective understanding of the research process. Issues can only be fully understood by attempting to understand the issue from the insiders’ perspective. However, Smith (2001) suggests that this process requires researchers to be reflexive and to critically appraise the impact of their own experiences. The process of reflexivity requires that investigators be aware of the impact of their own assumptions and understandings as they relate to the research process (Cheek, 2000).

I have had a variety of different experiences with reflective journaling. Journaling was more meaningful for me when I was given the opportunity to write and think about an issue that was personally engaging. Alternatively, being directed to contemplate specific topics resulted in a learning experience that felt frustrating and redundant. During the interviews, I was aware of the importance of acknowledging my own experiences as relevant, without naming them as a source of authority. In an effort to create an environment

that would be supportive of a variety of opinions, I simply explained to the students that my journaling experiences had been both positive and negative. However, I accept that my engagement with poststructuralist theory is the filter through which I interpret my experience in relation to the topic of inquiry.

The Role of Theory in Relationship to Research

Cheek (2000) emphasizes that all researchers working within the framework of postmodern or poststructuralist theory must clearly articulate the role that theory plays in shaping the entire research experience. For this reason, the following discussion makes explicit how theoretical perspectives influence and shape the research process. For example, theoretical interests shape our understandings of what constitutes a valuable research topic in the first place. In fact, one of the most valuable contributions of postmodern and poststructuralist approaches towards research rests in their ability to suggest alternative perspectives regarding taken for granted practices (Cheek, 2000). Without a clear understanding of the intent embedded within theoretical perspectives, it becomes difficult to appreciate exactly how research informed in this manner can make meaningful contributions to nursing research. Postmodernist and poststructuralist perspectives are not research methods themselves, rather they provide ways of thinking about the world that shape questions regarding what type of research is relevant, and how those same questions are interpreted (Cheek, 2000).

An in-depth exploration of the theoretical concepts associated with this research is detailed in chapter three. However, at this point it is appropriate to make a distinction between postmodernist and poststructuralist theories. This is done because confusion exists when these terms are used interchangeably. While there has been an increase in the

application of postmodern and poststructuralist theory in health-related research, ambiguity and a lack of clarity with respect to these approaches remains commonplace (Cheek, 2000). For example, Watson (1995) recognizes the potential for a postmodern approach towards nursing research but declares: “just exactly what is postmodernism is unknown and ambiguous at best” (p.60). Finally, Bloland (1995) comments on the assumption that “those who use the words also know the theory” (p. 522).

My understanding of the relationship between postmodern and poststructuralist theories originates from the description of these terms by Best and Kellner (1991). They interpret poststructuralism as a subset of a broader theoretical approach, namely postmodernism. In this manner, postmodernism is viewed as an “umbrella” concept with poststructuralist theory residing beneath it. This conceptualization presents the term “postmodern” as more generalized and inclusive. In fact, it is impossible to clearly delineate between these two theoretical approaches because both perspectives “share a postmodern impulse in their approaches to language, meaning, subjectivity and power” (Weedon, 1999, p.100). Indeed, some theorists are referred to as “postmodern” by some and “post-structuralist” by others. For example, French philosopher Michel Foucault, is described as both poststructuralist and postmodernist in his approach (Agger, 1991).

While postmodernism and poststructuralism share an aversion to modernist assumptions, Cheek (2000) suggests that poststructuralist theory and postmodern theory differ in their focus and emphasis. Postmodern analyses tend to be broader in scope, and focus on culture, society and history. Alternatively, poststructuralist theory concentrates its focus on analysis of text and the meaning embedded within language. Agger (1991) explains that “texts” can be pictures, poems, conversations or case notes. A poststructuralist approach

challenges the notion that language is neutral and objective. Rather, the language observed within a particular text is constituted by the social reality that it represents. In the case of this study, analysis of the meaning embedded within representations of participant interviews, research articles and course outlines reveals valuable information regarding the discursive frameworks that shape understandings of reflective journaling within contemporary nursing practice. The theoretical process described above is consistent with a poststructuralist approach towards doing research. Accordingly, this study is identified as such.

Poststructuralist Theory: Epistemology

The term “epistemology” refers to the ways in which we share information and answer questions about how we know what we know. Epistemological debates center on issues such as objectivity and subjectivity (Patton, 2002). From an epistemological standpoint, research paradigms can be conceptualized in terms of a continuum with anti-positivism and subjectivity at one end and positivism accompanied by objectivity at the other. Positivistic thinking values an objective process where the world is understood in terms of cause and effect. Positivist assumptions towards doing research are characterized by a more traditional approach where hypotheses are generated and tested in an effort to predict and explain phenomena. In addition, positivist research paradigms support the necessity of the researcher to stand outside of the research process and maintain a certain level of objectivity (Burrell & Morgan, 1979).

Alternatively, the epistemological assumptions associated with anti-positivism reject the belief in objective claims to knowledge. Instead, understanding a phenomenon requires the researcher to seek out the subjective experience of the insider (Burrell & Morgan, 1979). Subjectivity is the experience of self, and an anti-positivistic perspective understands that a

subjective experience is shaped by meaning and value (Patton, 2002). All research paradigms are situated somewhere along this epistemological continuum. Poststructuralist understandings of subjectivity are based on the notion that individual accounts and stories are always filtered through the lens of socially constructed meanings of issues such as language, gender, and social class (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). Although the lines between different theoretical paradigms has become increasingly blurred, positivistic and critical approaches such as poststructuralist theory are considered philosophically incompatible. As a result, each of these two theoretical paradigms are situated at opposing ends of the epistemological continuum (Lincoln & Guba, 2000).

Poststructuralist Theory: Ontological Assumptions

Ontological concerns are centered around claims of truth and what is the nature of reality (Patton, 2002). Poststructuralist ontological assumptions include the belief that reality is “virtual” in the sense that it is impossible to make claims to “truth.” In addition, “reality” represents multiple perspectives, is historically situated and socially constructed. In turn, the social construction of reality is influenced by political, cultural, economic and gender-related factors (Lincoln & Guba, 2000). For example, this study positions itself from the belief that a poststructuralist analysis of nursing students’ interpretations of reflective journal writing represents a partial and incomplete analysis. These “interpretations” are constructed within the framework of a variety of powerful discourses that constrain and influence how the students think and speak about the practice of reflective journaling.

Assumptions

This research is positioned from the assumptive base that nursing students will be engaged with this topic, and find it meaningful to discuss. Although confidentiality has been

stressed, the participants are being asked to critically appraise a component of their own nursing education. Therefore, it is reasonable to assume that some students may feel apprehensive about judging limitations associated with reflective journaling. In addition, an assumption is being made that nursing students are able to reflect on their work and articulate that process within an interview setting. Finally, this study assumes that the uncritical acceptance of reflective journaling writing as a pedagogical tool, within nursing curricula, is problematic.

Benefits

Many of the benefits of doing this research have been suggested throughout the introductory chapter. It has been established that poststructuralist approaches to nursing research provide healthcare practitioners and educators with an opportunity to reconsider previously held beliefs regarding a particular practice. Importantly, poststructuralist research is interested in exploring a multiplicity of views, and is particularly well-suited to uncovering assumptions and examining entrenched, taken-for-granted practices. This type of inquiry is particularly appropriate for developing a more informed understanding of reflective journal writing. Despite the overwhelming acceptance by professional and educational nursing authorities that the reflective process and journal writing are intimately linked with specific learning outcomes, there is no real basis upon which to rest this assumption. This is a significant observation, because the energy and commitment required by nurse instructors to implement reflective learning strategies is considerable.

I believe that there is a need to challenge some of the assumptions that are associated with reflective journaling. The benefits of critically appraising any practice include the opportunity to creatively generate different solutions, explore a wider variety of possibilities,

and engage in the process of critical thinking. Interestingly, this is one of the goals of reflective journal writing. Therefore, an open dialogue about the strengths and weaknesses of reflective journal writing would be a powerful example of such a process.

This chapter has explained the steps involved in generating a feasible and researchable problem. Broadly speaking, an initial review of the literature revealed that the majority of nursing research reflects the assumed importance of including reflective journaling within nursing curricula. The focus of inquiry for this study suggests that the uncritical acceptance of this practice within the profession of nursing is problematic. As a result, the underlying goals of this research focus on challenging the assumptions associated with this particular practice. Furthermore, assuming the importance of reflective journaling within the profession of nursing constrains how we think and speak about this practice. Theoretical exploration of these concerns reflects a poststructuralist approach towards doing research, and this study is identified as such. In addition, I explored the role that theory plays in shaping methodological choices throughout the research process. A more detailed discussion regarding poststructuralist concepts is presented in chapter three; however, the epistemological and ontological assumptions associated with a poststructuralist understanding towards doing research were introduced. Finally, the assumptions and benefits of undertaking this particular study were identified.

The following chapter presents a critical review of the literature. This is done to contextualize this research in relationship to existing work on the topic of reflective journaling. Central issues related to the impact of a poststructuralist approach towards doing a review of the literature are also explored.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

Initially, a generalized search for work related to reflective practice, reflection as a pedagogical tool and reflective journal writing was undertaken across several disciplines using the following databases: Cumulative Index to Nursing and Allied Health Literature (CINAHL), Medline and Eric. CINAHL and Medline were then utilized to focus the literature review on articles that reflected a critical appraisal of reflective practice within the discipline of nursing. This task proved to be more challenging. Key words such as Foucault, poststructuralist theory, nursing and critical theory were combined with the concepts of reflection and reflective practice. CINAHL yielded 39 publications that reflected a poststructuralist application toward a variety of theoretical and health care issues within the discipline of nursing. All of these articles, with the exception of three, were published in 1995 or later. Six of those publications approached the issue of reflective practice in a critical fashion. Medline yielded similar results. Interestingly, a search of Eric yielded 202 publications employing a Foucauldian approach. This observation reveals that other disciplines, such as education, appear more well acquainted with poststructuralist theory than nursing.

Poststructuralist research is not concerned with establishing the truth and this assumption influenced how I interpret a review of the existing work on reflective journal writing (Agger, 1991). Background information regarding the process of reflection is included to familiarize the reader concerning the topic of reflective journaling, and to contextualize subsequent discussion. Much of the work reviewed consists of theoretical commentary directed towards understanding the complexities of reflection and reflective journal writing. However, reflective journal writing has also been analyzed from a variety of

qualitative approaches. Alternatively, some researchers have focused their efforts on quantifying different aspects of the reflective process. Each of these perspectives is included in the following review of the literature. However, poststructuralist theory assumes that every representation of reality is only ever a partial and incomplete analysis and my review of the literature is positioned from the understanding that individual understandings of a given topic are not hierarchized in order of value. This includes my own interpretation of issues surrounding the practice of reflective journaling.

The Origins of Reflective Thinking

Ralph Dewey may have been one of the first educational theorists to explore the process of reflective thinking in the twentieth century. He believed that perplexing situations prompted a particular kind of mental process that stimulated searching for a creative solution. This reflective process incorporated an individual's past experiences as a means to problem-solve (as cited in Teekman, 2000). However, among contemporary writing within the nursing literature, almost every publication that addresses issues related to reflective thinking cites the work of Donald A. Schon (Atkins & Murphy, 1993; Scanlan & Chermonas, 1997; Teekman, 2000). Schon based his theories of reflective practice upon the earlier work of Dewey.

Major contributions of Schon's work include descriptions of the importance of reflection as it relates to professional knowledge and expertise (Schon, 1987). The following key concepts were developed by Schon: reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action. The former refers to the development of ideas during practice; the latter involves reflecting on the situation or experience after it has taken place. Reflective journal writing would be an example of reflection-on-action. These reflective strategies are thought to make knowledge

explicit, and contribute to the generation of new theory that is subsequently embedded within practice (Schon, 1983, 1987).

Conceptual Issues

While Schon introduced the term “reflective practice” he never offered a definition for reflective practice, or reflection. In fact, there seems to be some consensus within contemporary nursing education about the lack of clarity regarding terms and definitions related to the process of reflection (Burton, 2000; Scanlan & Chermonas, 1997; Teekman, 2000). This observation raises important concerns regarding the ability of nurse educators to share a common understanding of what the terms “reflection” and “reflective practice” mean. Atkins and Murphy (1993) suggest that lack of definition has made these concepts difficult to operationalize. Scanlan and Chermonas (1997) and Teekman (2000) agree that a more informed understanding of the conceptual issues and assumptions associated with reflection is required if nurse educators are to use reflective thinking strategies as a tool for learning.

Relevant terms associated with this study include reflective practice, reflective process and reflective journal writing. My interpretation of these terms is described as follows: reflective practice is characterized by the participation of nursing students to critically engage in a process of contemplation directly related to their professional nursing practice. The reflective process describes how students work towards this goal. Finally, journal writing is understood to be one example of a reflective learning strategy that may assist nursing students to become critically engaged practitioners. Within nursing education, reflective journal writing is implemented in a variety of ways. For the purposes of this study, journal writing represents one component of a seminar course designed to help students critically reflect upon a number of specific learning objectives.

The Processes of Reflection

The processes of reflection are most often conceptualized as stages or levels. This approach to reflection suggests a continuum of learning (Atkins & Murphy, 1993; Duke & Appleton, 2000). According to Schon, the process of reflection helps derive knowledge from practice. Benner's work on charting the progress of novice to expert nurse is similar in its assertion that theory is derived from practice (Benner, 1984). The research demonstrates that a variety of frameworks and conceptual models have been implemented to facilitate identification of the various stages of reflection (Astor, Jefferson & Humphrys, 1998; Duke & Appleton, 2000; Wong et al., 1995). Moreover, it is thought that by using a tool to guide the process of reflection, educators might be able to help students distinguish between "real" reflection and simply ruminating (Burton, 2000).

For example, Mezirow (1981) identifies seven stages of reflectivity that eventually result in perspective transformation. In contrast Schon (1987) identifies three stages: conscious reflection, criticism and action. Kim (1999) identifies a descriptive phase, a reflective phase and a critical/emancipatory phase. Upon closer inspection, Atkins and Murphy (1993) determined that different authors' accounts of the reflective process varied largely with respect to terminology and the extent to which stages were arranged hierarchically. This observation enabled Atkins and Murphy to generate a three-stage model of reflection from existing work by authors such as Mezirow and Schon. This conceptual model forms the basis for my own understanding of the reflective process.

The first stage in the process of reflection is thought to be triggered by an awareness of uncomfortable feelings and thoughts. Scanlan and Chermonas (1997) contribute to the discussion by adding that curiosity or being engaged with a particular experience may also be sufficient stimulus to trigger an awareness. However, it does seem clear that a conscious

awareness of a particular event or situation is a prerequisite for the reflective process to occur. Scanlan and Chermonas (1997) also suggest that what is interesting and engaging for one student will not necessarily be so for another. This raises questions about the prescribed nature of some reflective learning activities.

The second stage in Atkins and Murphy's model of the reflective process refers to the critical analysis of a situation or event. The nursing literature makes a clear distinction between various levels of reflection (Duke & Appleton, 2000; Kim, 1999; Wong et al., 1995). For example, the basic level of reflection is a descriptive process that is often characterized by unsupported opinions. Alternatively, critical reflection demonstrates the ability to transform perspective, validate assumptions and make knowledge one's own. Atkins and Murphy (1993) remind us that the skills required to engage in a process of critical appraisal need to be taught. However, while it appears clear that critical reflection is desirable within nursing education, information regarding how students can become proficient in critical thinking skills is notably absent within the literature (Aster, Jefferson & Humphrys, 1998; Duke & Appleton, 2000; Durgahee, 1996; Scanlan & Chermonas, 1997; Wong et al., 1995).

According to Atkins and Murphy (1993), the third stage of the reflective process concerns itself with developing a new perspective on the situation. The research identifies the importance of perspective transformation within the critical level of the reflective process (Kim, 1999; Wong et al., 1995). However, Scanlan and Chermonas (1997) make an interesting point when they suggest that critical reflection may serve to reinforce existing behavior and may not necessarily result in a new perspective. Kim (1999) refers to ways that critical self-dialogue can result in emancipation from ritualized, entrenched practice. Similarly, Wong et al. (1995) discuss the ability of critical reflectors to avoid

“habitualization” of practice. Neither of these authors discuss the political aspects of situating this type of practice within workplace culture.

Reflection: The Claims

Despite a lack of empirical evidence to suggest otherwise, the nursing literature demonstrates wide acceptance of the claims associated with reflective practice. Durgahee (1996) asserts that the basic aim of reflective practice is to improve the quality of nursing care. Reflection is used as a learning tool to improve nursing practice and achieve this goal. Brown and Gillis (1999) suggest that reflective thinking plays a role in developing the professional philosophies of nursing students. However, Duke and Appleton (2000) point out that the reputation reflection has gained for encouraging the integration between theory and professional practice is largely rhetorical. Lauder (1994) goes even further by suggesting that the reflective doctrine has not only failed to explicate the theory-practice link, is has actually perpetuated the gap between thought and action.

The claim that reflective practice encourages critical thinking is widely cited in the literature (Burton, 2000; Duke & Appleton, 2000; Durgahee, 1996; Scanlan & Chermonas, 1997). However, several studies using reflective journals as an assessment tool found it difficult to demonstrate evidence of higher level critical reflection (Duke & Appleton, 2000; Teekman, 2000). Explanations for this finding include the suggestion that critical reflection develops over time and that students need to learn the skills required to engage in critical appraisal (Atkins & Murphy, 1993). Scanlan and Chermonas (1997) suggest reflective journals are not an appropriate assessment tool because students may tailor their writing to accommodate what they think instructors want to hear.

Reflective Journal Writing

Critical thinking activities may include the creative use of lectures, role-playing, critical appraisal of research and discussion. However, the use of reflective journals to promote critical thinking in nursing education is commonplace (Elliott, 1996; Heinrich, 1992; Patton, Woods, Agarenzo, Brubaker, Metcalf & Scherrer, 1997). The effectiveness of journaling has yet to be empirically tested, yet there are positive accounts in the literature that suggest journaling can be a useful tool in developing professional nursing skills (Patton et al., 1997; Heinrich, 1992).

For example, Heinrich (1992) suggests that journals can be an excellent source of student feedback and provide a unique opportunity for student-teacher dialogue. Brown and Sorrell (1993) conclude that journaling is an effective means for students to foster critical thinking skills and integrate theory and practice. Alternatively, Scanlan and Chermonas (1997) argue that there is no basis upon which to believe that what students write in their journals is necessarily transferred into nursing practice.

Critical Appraisal of Reflective Practice

To a much lesser degree, the concept of reflection has been critically appraised within the nursing literature. Scanlan and Chermonas (1997) question the assumption that students who write reflective journals will become reflective practitioners. By contextualizing nursing practice within a political and social framework, Taylor (1997) illustrates the difficulties associated with making change within healthcare organizations. She goes on to suggest that assumptions are made about the ability of reflective practitioners to actually change their practice. Johns (1999) questions whether reflective practice can be realized within the real world of nursing practice and raises concerns about reflection becoming a mechanism of surveillance, rather than a tool for emancipation. Similarly,

Gilbert (2001) uses a Foucauldian perspective to demonstrate how reflective practice can be shown to function as a technology of surveillance. Finally, Wellard and Bethune (1996) employ a poststructuralist critique of reflective practice that questions the hegemonic discourse, within nursing education, that assumes reflective journal writing is useful.

Reflection as a Pedagogical Tool

Over the past few decades, debate has been centered on shifting educational paradigms within nursing education (Romyn, 2000; Walton, 1996). Currently, nursing education tends towards positivistic methods of teaching. This traditional model of information sharing is considered hierarchical and authoritarian in nature (Walton, 1996). However, contemporary nursing practice requires practitioners to be creative and to possess superior critical thinking skills. Concerns exist that teaching methods based on positivist assumptions are inadequate to fully prepare nursing students for the challenges associated with contemporary health care systems (Allen, 1990; Romyn, 2000; Walton, 1996). Critical theory and feminist theory underpin various conceptions of new emancipatory pedagogy in nursing. However, paradigm shifts such as this are not without their difficulties.

Emancipatory teaching practices aim to free students and educators from the authoritarian constraints of traditional methods. Central to that goal is the notion of constructing egalitarian power relationships (Allen, 1990; Romyn, 2000). The new “reflective doctrine” is one such example of a teaching perspective that espouses sharing of power between student and instructor. Additional claims include integration of the theory-practice gap, promotion of social change and reduced hierarchies (Heslop, 1997).

Some authors acknowledge that the reality of implementing reflective learning strategies has met with very different results; most notably that students required to reflect do so in a manner that is often resistant to the activity itself. Heslop (1997) points out that by

forcing students to reflect, educators are behaving in a way that is incongruent with the philosophy of reflective practice. Wellard and Bethune (1996) identified that resistance to reflective journaling was evident when students seemed to write what the instructor wanted. While this type of passive resistance empowered students, it was directed at simply surviving nursing school.

Nurse educators committed to promoting a more egalitarian learning environment recognize the importance of acknowledging the power relationship between student and teacher (Allen, 1990; Francis, Owens & Tollefson, 1998; Wellard & Bethune, 1996). For example, Francis et al. (1998) acknowledged dismay at the practice of judging students to be successful or unsuccessful based on their own interpretation of what was desirable. Both Scanlan and Chermonas (1997) and Foster and Greenwood (1998) comment on the need for instructors to actively reflect on why and how they are asking students to engage in a particular activity. Bell hooks (1994) goes even further, suggesting that professors who ask students to share confessional narratives (without taking similar risks themselves) run the risk of behaving in a coercive manner.

Romyn (2000) suggests that there are a variety of opinions regarding the ability of teachers and students to share power within an egalitarian relationship. However, some nurse educators are actively questioning how to implement reflective learning in a manner that is more consistent with the philosophies attached to those of the “reflective doctrine” described earlier. However, Wellard and Bethune (1996) suggest that room exists to critique reflective journal writing in a manner that illustrates the influence of emancipatory pedagogy and reflexivity.

Significance of Research

Despite an extensive effort, I was unable to find publications that critically analyzed reflective journal writing from the position of nursing students. Under-representation of the student voice suggests that the practice of reflective journaling is largely teacher-driven. This observation, coupled with the accepted belief that reflective journaling is an important pedagogical tool, demonstrates that a gap in the literature exists regarding a critical analysis of this topic within the profession of nursing. Although poststructuralist theory recognizes that the interpretation of any reality is based on the contribution of multiple perspectives, it is interesting to note that the vast majority of existing work on reflective journaling has not included a critical perspective. The literature itself is reflective of a predominant discourse that assumes the importance of reflective journaling in the professional development of nursing students. By posing questions that challenge this position, a poststructuralist approach towards understanding student nurses' experience of reflective journaling represents an important addition to the existing work already focused on this topic.

This chapter has attempted to locate relevant work within the context of this research study. Having established that this study is poststructuralist in its approach, discussion was directed towards explaining how a poststructuralist understanding of a review of the literature influences the goals and expectations associated with this type of inquiry. The significance of this study was established by identifying that a gap exists within the current nursing literature with regard to a critical analysis of reflective journal writing within nursing education. Subsequently, an argument was put forward to demonstrate the need for a poststructuralist analysis of reflective journaling within the context of nursing education.

The following chapter takes up detailed discussion of the theoretical concepts associated with a poststructuralist perspective towards doing research. Specifically, I have chosen the work of Michel Foucault to provide the framework for a theoretical analysis of the research findings.

CHAPTER III

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Poststructuralist Thought

Chapter one briefly introduced the theoretical assumptions associated with poststructuralist and postmodernist approaches towards doing research. This was done for two reasons: (a) the opportunity was taken to establish this study as poststructuralist in its approach; and (b) to provide clarification, because the similarities between these two theoretical approaches often generates confusion regarding their application. The following discussion more thoroughly outlines the characteristics of poststructuralist theory and its direct application towards this study.

Poststructuralism is a theory of language that focuses on the analyses of various literary and cultural texts. Here, the word text refers to the written word and includes conversations, artwork and case notes amongst other sources (Agger, 1991). Poststructuralist thought challenges the notion that language is neutral, objective and value-free (Cheek, 2000). In doing so, poststructuralist approaches explore the relationship between language, meaning and subjectivity. For example, by calling for the critical deconstruction of texts, poststructuralists such as Derrida have drawn attention to the power of language and discourse. Derrida suggests that every text is *undecidable* insofar as it conceals the conflicts that exist between the voices of various authorities. The implied meaning that rests on the surface of the text cannot be fully understood without knowledge of the competing discourses that operate beneath the surface (Derrida, 1976). For example, consider the title of an article by Cameron and Mitchell (1993) "Reflective peer journals: developing

authentic nurses.” Deconstruction of this statement reveals a number of different ways to interpret what is being implied. One might conclude: (a) writing reflective peer journals is necessary to become an authentic nurse; (b) unless you reveal yourself to be authentic in the manner described in the article, you are less valuable as a nurse; and (c) the practice of peer journaling is not socially contextualized and assumptions are made about the ability of nurses to engage in “authentic” ways in the workplace.

Similarly, Michel Foucault has drawn attention to the relationship between power and discourse as it reveals itself through language. In particular, Foucault challenges the notion that knowledge is objective and value-free. Power relations are established, and meaning is assigned, within the framework of discourse (Rail, 2002). However, Foucault suggests that hegemonic discourses can be challenged by oppositional discourses that provide alternative interpretations of reality. Dismantling the relationship between language, power and discourse challenges traditional assumptions associated with the reading, writing and interpretation of texts (Agger, 1991).

This study utilizes a poststructuralist approach to explore discursive frameworks and challenge the underlying assumptions associated with them. Specifically, Foucault’s treatment of the concept of discourse is applied throughout my analysis. However, Foucault’s concept of discourse is intimately linked to the relationship between power and knowledge. Each of these concepts is now explored in detail.

Discourse

The term “discourse” is used across a wide range of disciplines. However, Mills (1997, p. 1)) points out that that the concept of discourse is frequently left undefined “as if its usage were simply common knowledge”. Alternatively, Cheek (2000, p. 23) refers to

discourse as “a set of common assumptions which, although they may be so taken for granted as to be invisible, provide the basis for conscious knowledge.” Discourses create discursive frameworks that shape reality in a particular way. Cheek (2000) goes on to explain that discourses constrain the production of knowledge in that they allow for particular ways of thinking about reality and excluding others. This observation recognizes that not all discursive frameworks are afforded the same authority.

However, Mills (1997) points out that not only is the definition of “discourse” fluid, the concept of discourse is implemented in different ways according to specific theoretical perspectives (Mills, 1997). For example, formalist approaches to discourse analysis consider discourse in terms of text and are rooted in the work of structuralists such as Saussure (McHoul & Grace, 1993). Structuralist linguistics viewed meaning and subjectivity as a social and linguistic construct (Best & Kellner, 1990). In addition, structuralist discourse theory described social phenomena objectively in terms of linguistic structures, codes and rules. These assumptions were critiqued by poststructuralist theorists such as Derrida, Lyotard and Foucault, who stressed the arbitrary nature of language, culture and subjectivity (Best & Kellner, 1990). Alternatively, poststructuralist approaches towards discourse support the idea that discourses produce meaning and subjectivity, rather than simply reflect them. More than linguistic meaning, discourse is located within the practices and institutions that influence the world in which we live (Weedon, 1999). The application of a Foucauldian, poststructuralist notion of discourse is of interest to this study. The following statement by Foucault (1972) demonstrates his understanding of the concept of discourse:

Instead of gradually reducing the rather fluctuating meaning of the word “discourse”, I believe I have in fact added to its meanings: treating it sometimes as the general

domain of all statements, sometimes as an individualizable group of statements, and sometimes as a regulated practice that accounts for a number of statements. (p. 80)

Mills (1997) undertakes the following analysis of this quotation to help isolate the meaning behind the various statements and identify the unique aspects of Foucault's treatment of discourse. Treating discourse as a "general domain of all statements" implies that in a general sense all texts have meaning, which in turn produces discourse. By commenting that statements are individualized, there is the understanding that more than one discourse operates at any one time and that these discourses might be regulated in some way. Finally, by suggesting that a regulated practice accounts for a number of statements Mills (1997) takes this to mean that Foucault is more interested in the rules and structures that produce a particular discourse than the actual discourse itself. Given that the practice of reflective journaling within the discipline of nursing is written and spoken about in different ways by different authorities, it may be viewed as a discourse. Application of a Foucauldian concept of discourse provides me with the tools to uncover some of the mechanisms that function to reinforce belief in the importance of reflective journaling within the profession of nursing.

A Foucauldian understanding of discourse moves it away from the exploration of linguistics and closer towards the concept of discipline. Here, discipline means one of two things: (a) scholarly "discipline" refers to disciplines such as medicine or psychiatry; and (b) "disciplinary" institutions of social control are represented by schools, prisons and the confessional (McHoul & Grace, 1993). Therefore, an important distinction of Foucault's concept of discourse is that it provides a framework for exploring the relationship between discursively shaped bodies of knowledge and various methods of social control (McHoul &

Grace, 1993). Another unique aspect of Foucault's treatment of discourse involves his suggestion that discourses are historically specific. This means that the manner in which we think and speak about a practice may be quite different from one historical period of time to another (McHoul & Grace, 1993). These statements have several implications for a Foucauldian analysis of reflective journaling in nursing. First, the opportunity exists to explore ways that schools of nursing promote the importance of reflective journaling while at the same time excluding alternative ways of thinking and speaking about this practice. Second, reflective journaling can be situated within an historical context that suggests the assumption "reflective" activities are essential in producing desirable practitioners is a relatively new idea within the profession of nursing.

Foucault (1980) explores the relationship between power and the production of knowledge through the concept of discourse. In fact he suggests that it is in discourse that power and knowledge are joined together. Discourse can be an instrument of power, but it also represents a site of resistance where existing discourses can be challenged and the following statement by Foucault (1980) illustrates this concept: "Discourse transmits and produces power; it reinforces it, but also undermines and exposes it, renders it fragile and makes it possible to thwart it" (p. 101). In this fashion, Foucault's work allows us to theoretically examine how power and knowledge relationships produce "truth" and maintain dominant discourses. Here, it is important to remember that Foucault's primary interest lies not in the pervasive discourse itself, but rather in the conditions that allowed such a discourse to establish itself in the first instance (McHoul & Grace, 1993).

At any given point in time there are a variety of discursive frameworks available for writing and speaking about a particular aspect of reality (Cheek, 2000). Because dominant

discursive frameworks order aspects of reality in a particular way, they have the effect of marginalizing and excluding alternative versions of the same reality. Foucault suggests that the production and maintenance of such dominance is the effect of power (Cheek & Porter, 1997). Thus, power relations embedded within discursive practices teach us how to think, behave and ultimately conform.

Increasingly, researchers within the profession of nursing are interested in exploring a poststructuralist analysis of power (Cotton, 1997; Gilbert, 2001; Henderson, 1994; Holmes & Gastaldo, 2002; Huntington & Gilmour, 2001). The engagement of a poststructuralist perspective to inform theory and research provides nursing with the ability to critically appraise a variety of nursing related practices. A Foucauldian conceptualization is relevant within the context of this study and the following discussion explains the theoretical assumptions behind a Foucauldian approach towards the concept of power.

The Power\Knowledge Relationship

Central to Foucault's analysis of power is the suggestion that the discursive nature of power is intimately linked to the production of knowledge. In this manner, power forms knowledge and knowledge creates power relations. A unique aspect of Foucault's work rests on the assumption that the link between power relations and the capacity to produce truth is an essential one and the following statement by Foucault (1977) illustrates this point:

We should admit rather that power produces knowledge (and not simply by encouraging it because it serves power or by applying it because it is useful); that power and knowledge directly imply one another; that there is no power relation without the correlative constitution of a field of knowledge. (p.27)

Discursive frameworks produce belief in a particular version of truth, but the effects of truth are produced within discourses that are neither true nor false (Foucault, 1980). At any given time, the discursive framework that is afforded the most authority is the consequence of power relations. For example, Foucault would suggest that universalizing assumptions regarding the utility of reflective journaling reflect a dominant discourse that is produced and maintained as a result of power relations that exist within the educational and professional arenas of nursing practice. This dominant discourse serves to exclude other possibilities for thinking and speaking about reflective journaling within the profession of nursing.

The most significant aspect of Foucault's work on the concept of power stresses that power is not merely restrictive and oppressive. Rather, power is also viewed as a productive force that forms knowledge and produces discourse. Foucault (1977) explains: "We must cease once and for all to describe the effects of power in negative terms. . . .In fact, power produces, it produces reality; it produces domains of objects and rituals of truth" (p.194). This assertion challenges in significant ways the notion that power emanates from the top down. Instead, power is everywhere and exists within all relationships. It also brings into serious question assumptions related to the notion that power is reflected in a binary relationship consisting of those who have it and those who do not (Cheek, 2000).

In an attempt to move away from a purely top down concept of power, Foucault conceives power as "capillary" in nature. Specifically, power operates at all levels of society within an extensive network, or web of power relations. (Cheek, 2000). Indeed Foucault (1980) states that "Power is not something that is acquired, seized, or shared, something that one holds on to or allows to slip away; power is exercised from innumerable points, in the interplay of nonegalitarian and mobile relations" (p. 94). Thus, it becomes apparent that a

Foucauldian analysis views power as decentralized, and apparent within all types of economic, sexual and knowledge-based relationships (Weedon, 1999).

Central to Foucault's analysis of power is the notion that power produces multiple sites of resistance. However, these sites of resistance are not simply generated in response to a pre-existing power. Foucault (1980) explains that rather than viewing resistance as being exterior to power relations, it is important to understand that the act of resistance itself is responsible for continuously shifting and redefining power relationships. Strategic roles assumed by multiple points of resistance may well be adversarial in nature; however, resistance to power may also include roles that are supportive and specific in their focus (Foucault, 1980).

Furthermore, we are positioned within power relationships as a result of the struggle inherent within a specific context. Foucault makes it clear that the struggle for power includes both domination and resistance. The struggle itself requires the co-ordination of various strategies and tactics (McHoul & Grace, 1993). It is interesting to note that Foucault believed that the struggle for power associated with more mundane, everyday acts of resistance holds the potential for profound change. In addition, Foucault's analysis of resistance includes the notion that resistance is more effective if directed at specific techniques of power, rather than power in a general sense (McHoul & Grace, 1993). In order for resistance to be effective, active scrutiny of disciplinary tactics is required. However, resistance must be accompanied by the realization that such tactics are being used in the first instance. This last observation is relevant to understanding why disciplinary techniques are so successful in producing compliant individuals. Earlier discussion focused on the importance of the relationship between Foucault's concepts of power and discourse. In order

to maintain a dominant discourse, certain conditions must be introduced that establish what is considered an acceptable “truth.”

Disciplinary Power

Foucault differentiated power historically, and conceptualized it in a variety of ways. For example, in medieval society, power was exercised through the existence of a sovereign authority that maintained absolute control over his subjects. This was achieved by the threat of torture and public displays of violence (Foucault, 1977). However, modern society coordinates power in quite a different way, and alternative mechanisms of power came to replace sovereign power. This new form of [disciplinary] power is now exercised through constant surveillance and a variety of corrective techniques and procedures. Foucault’s theorizing allows us to understand how modern individuals can be controlled without the direct threat of violence and physical constraint (McHoul & Grace, 1993).

Foucault carried out his analysis of power within three specific bodies of knowledge: madness, criminality and sexuality (McHoul & Grace, 1993). However, the techniques and instruments of disciplinary power can be utilized within any institution including schools, prisons and hospitals. Foucault (1977) explains that the success of disciplinary power, within any institutional setting, is derived from the utilization of three instruments. These are: hierarchical observation, normalizing judgment and examination. Moreover, two specific techniques of power enable these instruments to be extraordinarily successful. Foucault’s work on the modern criminal system introduced the panopticon as a metaphor for surveillance. Alternatively, Foucault introduced the technique of the “confessional” to explore the relationship between power and sexuality (McHoul & Grace, 1993).

The Panopticon

Foucault's work is particularly relevant with respect to his exploration of the impact of surveillance, observation and disciplinary power (Cheek & Rudge, 1994). Each of these regimes has significantly influenced the construction of contemporary nursing practice. Foucault introduced the panopticon as the central mechanism for theorizing about surveillance and its associated disciplinary regimes (Cheek & Rudge, 1994). Conceived in 1843 by Jeremy Bentham, the panopticon consisted of a single guard tower surrounded by a ring of cells each housing a prisoner. From this tower, all the prisoners in the cells could be continuously observed. In addition, the guards themselves were under the surveillance of the governor of the prison. Thus, from a Foucauldian perspective the major effect of the panopticon was "to induce in the inmate a state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power"(Foucault, 1977, p.201). Foucault used Bentham's panopticon as a metaphor to understand the "normalizing" disciplinary techniques embedded within a variety of social structures including the contemporary health care system and schools (Cheek & Rudge, 1994). In modern society, the normalization of individuals can be achieved by claims of ownership to knowledge by powerful groups of experts. Disciplinary instruments such as hierarchical surveillance, normalizing judgement and examination ensure a certain level of conformity. Subsequently, individuals are molded and become self-disciplining. Foucault suggested both schools and hospitals as likely sites for this process of normalization (Cheek & Rudge, 1994).

Disciplinary Instruments

Hierarchical Observation

In the case of hierarchical observation, surveillance is enacted within the boundaries of an unequal relationship between two parties. Surveillance is directed towards the subject, but the subject of the surveillance does not have the power to observe the observer. Therefore, the major effect of the panopticon is to induce a state of permanent visibility that results in compliant and self-disciplined individuals (McHoul & Grace, 1993). This type of vigilant surveillance is essentially corrective in its ability to change behavior. Foucault (1977) referred to hierarchical and continuous surveillance as an automatic and anonymous power. An important aspect of this power is that it has the effect of disciplining individuals in the absence of an authority figure.

Normalizing Judgment

Normalizing judgment refers to the process whereby an individual's behavior or knowledge is judged according to a normative standard (McHoul & Grace, 1993). This disciplinary instrument hierarchizes good and bad behavior in relation to each another. Foucault (1977) goes on to explain that it is precisely the rules that govern normalizing behavior that allow us to seek out those individuals that are different. The process of normalization does not necessarily result in conformity; rather, a significant effect of normalizing judgement rests in its ability to highlight individuality. In this way, difference, deviance and eccentricities are highlighted by a system of control determined to seek them out (McHoul & Grace, 1993).

Examination

Finally, examination combines the instruments of observational hierarchy and normalizing judgement (Foucault, 1977). Examination endorses an individual's degree of knowledge. Individuals are made visible through a system that judges them, and success on an examination depends on a person's ability to meet specific criteria imposed by those in power. Failure to meet acceptable standards results in punishment and normalizing judgment (Dzurec, 1995).

Scientia Sexualis

Foucault's analysis of the relationship between power and sex details the use of the "confession" as a different disciplinary technique. In addition, this aspect of Foucault's work details the role of resistance in opposition to power. The technique of the "confession" in association with the instruments of power already discussed is particularly relevant to this research study. Foucault's concept of sexuality is historically constructed and links contemporary sexual practice with the modern mechanics of power. The discourse associated with sex and sexual practices was now associated with a specific political agenda. This discourse gained importance in a society that was concerned with managing life processes. Foucault suggests that this was because sex linked the two centers of regulation of life that disciplinary power controlled: the body as a physical organism and the population as a species (McHoul & Grace, 1993). The anatomo-politics of the body and bio-politics of the population represented two poles around which the organization of power over life was organized. The development of a bipolar technology interested in maximizing the performance of the body and regulating the processes of life is referred to as "bio-power" (McHoul & Grace, 1993).

The anatomo-politics of the body centered on the body as a machine. Disciplining the body was directed at optimizing its capabilities and enhancing the body's docility and utility. Inserting the body into machines of production facilitated the growth of a variety of economic processes (Foucault, 1980). Alternatively, the biopolitics of the population comprised of a system of interventions and regulations that were directed at such issues as birth, mortality and the health of the community. The control of sexuality focused on the need to manage populations in an attempt to achieve desirable results (McHoul & Grace, 1993).

The Confession

Just as the panopticon is identified as the disciplinary technique associated with the criminal justice system, the technology of the confession is important in understanding Foucault's work on the relationship between sexuality and power (McHoul & Grace, 1993). Since the Middle Ages, Western societies relied on the confessional as one of the most significant rituals depended upon for the production of truth. Indeed, Foucault (1980) argues, "The confession was, and still remains, the general standard governing the production of the true discourse on sex" (p. 63). For a long time the practice of confession was associated with confessing the sexual act, and doing penance. However, the confession has extended its reach to include reconstruction of the events in and around the sexual act, and exploration of the desires and obsessions associated with it. The technique of the confession has the power to direct sexual practice (Foucault, 1980).

However, the confessional is a versatile technology that has spread far beyond the domain of the church and it can be demonstrated within a variety of relationships: for example, children and parents, students and educators, patients and psychiatrists (McHoul &

Grace, 1993). The act of confession may take the form of a conversation, interview or written narrative. However, confessional activities share an important similarity: they all unfold within a power relationship where one party has the power to judge, punish, reconcile and forgive (Foucault, 1980).

Just as the panopticon produces docile, self-disciplined bodies, so does the confessional. Foucault (1980) suggests that the obligation to confess is so great that we no longer perceive the act of confession as the power that constrains us. Furthermore, the act of confession is liberating, but the production of truth is embedded within power relations. Foucault (1980) goes on to explain that truth is not by nature “free,” but that the production of truth within the confessional relationship is constrained by an authority figure that ultimately decides on an acceptable version of the truth.

Disciplinary instruments such as hierarchical observation, normalizing judgment and examination, provide a framework that establishes expectations around normality. Foucault introduced the panopticon and the confession as modern techniques that create the conditions necessary for this corrective behavior to occur. It is important to note that the knowledge produced as a result of panoptic surveillance, or confessional acts, is not necessarily “true.” However, disciplinary techniques are extremely effective in generating a belief in their claims to a particular truth. Developing an understanding of how the relationship between power and knowledge operates through discursive frameworks provides the opportunity to challenge the authority associated with this type of knowledge production.

This chapter started out by exploring the theoretical assumptions associated with poststructuralist thought. Michel Foucault was introduced as one example of a

poststructuralist theorist whose work has become increasingly popular with nurse researchers. I then explored some key theoretical concepts essential for understanding a Foucauldian approach towards doing research. The concept of discourse was introduced, and this discussion was followed by exploration of the unique aspects of Foucault's treatment of discourse. In particular, the link binding powerful discursive frameworks and the production of knowledge was explored. In addition, the techniques and disciplines of power associated with a Foucauldian perspective were described. It was established that Foucault's analysis of the "confessional" is particularly relevant for this study.

The following chapter addresses issues related to methodology and describes in detail how the research is carried out. Relevant considerations include ensuring a good "fit" between methodological and theoretical choices and presenting the research project in terms of feasibility. An attempt is made to link methodological goals with the study aims and objectives outlined in chapter one. The following discussion includes a comprehensive exploration of how methodological concerns are framed within a poststructuralist perspective.

CHAPTER IV

METHODOLOGY

Choosing the design for a research project involves the deliberate appraisal of a variety of influencing factors. Research in the discipline of nursing is most often conducted within two major paradigms. One of these is the naturalistic paradigm; assumptions associated with this worldview include inductive processes, emergent findings, flexible design, and interpretation of findings that are contextually bound (Patton, 2002). Qualitative research is associated with this particular form of inquiry. Examples of qualitative research methodologies include phenomenological research, ethnography, and grounded theory.

This study applies a poststructuralist and grounded theory methodological approach as a means to analyze and interpret study findings. First, explanation of the principles associated with the grounded theory approach is undertaken. Following that, the concept of discourse analysis is introduced as one methodological approach reflective of a poststructuralist perspective. An argument is put forward to support the compatibility of both methodological approaches. An attempt has been made to integrate each theoretical perspective in a manner that supports an analytical framework reflective of a poststructuralist understanding towards writing and thinking about research. In addition, the utility of this type of methodological approach with respect to the profession of nursing is explored. Other issues associated with methodology include sampling, informed consent and methods for collecting and analyzing data. These are discussed in turn.

Strauss and Corbin (1998a) have defined qualitative research as “any kind of research that produces findings not arrived at by means of statistical procedures or other means of quantification” (p.10). Descriptions of qualitative research can be confusing

when reference to, and interpretation of, different designs, purposes and approaches are used interchangeably. However, the purpose of all qualitative research is really the same. Researchers are interested in learning more about a particular phenomenon and they seek to develop new knowledge and understandings, as well as offer contributions to existing work.

Harding (1987) makes the clear distinction between the terms “method” and “methodology.” Method simply refers to the technique used to collect data. Examples include interviews and observation. However, methodology refers to a generalized theoretical approach to research that includes epistemological issues and concerns. This is an important distinction because it suggests that methodological choices can be informed by a specific philosophical stance. Therefore, it seems reasonable to think that grounded theory methodology can be influenced and shaped by a poststructuralist perspective.

Grounded theory is referred to as a general methodology or approach to research, as well as to a particular method of analyzing and coding data. This makes it particularly vulnerable to a lack of clarity regarding the difference between method and methodology. Patton (2002) indicates that the term “grounded theory” is often used as a more general reference to any inductive qualitative process. Indeed, Strauss and Corbin (1998b) state that “grounded theory is a general methodology, a way of thinking about and conceptualizing data”(p.275). While it is true that grounded theory shares similarities with other types of qualitative research, a major difference between this approach and other types of qualitative research is its emphasis on theory development (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

The Origins of Grounded Theory

Grounded theory methodology has its roots in the symbolic interactionist tradition of social psychology and sociology (Robrecht, 1995). The basic principles of symbolic interactionism state meaning is derived from social interaction, and that individuals use an interpretative process to direct and modify those meanings. Philosophically, early-grounded theory was considered realist and somewhat objectivist in its perspective (Annells, 1996).

Sociologists, Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss, first presented grounded theory in their 1967 book *The Discovery of Grounded Theory*. The purpose of this book was threefold: to provide rationale for the notion that grounded theory is developed through continuous interaction with data collected during the research, to suggest the logic for grounded theory and to legitimize qualitative research (Strauss & Corbin, 1998b).

This early work generated grounded theory methodology, a process that “articulated the discovery of theory from qualitative data” (Robrecht, 1995, p.170). Specifically, constant comparative analysis was developed as a means to develop theory from data obtained in social settings. The introduction of a rigorous guide to theory development enabled Glaser and Strauss to confront challenges from the scientific community. These concerns focused on the absence of explicit methodological procedures associated with qualitative research at that time.

However, grounded theory has evolved since the 1960's, and additional books are now published that seek to refine and further develop this particular style of analysis. However, an on-going debate exists between Glaser and Strauss regarding definitions of various terms and application of methodology (Melia, 1996). A more recent collaboration

by Strauss and Corbin (1998a) explains that some differences in terminology and procedural recommendations have emerged throughout the years, but that the essential theoretical components remain the same. For the purposes of clarity, the principles of grounded theory data analysis outlined by Strauss and Corbin (1998a) are utilized throughout this study.

What is Grounded Theory?

Strauss and Corbin (1998a) explain that grounded theory is derived from data systematically gathered and analyzed throughout the research process. In this method, data collection, analysis and theory building stand in close relationship to one another. Grounded theory is inductive in nature and must originate from the data and not a priori assumptions. Data collection, analysis and building of theory occur simultaneously in this type of methodological approach. Theory building itself requires interpretation and conceptualization of the data. The concepts must then be related in order to provide a theoretical framework that suggests a plausible representation of reality. Strauss and Corbin (1998a) are careful to suggest that this reality is interpreted, and cannot be actually known. Having said that, grounded theory researchers hope to produce theory that is well constructed and conceptually dense.

Well-constructed grounded theory meets the following four criteria: fit, understanding, generality and control (Strauss & Corbin, 1998a). Essentially, theory that is derived from reality and has been carefully induced from a diverse range of data should “fit” within a theoretical framework. If the theory reasonably represents a particular representation of reality, it should make sense to both the researcher and the participants. Comprehensive interpretation of the data should provide enough conceptual variation to

make it applicable within a variety of contexts. Finally, control is achieved by systematically deriving data from a specified phenomenon within clearly defined parameters.

Discourse Analysis: One Method Within a Poststructuralist Approach

The discourses represented within various texts uncover different aspects of contemporary nursing practice. Analyses of these discourses reveals much about our understanding of how certain practices become established and taken for granted (Cheek, 2000). Drawing its approach from linguistics, psychology, anthropology and cultural studies, discourse analysis is an interdisciplinary concept that is used in a variety of ways. However, the key features associated with a poststructuralist application include the following philosophical understandings; (a) discourse analysis situates texts within their historical, social and political contexts; (b) texts, whether they are interviews, newspapers, articles or drawings are constructed within discursive frameworks which shape how we think and talk about various practices; and (c) discursive analyses of texts are reflexive and critical in their approach. Interrogation of texts is guided by asking questions about what representations are included and excluded. The goal of this type of analysis is to uncover unspoken assumptions that serve to shape texts in the first place (Cheek, 2000). This study focuses exploration upon the central discourses associated with the practice of journal writing within the profession of nursing.

Doing Research Using Discourse Analysis

As with any research method, discourse analysis follows certain steps or guidelines. For the purposes of this study, I chose to implement the stages of analysis suggested by Parker (1992). These guidelines are not intended to be rigid, however they provide a useful

framework for this type of exploration. Application of the key features associated with analysis of discourse is evident throughout all the stages of a research project. Parker (1992) suggests that the introduction be used to situate the study in relationship to existing work. The questions and issues underlying the topic of interest were discussed in order to contextualize the research in relationship to existing work. Following that a review of the literature included articles that reflect a variety of theoretical approaches. Major themes or discourses were introduced. Chapter one established that, despite a lack of evidence to suggest otherwise, reflective journal writing is afforded an enormous degree of authority regarding its ability to produce critically astute practitioners. This study suggests that the uncritical acceptance of journaling within nursing education is problematic. As a result, questions were directed towards challenging the underlying assumption that this practice is useful in nursing education. A review of the literature uncovered several dominant themes. First, professional and educational nursing authorities promote the utility of reflective journaling without acknowledging the limitations of this practice. Second, nurse educators decide what constitutes good reflection, versus an unacceptable effort.

From a methodological standpoint, Parker (1992) suggests that it is important to provide information regarding the nature of the texts chosen for the study. Considerations include explaining why certain texts were chosen over others. For the purposes of this study, texts were represented by transcribed interviews with the students, course outlines and Reflective Practice guidelines established by the CNO. The choice of what kinds of texts to include was based on methodological approach, and guided by the research question. This study explores the student perspective, and individual interviews were thought to be the best way to generate in-depth information about the topic of interest. Course outlines and

information from the CNO provided valuable information regarding the impact of educational and professional discourses associated with reflective journal writing.

The analysis and discussion phase of the research process is also guided by the principles of discourse analysis. Each of the texts used in this study are representative of a number of underlying discourses that shape our understanding of reflective journaling within contemporary nursing education. Here, it is important to focus on the absence of possible discourses. That is, are certain ways of thinking and speaking about reflective journal writing excluded? In keeping with this philosophy, each interview transcript was scrutinized in a variety of ways. Statements and words that appeared to reflect a particular viewpoint or emotion were grouped together. I asked myself questions about why students might choose to verbalize their experiences in one way, as opposed to another. Therefore, the data were analyzed with a view to identifying discourses that appeared to be absent. This process led me to ask questions about why reflective journaling might be afforded so much authority, and what conditions exist in order to maintain this position. Similarly, written texts such as course outlines and information from the CNO were interrogated. This was done in an effort to determine if there was congruence between the expectations detailed in these texts and the perceived experience of the students with whom I spoke.

Identification of various discourses and their associated concepts was undertaken in the following manner. Upon completion of each interview, line by line analysis was done. This generated a number of concepts that were subsequently grouped beneath a discursive heading. Analysis of the interviews was on-going and comparisons were made between how students spoke about specific issues related to journal writing. A number of dominant discourses emerged. For example, reflective journaling was identified as a facilitator-driven

activity encouraging conformity and compliance. The discourse of conformity emerged, and it revealed that students were resistant to the activity of journal writing in two distinctly different ways: Most students passively resisted, but some were overt in their criticism of journaling. Questions that shaped my understanding of a discourse of conformity included: (a) why were students so hesitant to actively challenge various aspects of journal writing; and (b) what does it mean if nurse educators seek to control journal writing activities when the course outline speaks about the need for students to think critically and show initiative?

A similar approach was taken upon reading the course outlines and professional recommendations for reflective practice. I noticed that reflective journal writing is spoken about with an enormous degree of authority and there are no indications pointing to the limitations of this practice. Check (2000) reminds us that discourse analysis is most useful when the level of analysis reflects the social and political realities of the texts it seeks to represent. As a result, I attempted to integrate information from each of the various texts in an effort to describe how sociopolitical discourses shape the way this learning tool is implemented within nursing education.

Grounded Theory and the Discipline of Nursing

Sociologists did much of the early work with grounded theory. However, diffusion of this methodological approach has increased rapidly across a wide range of disciplines. In fact, Strauss and Corbin (1998b) state “grounded theory now runs the risk of becoming fashionable”(p.277). In fact, a grounded theory approach has become increasingly popular with nurse researchers who seek to understand phenomena of a diverse and complex nature. For example, generating information that provides a more complete understanding of the gap that exists between theory and practice has particular relevance

for nursing (Streubert & Carpenter, 1999). For example, Burnard (1992) utilized modified grounded theory to explore student nurses' perceptions of experiential learning. The aim of this research was to produce a theoretical framework of interviewee responses that could be used to help nurse educators plan and implement more meaningful teaching strategies. Benoliel (1996) discusses how grounded theory has the potential to broaden the scope of nursing practice and research to include exploration of phenomena that are representative of multiple layers of sociocultural context. Similarly, Keddy, Sims and Stern (1996) argue that by addressing the broader social and political context, it is possible for nurse researchers to develop theories that have the potential to effect action.

This is certainly congruent with Strauss and Corbin's (1998b) assertion that grounded theory is less interested in individual interactions (as in patient-nurse interactions), and more concerned with patterns of interaction and the social processes that emerge between multiple players. Developing nursing knowledge within the context of the larger picture affords nurse researchers the opportunity to direct practice that is socially and politically engaged. In fact, some nurse researchers are choosing to combine grounded theory with theoretical perspectives such as feminism and poststructuralist theory in an attempt to facilitate a more critical and flexible analysis (Fahy, 1997; Keddy, Sims & Stern, 1996; Wuest, 1995).

A Poststructuralist Approach Towards Doing Nursing Research

Dzurec (1989) suggests that nursing's commitment towards a positivistic approach to doing research recognizes an objective truth exists, and that outcomes can be clearly articulated. The belief that positivistic inquiry is somehow more "valid" than naturalistic investigation reflects the relationship between authoritative claims to truth and power.

This singular understanding of what constitutes valid research constrains and excludes alternative approaches towards understanding the same phenomena. Alternatively, poststructuralist theory is offered as a way to transcend the limitations of traditional research paradigms. Poststructuralist theory provides nursing with the impetus to challenge the limitations of structured paradigms and explore phenomena from multiple theoretical and methodological perspectives. Cheek (2000) states that:

Postmodern and poststructuralist approaches offer one way of thinking deeply about nursing and health care. Practical, specific and concrete research outcomes are needed in practice-based disciplines such as nursing, but so are thoughtful practitioners who can influence and change practice. The two need not be mutually exclusive. (p.11)

Poststructuralist theory seeks to challenge universalizing assumptions. Increasingly, the work of Michel Foucault has been utilized within the discipline of nursing to theorize notions of power, truth and knowledge (Cotton, 1997; Gastaldo & Holmes, 1999; Gilbert, 2001; Henderson, 1994; Holmes & Gastaldo, 2002). Specifically, power is knowledge, and this has direct implications for what type of information is afforded legitimacy. For example, the assumed importance of reflective practice is one discourse; alternatively, questioning the value of a universally applied practice represents an opposing discourse.

Although the work of Foucault is increasingly more visible within nursing research, a diverse range of opinion exists regarding the practical application of poststructuralist theory in relation to contemporary health care analyses. Challenges directed towards Foucault's theorizing of power and knowledge include the suggestion that although Foucault effectively

criticizes the notion of a dominant discourse, he fails to offer an acceptable alternative (Cheek & Porter, 1997). This criticism suggests that although poststructuralist theory raises interesting concerns, it does not offer useful and practical possibilities for nursing.

In response to this challenge, Julianne Cheek (1997) suggests that the utility of a Foucauldian approach towards nursing research rests in its ability to expose dominant discourses and explore the conditions necessary to maintain them. Exploration of the relationship between the effect of power and the production of knowledge the possibility presents nursing with an alternative understanding of how to use power to motivate change. By introducing the suggestion that critical debate exists in relationship to the usefulness of poststructuralist theory within the health care arena, I seek to acknowledge the complexity and limitations of this, or any, type of theoretical approach. However, this study positions itself from the assumption that a poststructuralist analysis of reflective journaling has some practical use within the profession of nursing.

Combining Grounded Theory with a Poststructuralist Approach

While the topic of interest, research question and methodology direct the choice of research design; the interests of the researcher are also an influencing factor. Annells (1996) explains that the methodological choices made during the course of the inquiry necessarily reflect the philosophical beliefs of the researcher. These beliefs shape questions regarding how a particular version of reality can be discovered and known. As discussed earlier, methodological perspectives are informed by epistemological concerns. There has been lively debate directed at which paradigms of inquiry are congruent with the philosophical underpinnings of grounded theory. Strauss and Corbin (1998b) acknowledge that the actual uses of grounded theory have varied in accordance with the

focus and purpose of the research, as well as various social and intellectual forces. They state:

Researchers utilizing grounded theory have undoubtedly been much influenced by contemporary intellectual trends and movements, including ethnomethodology, feminism, political economy, and varieties of postmodernism. (p. 276)

However, Strauss and Corbin (1998b) stress that extending grounded theory to incorporate different theoretical perspectives does not mean that the central tenets of this methodology have been altered. This statement suggests that Strauss and Corbin believe that it is possible to maintain certain openness and receptivity to new ideas while retaining the core principles of grounded theory methodology. My particular interest is directed at melding grounded theory and poststructuralist theory in a way that maximizes the strengths of each approach.

Strauss and Corbin (1998b) have identified the impact of poststructuralist theory on the development of grounded theory methodology. This is illustrated in their discussion surrounding the influence of gender, power and social class as it relates to the phenomenon of interest. Inclusion of these issues reflects a broader perspective, or a macrosociological view. This is a move away from the original underpinnings of grounded theory that upheld classic symbolic interactionist beliefs that focused on microsociological theory (Annells, 1996).

Furthermore, Strauss and Corbin (1998b) acknowledge the provisional and time-limited nature of theories. This means that all theories are susceptible to changes in social reality and the temporal nature of such theories constantly requires revision. This speaks to the necessity of a process that is fluid and dynamic, rather than fixed and prescribed.

Similarly, poststructuralist theory supports the notion that any version of reality is only a partial capturing of the truth at any particular moment in time.

Lastly, Strauss and Corbin (1998b) discuss the importance of implementing multiple perspectives. This is achieved by discovering the reality of as many participants as possible in an attempt to develop theory that is complex and multilayered. Keddy et al. (1996) speak to the importance of on-going participant involvement as a means to verifying the authenticity of researcher interpretation of this discovered "reality." In addition, analytic interpretations and the resulting conceptual relationships are inclusive of participant voices. Theories that arise from this type of researcher-participant collaboration have the potential to be conceptually rich and meaningful.

From the previous discussion, it seems apparent that grounded theory could be considered compatible with a poststructuralist approach. However, given the complex nature of the relationship between research designs and paradigms of inquiry, a divergent range of opinions does exist regarding the congruence of these two different philosophical viewpoints. Annells (1996) agrees that the use of a conceptual framework to explore macrosocial and structural factors facilitates the possibility of doing grounded theory that is informed by the critical theory paradigm. But, Annells (1996) also reminds the reader that the issue of theory development is a thorny one for poststructuralist and postmodern theory. She goes on to state, "Postmodern researchers are not concerned about the "truth" of their research product but rather the pragmatic applicability of the results" (p. 391). Lastly, Annells (1996) admits that grounded theory will continue to be influenced by postmodern thought and that this relationship will become more clearly defined in the coming years.

Finally, a few comments to close this discussion regarding the rationale for a poststructuralist, grounded theory approach. Irrespective of what type of theoretical approach is applied to the grounded theory process, there is a necessity for researchers to make clear their epistemological intent. This process of examination makes it possible to acknowledge the limitations of the resulting research (Charmaz, 2000). Combining grounded theory with a poststructuralist inquiry reflects my personal engagement with this type of philosophical approach. Therefore, it is expected that this particular worldview will shape the research process. Finally, I agree with Lincoln and Guba's (2000) assertion that it is less useful to hold paradigms in contention with each other, than it is to understand how to blend approaches, and capitalize on the strengths of differing worldviews. In keeping with this philosophy, I have utilized the principles generated by the work of Strauss and Corbin (1998a) to approach issues related to sampling and the analysis of raw data. However, where appropriate, I have melded this more traditional approach with a poststructuralist understanding of methodological issues.

Grounded Theory: Sampling

Grounded theory is unique in its use of theoretical sampling. That is, purposeful sampling based on uncovering concepts that have theoretical relevance to the study at hand. Strauss and Corbin, (1998a) stress that theoretical sampling is one of the most fundamental features of grounded theory. Theoretical sampling is cumulative, consistent and flexible. Three distinct modes of sampling correspond to the particular level of coding the researcher is engaged in at each particular point in the research process.

Open Sampling

Sampling is directed by the aim and purpose of three different types of coding. The first stage of sampling is called open sampling. It is associated with open coding and its aim is to discover and categorize phenomena. The goal is to uncover as many relevant categories as possible and to access the greatest amount of relevant data. Openness, rather than specificity, guides the sampling choice and this process is fairly indiscriminate. Purposeful open sampling deliberately chooses participants who will provide conceptually relevant data (Strauss & Corbin, 1998a). In this case, undergraduate nursing students that are currently engaged in the process of reflective journal writing were invited to participate in the study. The criteria for choosing these students were indiscriminate in the sense that no restrictions were specified regarding individual experience. In fact, the students were informed that all perspectives relating to the activity of reflective journaling were welcome.

Relational and Variational Sampling

Relational and variational sampling follows open sampling and is associated with axial coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1998a). The focus of this type of sampling is to uncover as many differences as possible within the data. Categories are related in terms of context, conditions, and interactions; relational statements are then made that attempt to validate these conceptual relationships. Strauss and Corbin (1998a) explain that uncovering process and variation might be a more difficult task if sampling proceeds based on chance, rather than choice. In addition, they acknowledge that discovering incidents that demonstrate variations in the data is difficult without unlimited access to both site and participants.

However, initial sampling was undertaken with a view to reducing researcher bias by inviting a variety of opinions from the participants.

Discriminate Sampling

Discriminate sampling is the third type of sampling and is associated with selective coding. As the name suggests, sampling now becomes a deliberate process whereby conscious decisions are made about who, and what, to sample in order to obtain data. For example, this process could involve returning to earlier sources of data in an attempt to verify information and more fully develop specific categories. In this way, sampling continues until theoretical saturation is reached. In a traditional sense, this means no new categories have emerged, and the relationships between categories are validated and well described (Strauss & Corbin, 1998a).

Strauss and Corbin's (1998) framework for approaching issues related to sampling provides a useful guide for navigating some of the considerations associated with obtaining a sample. Students were initially approached with a view to capturing the broadest range of experiences regarding reflective journal writing. Subsequently, these experiences were categorized in a way that helped me make sense of a large amount of information. However, while it might be useful to think of sampling in terms of a fairly linear process from a less complex selection process to a more discriminate one, the reality is slightly different. I did not undertake a more discriminating search to expand my sample for the following reason: Recruitment of students for this study was challenging and a large pool of interested participants did not materialize. Having said this, during the course of interviews it became quickly apparent that much of what the students had to say regarding reflective journaling was fairly similar. However, this is not to suggest that I

captured the truth regarding the student experience of reflective journaling. Rather, a poststructuralist understanding towards doing research would challenge the notion of data saturation by suggesting that my interpretation of the information shared with me by a certain number of students simply reflects one possibility among several. This philosophy supports the belief that a more discriminate sample would be no more or less representative of the “truth.”

Sample

Participant Characteristics

The study sample comprises third and fourth year, undergraduate, English-speaking university nursing students. With the exception of one student, all ten students were between the ages of 19 and 25. Several of the students had had previous university experiences in a different program. The students were purposefully recruited based on their ability to discuss their experiences of reflective journal writing. The recruitment process respected the guidelines identified by the university’s board of ethics.

Recruitment

The third year students were divided among seven seminar groups. Following approval from the seminar instructors, a brief verbal explanation of the proposed study was given at each of the seminars. A minimal amount of class time was used and each student was handed a copy of the Recruitment Text (Appendix A), the Information Letter (Appendix B) and asked to contact the researcher directly with any questions. Providing information to each student helps to preserve participant anonymity since individuals are not required to indicate interest in front of other students, or their instructors. Fourth year students were approached in an effort to increase the initial sample size. A total of three

students from the fourth year were interviewed. These students were contacted via e-mail and instructed to communicate their interest to the researcher in the same manner as the third year students.

Nursing students at this university are required to write reflective journals throughout the first three years of the undergraduate program. The fourth year students submit their journals via the Internet, rather than directly to the facilitator. Students in the latter stages of the program were chosen for this study since it was anticipated they would have had a number of reflective journal writing experiences, and be in a position to comment on how their perceptions may have changed over the course of the program. Moreover, because this population of students has had a variety of different instructors, the opportunity exists to assess the impact of different teaching styles.

Method

Data collection took the form of one-on-one, audiotape interviews. A semi-structured format utilizing open-ended questions was implemented. An interview guide was used to ensure each participant was prompted with the same types of questions (Appendix C). In this way, it was hoped that specific information might be elicited without overly constraining participant responses. Face-to-face interviews can provide the researcher with the opportunity to clarify information and detect subtle nuances that might otherwise go undetected. However, Patton (2002) emphasizes that the quality of the information gathered during an interview is largely dependent upon the skill and technique of the interviewer. Other considerations include developing an understanding that information shared during the process of an interview is context-dependent, and subject to a variety of interpretations. Crowe (1998) reminds us that the researcher has the power to

construct meaning from what has been said. Furthermore, it is possible that during the interviewing process participants may have aligned their perspectives to reflect those of the researcher. These observations are important to keep in mind during the interpretative stage of the research, and illustrate the effect of subjectivity on the process of data collection.

Analysis

In grounded theory, coding is the central process by which theories are built from data. Strauss and Corbin (1998a) stress the importance of examining the relationship between macro and micro social conditions, and integrating these findings throughout the analysis. In this way theory is contextually situated and grounded. Theory development itself consists of three different types of coding. These are: open coding, axial coding and selective coding.

Open Coding

Open coding is a fluid and dynamic process that identifies initial concepts. These concepts, along with their associated properties and dimensions, represent the building blocks of theory. Each category is made up of a number of concepts that are subsequently associated with a central idea, or phenomena. There are several ways of doing open coding, but Strauss and Corbin (1998a) suggest that line-by-line analysis is perhaps the most generative and useful way to start data analysis.

Open coding incorporates the following steps: conceptualization, defining categories and developing categories in terms of their properties. Conceptualization involves the process of grouping pieces of data together that share similar properties. This process refers to an abstract representation of an event. Grouping pieces of data into

various concepts and categories reduces large amounts of data into smaller, more manageable “bits” of information. By using comparative analysis, events that have similar properties and characteristics are grouped together under the same concept. For example, many of the students described how they wrote in their journals what they thought the facilitators wanted to hear. This behavior was labeled as “passive resistance.” The abstract concept of passive resistance was placed under the broader discursive heading of “journals as instruments of power.”

Axial Coding

Axial coding relates categories and subcategories at the level of their properties and various dimensions. Throughout this process the researcher makes constant and theoretical comparisons. Strauss and Corbin (1998a) stress that the emphasis should be on coding for explanation, and to gain understanding of a particular phenomenon. The purpose of this type of coding is to reassemble pieces of data that were fractured during the process of open coding. As a result of relating categories and subcategories, provisional statements can then be made that attempt to explain phenomena. Axial coding differs in purpose from open coding, but the two processes are intricately bound. In fact, a sense of how categories might relate may even begin during open coding.

Selective Coding

This last stage in the coding process takes concept development to the formation of a grounded theory. Selective coding integrates and refines categories. In this way, the categories are integrated into a larger theoretical picture and not simply presented as a list of themes. This process involves identifying the central category or theme around which categories are now organized (Strauss & Corbin, 1998a). The basic social process, or

central theme is interconnected to all the categories identified in the analysis. Each category represents a different aspect of how the basic social process is constructed in relation to the research process. As mentioned earlier, the development of theory is a unique component of grounded theory research. The strength of this particular methodology lies in its ability to situate issues within the larger social and political context. My goal with this research is to develop the beginnings of a conceptual framework that addresses some of the micro and macrosocial issues associated with reflective journal writing.

Just as sampling techniques and guidelines are modified to support a poststructuralist perspective, so are considerations related to coding of text. Line by line analysis of the interview text was undertaken in an effort to generate the largest amount of coding possibilities. Broad categories were established and like concepts were grouped beneath the appropriate category. In keeping with the discourse analysis method described previously, the categories and subcategories generated in this analysis became representative of various discursive frameworks. For example, the category "Journaling as an instrument of power" includes concepts such as passive resistance and active resistance. This is illustrative of a discourse of conformity within nursing education that reflects a shift of power from student to the teacher.

Credibility

The diverse range of approaches possible within qualitative inquiry requires that researchers and consumers of research recognize issues of quality and credibility are related to audience expectations, and the purpose of inquiry. Therefore, it is important to acknowledge that each theoretical orientation generates different criteria for judging

research credibility (Patton, 2002). For example, critical theory and analysis disregards efforts to remain objective and value-free. Therefore, tasks such as assessing the validity of standardized research instruments are not relevant for a critical approach towards doing research. Instead, the aim of critical theory is transformation, social critique and emancipation (Lincoln & Guba, 2000). However, this does not mean that research positioned from this perspective is disinterested in credibility and rigor. Patton (2002) explains that the issue of credibility is related to rigorous methods associated with fieldwork and analysis. Techniques for enhancing the integrity of qualitative research include acknowledging researcher bias, including negative cases and research triangulation.

Triangulation

Triangulation has long been regarded as an essential component of the design process that contributes to the quality and credibility of the research findings (Janesick, 2000). The concept of triangulation is based on the idea that no single method can adequately represent the findings brought forward by a research study. Broadly speaking, there are four different ways to triangulate data. These are: source triangulation, theory triangulation, methods triangulation and analyst triangulation (Patton, 2002).

This study used source triangulation which means that a variety of sources were used to check the consistency of the data using the same method (Patton, 2002). This was achieved by seeking out multiple perspectives from a variety of undergraduate nursing students. Source triangulation also involves comparing and crosschecking the consistency of information from multiple sources (Patton, 2002). Responses from each student regarding a particular issue were compared to see if they were similar. In addition, the

raw data extrapolated from the interviews with students was compared with information provided by course outlines and the College of Nurses of Ontario's reflective practice Self-Assessment Tool (1996).

Patton (2002) suggests that providing participants with the opportunity to view their transcripts is a form of analyst triangulation. Also called *member checks*, the credibility of a qualitative research project is enhanced by providing participants with chance to review their transcript and comment on issues of accuracy and completeness. To facilitate this process, each of the participants was e-mailed a draft of their transcript. One student was kind enough to fill in a word I could not hear during the transcription. However, there were no discrepancies brought to my attention at this stage of the research process. In addition, each student was given the option of viewing the completed project. Nine of the ten participants chose to do so.

Poststructuralist Challenges Towards the Concept of Triangulation

Research informed by poststructuralist inquiry seeks to challenge the notion that triangulation can be used as a means to validate the truth. This is in keeping with ontological assumptions that assert the truth cannot be known. More recently, Richardson (2000) introduced the "crystal" as a metaphor to illustrate the concept of validity in postmodern research. Richardson (2000) states "The central imagery (for postmodern texts) is the crystal, which combines symmetry and substance with an infinite variety of shapes, substances, transmutations, multidimensionalities, and angles of approach" (p.934). From this perspective, traditional ideas related to the credibility of qualitative research are challenged and deconstructed.

Ethical Considerations

The students were assured of the voluntary nature of their participation, and concerns related to confidentiality and anonymity were given serious consideration. Direct quotes from the participants were identified by interview and page number. Each of the students were given the opportunity to review their transcripts for the purposes of accuracy. Students interested in participating in the study contacted me directly and a meeting was arranged to review the Information Letter and to clarify any questions. Once the participant and myself were satisfied that all relevant information was understood, informed consent was obtained (Appendix D). Each student was given a signed copy of the consent form. In an attempt to address the particular nuances of any one language, the consent form was also available in French (Appendix E). None of the participants requested a French version of the consent form.

Other ethical considerations included reassuring the seminar instructors that they were not identified within the study, and that individual seminar groups were arbitrarily numbered as a means to locate the students. Finally, the possibility existed that some students might interpret the focus of inquiry for this research project as an opportunity to critique the nursing curricula. My responsibility included focusing the interviews in a way that reflected the specific aims of the research itself. Thus, it was made clear that the study was not being guided from a particular viewpoint about the usefulness of reflective journal writing or a critique of the curriculum.

a comprehensive description of the data. Excerpts from the interviews are used to illustrate various points. The data was initially conceptualized and categorized based on the procedural steps outlined by Strauss and Corbin (1998a). The poststructuralist method of

discourse analysis is used to organize and interpret the research findings. Each discursive framework is analyzed with a view to promoting an understanding of the various ways that schools of nursing construct the ideal nurse. In keeping with a poststructuralist approach towards doing research, write-up of the analysis and discussion phase of this study reflects a creative process that is less linear in its presentation than more traditional research efforts.

CHAPTER V

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

In chapter one, I suggest that many of the assumptions associated with reflective journal writing are problematic. Undertaking a critical analysis of student nurses' perceptions of this learning strategy provides a more developed understanding of the impact of this learning strategy on the learning needs and professional development of these students. Grounded theory stresses the importance of deriving theory from data. The analytical goal of this type of inquiry is to provide a theoretical description of the basic social process, or core category, that best describes the main theme that is woven throughout the investigation (Robrecht, 1995). Using discourse analysis, each grouping or category is organized within a particular discursive framework. Each of the discourses explored in this analysis reflects different aspects of the socialization process that ultimately results in the construction of an "authentic" nurse. The following discussion identifies the basic social process that underlies the relationship between journal writing, nursing students and various nursing authorities.

Basic Social Process

"Constructing the *authentic* nurse" emerged as the core social process that best describes the attempt, on the part of nursing schools, to produce reflective practitioners. Each of the categories and concepts contribute to an understanding of this process. The verb "constructing" was chosen since it reflects a deliberate and active process undertaken by nursing authorities to produce a particular type of nurse. In fact, description of the data reveals that the participants were mostly aware of efforts, on the part of nursing educators, to shape their learning experience. In addition, identification of this core category demonstrates

the effect of the new “reflective doctrine” and its belief that authentic nurses are by nature reflective.

The term “authentic” implies claims of legitimacy and truth. For the purposes of this study the “authentic” nurse is understood to be the ideal nurse. Indeed, current nursing research suggests that the practice of reflective journal writing is linked with the concept of authenticity. For example, researchers such as Lepp, Zorn, Duffy and Dickson (2003) suggest that reflection, through journal writing, is a useful way to promote greater authenticity. The reflective nurse *is* the authentic nurse. Similarly, my analysis illustrates that students are invited to speak in an “authentic voice” and that journal writing is the preferred vehicle for facilitating this process. However, the majority of the students that I interviewed felt that the learning environment was not necessarily conducive to critical and authentic reflection. This observation raises questions about the ability of the learning environment to support and encourage the “authentic” voice.

Understandings of authenticity have shifted meaning in relation to the history of nursing. Contemporary nursing practice expects nurses to be reflective, autonomous and empowered. However, it is interesting to note that from an historical viewpoint desirable characteristics associated with the “ideal” nurse represent different notions of authenticity. For example, in the 19th and early 20th Century the essence of what constituted a “good” nurse reflected socially constructed notions of gender. Women’s place was in the home, while men occupied the public domain. Physiology played a part in determining gendered divisions of labour. Women were associated with matters of the body and irrational behavior, while men represented the voice of reason and matters of the mind (Stuart, 1993). However, in the latter part of the 19th Century it became socially acceptable for women to

work outside of the home. Nursing was among those professions considered acceptable. Women were considered inherently self-sacrificing, pure, and good; nursing provided the opportunity for women to capitalize on these “natural” qualities (Stuart, 1993). The following quote from a 1930’s textbook exemplifies this statement: “The utter helplessness of patients and their dependence upon us appeal to and develop in us the maternal and protective instinct” (Harmer, 1935, p.15).

While historian Kathryn McPherson (1996) readily acknowledges the profound influence that gender has had on shaping the role of nursing in the past, she also points out that issues related to class and ethnicity are mutually influential. Historically speaking, the range of factors that influenced the position of nurses within the health care system reflects a complicated relationship bridging a variety of issues. However, the political and social factors that shape our experiences of nursing today are no less complex. Current expectations regarding the characteristics that make up an ideal nurse are infused with judgments focused on the ability of nurses to be truly reflective and authentic in their practice.

The Reflective Doctrine

It is apparent that the expectations associated with representations of the “ideal” nurse” have shifted over time. However, contemporary understandings of what constitutes an “authentic” nurse originate from critical social theory. Concepts that derive from critical social theory include reduced hierarchies, reciprocity and egalitarian relationships. Practices generated as a result of the discourse associated with these concepts are referred to as the “new” nursing. The “reflective doctrine” is one such practice. Reflective teaching prescribes certain types of consciousness raising activities such as journal writing (Heslop, 1997). This

“new” way of being a nurse requires on-going reflection and the predominant discourse associated with this practice reinforces the suggestion that in order for nurses to be credible they must be self-reflective, autonomous and empowered (Gilbert, 2001; Heslop, 1997; Johns, 1999). However, researchers such as Wellard and Bethune (1996, p.1077) ask the question “how has reflection become accepted as being a rubric for an “authentic” nurse?” The discourse associated with today’s “authentic” nurse can be problematized in several ways. First, an assumption is made that the only way to be a “good” nurse is to engage in self-reflection. Second, being reflective invites nurses to speak and write in “authentic” voices. However, it is quickly apparent that being reflective is not enough: a specific kind of reflection is required.

So what are the discursive frameworks that shape the representation and understandings of how we think and speak about reflective journal writing within the profession of nursing? The following major discourses emerged from talking with nursing students and reading various written texts including course outlines and professional recommendations from the CNO: (a) the discourse of authority: journaling as a facilitator-driven activity; (b) the discourse of conformity: journals as instruments of power; and (c) the professional discourse. This is not to imply that these are the only discourses apparent within an exploration of the practice of reflective journaling, but for the purposes of this study the above identified discourses were most powerfully evident. Each of these categories is representative of a universalizing discourse within the profession of nursing that assumes the importance of journal writing.

ANALYSIS

Reflection

Before exploring each of the three discursive headings just mentioned, I have included a sample of student definitions of the concept of reflection. Towards the beginning of each interview, I asked the students to describe their understanding of the concept of reflection and the reflective process. This discussion revealed that, for these students, the reflective process is significantly influenced by educational learning objectives. It was interesting to note that all of the students recognized the importance of being “reflective” despite varying opinions regarding how this process might be achieved. In spite of the fact that the concept of reflective learning is a fairly new phenomenon within nursing education, it seems that nursing students equate being reflective with being a professional nurse.

its basically looking at how my values and my beliefs are incorporated into my practice. . . . reflection] is very valuable in kind of evaluating the effectiveness of your interventions and your change. (14, p.12-13)

It means being able to understand yourself and understand your reaction to things in order to react in more of a professional manner. (110, p.5)

Reflection is a process for understanding your learning needs and for socializing yourself into the profession. (13, p.8)

This student made a clear distinction between reflection for personal reasons and professional reflection:

My personal reflection is not really what I want here, I want my professional reflection and I want to see how I can use that to strengthen my nursing. (19, p.7)

The students were consistent in their understanding of the need to become critically reflective practitioners. The goals of reflection were associated with enhanced professional

development, personal growth and identification of individual strengths and weaknesses. The reflective process was identified as a means to understand individual learning needs and determine progress in this regard. Most of the students acknowledged that becoming reflective afforded them the opportunity to become “better” nurses. It is important to note that the students wholeheartedly support the notion of nurses being reflective. This observation demonstrates that even if students have difficulty using journals to demonstrate their ability to reflect, it does not mean they lack personal engagement with this process. The nursing students in this study are required to use journal writing as a means to develop their ability to think critically and become reflective practitioners.

Discourse of Authority: Reflective Journaling as a Facilitator-Driven Activity

We're not becoming self-directed learners because we are being told to do this

A major part of the discussion with students centered on their perception of reflective journaling within the nursing program. Each interview started with some general questions about the content and purpose of the journals. This included a description of the perceived goals of reflective journaling. The students identified how their experience with writing the journals had impacted upon them. The journals were described as written pieces of work that reflected the student's ability to meet a variety of specified learning outcomes. Examples of these learning outcomes included goals such as becoming a self-directed learner, critical thinker and evolving professional. The students spoke about understanding the need to demonstrate their professional development and ability to engage in the group process in their journals.

Within the journals, we have to reflect on how well we were, how well we performed. . . . the various roles] (I1,p.4)

There are specific objectives in the course outline that you need to reflect on in your journal. (I3, p.4)

Discussion surrounding the content of the journals included a description by the participants of the intended purpose of the journals. The students explained that the journals became a reflection of how they were achieving specific learning outcomes associated with professional development and group process.

what's expected of us is that we outline two learning outcomes we want to focus on and talk about the strengths and limitations that we have and strategies to improve. (I9, p.3)

[in the journals] we are talking about ourselves always in terms of learning outcomes, we talk about the group and how we behaved in the group. (I5, p.4)

Utility of Reflective Journals

There were a variety of opinions regarding the practice of attaching specific learning objectives to the activity of journaling, and some students were quick to point out that prescribed learning objectives did not necessarily allow for a meaningful learning experience. One student referred to the learning objectives as “euphemisms” and suggested that meeting the outcomes specified in the course outline was a matter of common sense, something students should be working on anyway. Another student agreed:

I'm the kind of person that is constantly reflecting about myself. . . . I find when someone tells me to sit down and write when its an on-going process. . . .you know, its redundant. (I2, p.9)

This same student made an interesting observation regarding the ability of the journals to enhance self-direction and critical thinking skills.

I almost feel that by making us reflect all the time its not challenging us, we're not becoming self-directed learners because we are being told to do this. (I2, p.11)

Some participants felt strongly that journaling and being reflective were distinctly separate processes. Attaching structured learning goals to the activity of journaling detracted from the opportunity for these students to think critically.

reflection is a personal process evaluating your actions, feelings, and beliefs on something that occurred. . . . its an internal debate and analysis. (I6, p.10-11)

Similarly, another student had this to say:

I think its imperative to reflect but I don't feel [journal writing] makes a better nurse or even a better person, I just do it [reflecting] anyway. (I2, p.30)

Alternatively, several of the students found journaling a positive experience:

it [journaling] has allowed me to focus on myself in terms of my strengths and weaknesses, um, and I don't think I would have done that so concretely if I wasn't forced to write the journals. (I5, p.17)

I think I am more attuned to critically thinking, it has to do with being analytical of situations that one finds oneself in. (I3, p.17)

By writing things down it just seemed to open up different options and possibilities. . . . I could just see everything a little more clearly. (I7, p.15)

The students were articulate in their ability to describe the intent and purpose behind writing in reflective journals. The journals became a reflection of how well each student was meeting the course objectives. However, it was apparent that there were a variety of opinions regarding the ability of journals to assist students in meeting those objectives. Some students explained that being asked to write reflective journals detracted from their ability to think critically.

Even those students who appreciated the value of reflective journal writing acknowledged that there were significant limitations associated with the implementation of the journals within the nursing program. A common thread linked those limitations which

rendered the activity of journal writing less meaningful for the students. The following discussion identifies student's perceptions of the major barriers associated with reflective journal writing.

Structure

The structure of the journals was perceived as rigid and regimented. The majority of the students commented on the limitation of prescribed learning activities and the interviews consistently reflected the student's need for flexibility and creativity regarding journal writing. This perception significantly diminished the power and meaning of reflective journaling for these students:

I don't like the fact that it's so structured. It forces you to reflect on certain aspects of things...they should be used to reflect on the things that students are interested in reflecting on. (I6, p.8)

I enjoy creating a finished product.. but sometimes its tedious and not very exciting because I know I have very strict criteria that I have to meet within the journaling. (I3, p.20)

when [journaling] becomes so focused on outcomes, you find yourself searching for ways to fulfill the predetermined criteria as opposed to saying what you really feel or think(I3, p.14)

This comment nicely illustrates the degree to which many of the students view journal writing as a facilitator-driven activity:

Its very focused on what they want done with it rather than what you might want to get out of it (I6, p.4)

Many of the students suggested that flexibility about what they could write in their journals would significantly improve the quality of the experience. Students were clear about their need to reflect upon something that evoked a thoughtful response. This observation is consistent with the theoretical underpinnings of the reflective process that suggest the first step in critical reflection must be an event that provokes some type of thoughtful analysis.

The problem I have with journaling [in this setting] Its almost like we aren't encouraged to talk about what you feel in situations or what you struggle with or that sort of thing because the emphasis is solely on learning outcomes. (I3, p.4)

Several of the students referred to the need to broaden the scope of journaling to include discussion of some of the sociopolitical issues related to the profession of nursing.

Here are a few examples of what these students had to say:

Being a nursing student is not about learning outcomes, its about understanding the demands made upon me physically, emotionally, mentally and spiritually. . . .I think journaling would be far more valuable if they focused on some of our concerns and pressing needs, even the political and social climate that we are entering into is ignored (I3, p.23)

This student echoed the same concerns:

there are a lot of other issues we would love to address, like the political arena and such things but we don't get the opportunity because the structure of the course is clearly defined. . . .its kind of funny because they try to promote self-directed learning but they don't really give us much option. (I4, p. 28)

One suggestion included the need to focus journaling on contentious issues that may invite more meaningful engagement:

open discussion using incredibly contentious topics that aren't dealt with anywhere else...if you were going to use journaling that would be a good place. Shock people and have them reflect on it, you actually give them a reason to think quite deeply about how does this feel, what does it mean to me, how is it going to effect me? (I6, p.21)

In addition, those students who enjoy journaling admitted some frustration at the limitations associated with the structured elements linked to specific outcomes.

Journaling becomes a task for school and not something for your own learning. (I5, p. 25)

However, one participant had this to say:

In my second year it was a lot more freelance and not very structured...it wasn't quite as valuable, it was kind of more personal writing versus course related. (I4, p. 16)

This student was clearly more comfortable writing about predetermined criteria, and made a distinction between journaling for personal and professional reasons. However, at a later point, this same student commented on the need for a broader, more expansive structure that would be supported by the facilitator. Many of the other students described the need to incorporate both professional and personal aspects of reflection in their journals.

Redundancy

It was evident that the students recognized the importance of becoming more critical practitioners. However, there appeared to be difficulty associated with implementing reflective journals [within the current format] to meet that goal. All of the participants agreed there was a certain level of redundancy and repetition that limited the learning experience. The frustration associated with being asked to reflect repeatedly on the same outcomes was a common complaint. Dissatisfaction with the process seemed to be centered on the *way* in which students were being asked to reflect as opposed to the process of reflection itself:

Journaling on the group process is kind of redundant and even commenting upon myself as a group member each week it kind of became repetitive because there wasn't, it wouldn't be so much change over each week. (I8, p.11)

I will admit that sometimes it does feel redundant to write down again and again how we felt...it does seem that we are doing the same thing over and over again. (I1 p. 24)

This student found that going back repeatedly to the same objectives restricted her ability to reflect on a deeper level:

we were supposed to reflect on the learning outcomes in every journal, I remember writing some that were just pointless. (I7, p. 3)

Feedback

As mentioned, the prescribed format of the journals was a major concern for the majority of the students. However, the nature of the feedback the students received from the instructors was also an issue for many of the students. Within the context of the discussion regarding feedback I asked the students to explain how they knew they were meeting the objectives associated with writing reflective journals. How did the students know they were becoming more critical in their ability to appraise situations? Many of the students felt this process was subjective and largely self-determined:

I know I'm progressing because of my own personal self-reflection. . . .its just through self-evaluation.

(I2, p. 15)

You have to gauge yourself, its completely subjective, you gauge yourself based on what is outlined, the components of that particular outcome and the criteria. (I3, p. 15)

If I thought to myself well if maybe look at my first year journal about how I was as a communicator and compare with how I am now. (I5, p. 6)

It was apparent that the students felt a major component of the evaluation process included their own perceptions on their ability to improve their skills. However, I wanted to understand what kind of feedback would best facilitate the student's abilities to develop the skills outlined within the objectives. Here is what the students had to say:

If they just put tick marks, I don't think that really gives you much to think about after you receive your journals. . . .if we are pouring our heart out to the teacher and then if they respond well...it may give us some confidence for future journals and in ourselves. (I5, p. 21)

I've never really gotten any constructive feedback. Hearing [feedback] from a professional [that says] this is good but you could work on this, I would definitely appreciate it and take it to heart. (I2, p. 16)

Some of the students felt they had received positive feedback from their facilitators:

I think she has generally been pleased with our journals, obviously we have to have certain things in the journal. . . .generally she gives us good feedback. (I1, p. 15)

It became clear that [at times] the nature of the feedback was linked to the content of the journals rather than the student's ability to critically explore a given situation. Students that challenged the process often received feedback that was directive in the sense of guiding students back towards delivering a more acceptable end product.

The feedback is constructive but not helpful, its very focused on what they want) done with it rather than what you might want to get out of it...(I6, p.4)

The participants in this study were aware of the need to accommodate their learning experience within acceptable parameters. This was particularly difficult for those students who viewed journaling as an opportunity to develop professional skills in conjunction with personal exploration. Prescribed format, redundancy and quality of feedback were perceived as major barriers in preventing journaling from becoming a more meaningful tool. The students experienced a significant level of frustration associated with the fact that the journals were viewed as too rigid and prescribed. This reduced journaling to a "task" associated with school as opposed to an activity that facilitated deep and meaningful reflection. Feedback was considered more useful if it was detailed and specific as opposed to vague and generalized. Tick marks were considered inadequate and students seemed to equate the quality of the feedback that they received from the facilitators as a reflection of the value of their effort. Finally, students that wrote within the suggested guidelines appeared to receive positive feedback.

Course Outlines

Examination of course outlines attempted to uncover how students were being judged in relationship to the learning objectives. I wanted to establish if there was

incongruence between the intended goals identified within the course objectives, and the student experience. From talking with the students, it seemed that the emphasis was on facilitator-driven expectations rather than student-centered learning. I asked students to explain why they might be asked to redo their journals, and found that students who challenged the guidelines regarding appropriate content risked being asked to rewrite their journal entries.

Many of the characteristics of critically astute practitioners are well-described in the course objectives. For example, the program expects self-directed learners to take responsibility for their learning and identify strategies to promote their own learning needs. Similarly, an evolving professional might be expected to identify nursing roles in more complex situations. However, it was apparent that the students needed to conform to a prescribed process associated with meeting these objectives. Furthermore, the journals could be considered unsatisfactory if students failed to demonstrate particular behavior based on learning outcomes such as those just mentioned. This resulted in dissonance between the intent behind the objectives and the manner in which they could be demonstrated. Interestingly, those students who criticized the current format of the reflective journals were insightful and articulate about their interest in critically appraising nursing, and their role within the profession. In fact, the interviews revealed that many of the students were critically engaged in much more complex ways than the journal experience appeared to allow for. During the course of the interviews several of the students had shared their interest in an exploration of broader sociopolitical issues that extended beyond the expectations outlined in the course objectives.

The above-mentioned observations certainly point to the fact that reflective journaling, at least within this school, is largely viewed as instructor-driven. This observation is suggestive of a teaching paradigm that remains somewhat authoritarian in its approach. Several considerations emerged as a result of those early discussions with the students. The students are not challenging the professional goals associated with the reflective process. Rather, they are questioning the exclusive use of journaling writing as a means to achieve those same learning outcomes. The students identified several key barriers that were responsible for reducing the perceived utility of the reflective journals. These included prescribed learning outcomes, redundancy and the quality of facilitator feedback. But what does this finding mean for nursing education?

The majority of the students found journal writing, in its current format, problematic. Feedback from the students provides nurse educators with a valuable opportunity to critically appraise their own beliefs associated with the utility of this learning strategy. The very nature of the discourse that surrounds the concept of reflective practice emphasizes autonomy, empowerment and the formation of egalitarian relationships (Heslop, 1997). However, the experience of students interviewed in this study suggests that educators behave in a manner that is incongruent with the assumptions associated with the principles of reflective teaching. If nursing schools are interested in producing nurses that are skilled in critical thinking and creative problem-solving, it seems reasonable to expect that teaching strategies could be modified to provide the best possible learning environment for students to achieve these goals. This position requires nurse educators to be reflexive about their own assumptions regarding the value and meaning of a specific pedagogical approach. It also

encourages educators to question the prevailing discourse that positions reflective journal writing as unproblematic.

Journals as Instruments of Power: Discourse of Conformity

I was told at one point just to conform and write the journals as needed

This study incorporates a poststructuralist analysis of power and the following discursive heading explores the effect of the relationship between power and the production of knowledge. In conversation with the students it was apparent that the dominant discourse surrounding the utility of reflective journaling creates a particular kind of learning environment that requires students to conform. Despite this observation, all of the participants demonstrated the ability to resist the effect of power relations in one-way or another.

Passive Resistance

Much of the behavior described by the students reflected a certain passivity or resignation. By this I mean that the students had successfully found ways to navigate the expectations surrounding the activity of journal writing. Not taking the journals seriously and writing what the facilitators want to hear were the most common examples of passive resistance. I chose the term “passive” because to me it represented a group of behaviors that concealed how the students really felt about what they were doing. By handing in journals that reflected the expectations of the course outline, the students were able to demonstrate to the facilitators that they were meeting the course objectives. Frequently it appeared as though students committed the least amount of personal engagement. Most of the students seemed to know what types of journal entries would be acceptable to individual instructors and this facilitated the ease with which they were able to produce the journals:

I don't think a lot of people take their reflective journaling too seriously and just kinda write it on the bus on the way to school. (I2, p. 8)

[you] are just making up things because you had to for the sake of it, you know filling up that space. (I8, p. 12)

I've noticed a large number of people that don't enjoy journaling just make it up the night before. (I6, p. 9)

I felt I was just writing what the professor wanted to hear. just knowing that the professor was reading it. . . .I never reflected on a deeper level on many things. (I7, p. 12)

I know a lot of people would just make it up [the journal] for the whole whatever three or four weeks (I1, p. 8)

Active Resistance

A few of the students openly criticized various aspects of journal writing. The response by faculty was generally unfavorable. Here is what the students had to say:

If you criticize anything its almost as if they take personal offence to it. (I2, p. 8)

With reflecting you can't be negative. . . .there was an activity that we had to do and I said that it was a waste of time because that's how I felt. I felt we were being spoon-fed...but anyway she [the facilitator] said I wrong for saying it was a waste of time. I had to rewrite it [the journal] actually. (I2, p. 20)

In the one I [redid] I said I hated journaling and I found it ridiculous that I had to expose myself to someone to evaluate my character not my performance. All I did in the redo was say journaling was wonderful. . . the instructor loved it. (I6, p. 9)

Power Relations

A poststructuralist perspective understands that power operates within a web of power relations. This refers to the ability of power to operate on many levels within an extensive network. The following examples illustrate the various ways that power relations can be used to reinforce the dominant discourse that specifies reflective journaling is useful

and good. In this instance, the students were made aware that particular viewpoints regarding reflective journal writing were not acceptable:

If a student dislikes something about the course the teacher automatically sees this and it's in their head and they think this person has a bad attitude. (I1, p. 25)

This student felt that writing in the journals was more about what made sense to the facilitators:

I wrote a journal as a personal kind of therapeutic or creative process and I thought oh this is going to be great and then it was taken away from me..we were more or less explicitly told that's not what we want to be reading. (I3, p. 15)

I was told at one point just to conform and write the journals as needed. (I6, p. 15)

Several students commented on the fact that writing outside of the structured format resulted in being asked to redo journals:

quite a few people have to redo their journals because they won't have followed the correct format. (I5, p. 12)

Many of the students acknowledged that a critical discussion regarding the strengths as well as limitations of reflective journaling was notably absent:

I believe the assumption is made that it's a good thing to do. (I5, P.15)

Even facilitators that are laid back always say " but don't you find that you use reflective journals and it has helped you as a nurse?" (I9, p.22)

There's a right way to reflect. . . they took it as a personal offence because if we find an aspect of our nursing education to not be worthwhile, in my experience the teacher thought that I'm lazy and don't want to learn. (I2, p. 21)

From the facilitator's perspective reflective journaling was the best thing you could go for and the best thing you could do and best thing you have to do to be able to progress as a nurse. (I9, p. 13)

A different way that the learning experience was constrained for some

students related to the content of the issues that were introduced to generate critical reflection:

Its not dealing with things that come up in the clinical setting like death and dying, human sexuality, suicide. I think it has to do with the fact that the instructors probably never learned to deal with it. (I6, p. 19)

Finally, this comment by one of the students summarizes the view held by many of the students that journals should not be held up as a yardstick to measure ones ability to be critically reflective:

Anything that you want to reflect on should be alright, it should be accepted and you should not be made to feel that you are a bad student or bad nurse because one learning activity didn't help you learn. (I2, p. 37)

Self-Censorship

Several of the students acknowledged that they censored the content of their journals because they feared being judged by the facilitators. The students spoke about being frustrated at not being able to be honest about their feelings in the journals:

But when we're asked to write this journal about how we feel and if we can't do it honestly and write what we really feel that's where people get frustrated. (I1, p. 26)

I never reflected on a deeper level on many things, I just, I felt that I was just writing what the professor wanted to hear. (I7, p. 12)

Relationship Building

Several of the students used the term "relationship building" to describe the importance of establishing a supportive mentorship role with their individual facilitators. The quality of the relationship between the student and facilitator was perceived as playing a major role in how the students characterized the experience of reflective journal writing.

Many of the students described the relationship they had with their facilitator in terms of the feedback they received:

I've had a lot of positive feedback given to me from responses to journals...its very good for relationship building in terms of between you and the facilitator. (I3, p. 6)

[our facilitator] would write full reflective evaluations. . . I felt a lot more comfortable and a lot more inspired by her. (I7, p. 19)

Establishing a rapport with the facilitator helped these students develop trust, which in turn appeared to facilitate deeper reflection:

Like if its somebody that's really approachable and you have an established good relationship with them then you might feel comfortable disclosing a little bit more. (I8, p. 9)

If you think that she is open to what you'll say then you can really write down something that portrays your own feelings. (I5, p. 7)

Specific characteristics associated with the facilitators that contributed to successful building of relationships included instructor flexibility and open-mindedness:

ultimately it should be based on the process as opposed to what the actual product is and that's what journals should reflect, the process. (I3, p. 29)

Some [facilitators] are more open-minded and enjoy the different things that you bring up and touch on, there is a large difference based on the instructor. (I6, p. 26)

The students were unanimous in their agreement that the impact of individual instructors was significant in its ability to shape the reflective journaling experience. Relationship building was viewed as an important aspect of the journaling experience. This was because connected and supportive facilitator-student relationships were associated with the ability to develop trust, and reflect on a deeper level. However, it was unclear if those same supportive relationships would have been available to them had they challenged the process [of reflective journaling] in any significant way.

The essential elements required for a more meaningful student experience included facilitator flexibility and open-mindedness and it became clear that the facilitators were seen as somebody that could “make or break” the journaling experience. In talking with the students regarding their abilities to forge good relationships with their facilitators, it was apparent that some of the students were aware that the quality of their relationship depended upon a certain level of conformity. Students that followed the guidelines received positive feedback in response to their journals and these same students were able to develop good relationships with their facilitators. Desirable facilitator characteristics that were most influential in shaping the learning experience were identified as flexibility and open-mindedness. This observation was consistent with earlier discussion that identified lack of flexibility as one of the major barriers to meaningful reflection. Several students suggested that facilitator flexibility included the need to emphasize process rather than end product.

Finally, some of the students even questioned me about the safety of being truthful within the interview itself. On several occasions, I became aware that some of the students felt uncomfortable criticizing reflective journaling. This observation was reinforced when students made comments such as:

I got sick of doing them [the journals] if I'm allowed to say that? (18, p. 12)

Sometimes you find yourself making stuff up, this is confidential, right? (19, p. 11)

This is not surprising given that the students had already acknowledged that open debate concerning the utility of journal writing was lacking. Most of the students understood that to criticize reflective journaling would most likely result in a negative response from facilitators.

The predominant discourse surrounding reflection informs us that being reflective is essential and important and this section of the interviews clearly illustrates the effect of power upon the production of knowledge. As a result of needing to conform, the majority of the students engaged in the process of passive resistance. The students seemed to suggest that writing what the facilitators wanted to hear was a more efficient use of time than attempting to engage the facilitators in a more meaningful and critical dialogue. It seemed as though the underlying goal of this type of behavior was directed at simply surviving nursing school and passing the course.

Adhering to the structure and format of the journals was essential if a student wanted to avoid negative repercussions. However, some students were more vocal in their dissatisfaction regarding reflective journaling. This had the effect of disciplining the remaining students. One student admitted that she felt the only reason that she had not experienced difficulty or tension regarding her journaling experience was because she kept her opinions to herself.

An interesting observation surfaced during this portion of the interviews. Despite the fact that many of the students admitted they were resistant towards the practice of journal writing, there appeared to be a certain willingness on the part of the facilitators to accept that merely writing a reflective journal necessarily means engagement with a critical process. Despite the fact that many of the students felt they were reflecting on a superficial level, it seemed as though following the guidelines was sufficient proof that a deeper level of engagement had occurred. If the students are modifying their journals as a means to elicit positive feedback from the facilitators, what does this mean in terms of evaluating actual progress versus assumed understandings?

The fact that several of the students were asked to redo their journals is significant. It suggests that there is a right way and a wrong way to reflect. Students are quick to learn what constitutes an acceptable journal, and they understand the implications for not following the guidelines. An argument could be made to support the notion that writing in journals is a course requirement that must include specific guidelines and expectations. However, I suggest that journal writing is not the same as other kinds of learning strategies implemented in nursing education. Reflective journals are a tool to facilitate the development of a set of skills that the profession of nursing has identified as desirable. Teaching students how to become reflective in their practice requires nurse educators to be reflexive about their own values and judgments. The opportunity for incorporating elements of creativity and flexibility exists and seems appropriate for this kind of learning. This study suggests that reflective journaling, for these students, falls short of its potential.

Another consideration surfaces at this point. Many of the skills associated with becoming reflective in practice may develop over time and it is likely that nurses rate themselves differently on their ability to be reflective. Students who fail to meet the criteria for acceptable kinds of reflection while they are in school may perform as well in the work place as students who consider themselves deeply reflective. I suggest that this is because the criteria by which students are judged to be reflective in school excludes critical reflection on a variety of levels. Students that question the utility of a practice that holds little meaning for them may well turn out to be the kind of critical practitioner nursing schools are hoping to produce.

The process of reflection is less engaging for students that perceive reflective journaling as an exercise in conformity. The students I interviewed were very aware that

criticizing aspects of reflective journaling had negative repercussions. By adopting a certain level of compliance, these students handed in acceptable journals and passed the course. But what does this mean about their ability to reflect on a deeper and more critical level? And what does it say about those students that do not find journaling helpful?

These questions prompt several interesting interpretations: writing in journals is not necessarily reflective of a meaningful learning experience. Students who do not find journaling useful may be no less capable of deep and critical reflection. How could this observation be helpful for nurse educators? One possibility includes critically appraising the utility of journaling in terms of its meaning for students. If continued use of journals is proposed, then modifications in approach are likely to result in a favorable response from students. However, modifying the criteria attached to reflective journaling to represent a more student-centered activity means that nurse educators must be willing to consider both the strengths and limitations of reflective journaling. This process would need to include consideration of alternative activities that might encourage nursing students to become critical in their thinking.

Discourse of the Professional

All of the students were very aware of the professional expectations that are associated with being reflective. Many of the students made reference to the Reflective Practice component of the CNO's Quality Assurance Program.

[reflective practice] is part of the licensing board of the college, it comes down from the college and is instituted in hospitals and workplaces.

[reflection] was incorporated into our whole program because of the quality assurance program, self-reflection. . . they wanted you to start early and get used to it. (18, p. 4)

Some students did not make a distinction between being reflective and writing

reflective journals:

they told us over and over again that all through your nursing career you will have to do reflective journaling, its mandatory and is a part of nursing. (I2, p. 19)

Officially in practice we are supposed to be reflective journaling once we're RN's (I4, p. 11)

Some of the students raised concerns about finding time to write reflective journals once they were working:

Given the current work environment that nurses are in, I think it's hard to try and make time for something like that [reflective journaling] (I4, p. 25)

This component of the interviews illustrated that the students understood the professional requirements surrounding the need to be reflective in practice. The link between professional practice expectations and educational goals was apparent. Examination of the course learning objectives revealed that they mirrored some of the outcomes suggested in the CNO's Reflective Practice self-assessment tool (CNO, 1996). Nurses practicing in Ontario are required to participate in Reflective Practice. This process is believed to facilitate formal examination of nursing practice and facilitate ongoing competency. Reflective Practice requirements can be met by implementing a self-assessment tool that consists of five steps: self-assessment, peer feedback, creation of a learning plan, implementation of that plan and evaluation. Nurses are asked to rate themselves in terms of four behavioral descriptors. These are: communication, leadership, critical thinking and job knowledge, and legislation and standards (CNO, 1996).

Examination of the CNO documents outlining the expectations related to Reflective Practice described the various ways that being reflective helps nurses to achieve their professional goals and identify strengths and weaknesses. The students who were interviewed had identified these same goals when asked about the purpose or intent of

reflective journaling. However, the CNO does not specify that nurses must write in journals in order to be reflective. In addition, the reflective practice requirements of the College ask nurses to engage in the process of self-evaluation on a yearly basis. This expectation is quite different from the assumption that nurses are required by the CNO to journal on an on-going basis. In fact, the College acknowledges some of the barriers that exist to prevent nurses from doing just that. Those include time constraints and interdisciplinary conflict (CNO, 1996).

There appears to be a gap between the messages the students are receiving at school and the professional expectations outlined in the CNO's Reflective Practice guidelines. Certainly, students appear to be under the impression they will need to journal on an on-going basis in order to be truly reflective. However, it is true that while journal writing may not be a professional requirement, both professional and educational nursing authorities share a belief that reflective practitioners provide a higher quality of nursing care. The CNO is currently implementing a random survey of nurses who have participated in Reflective Practice in order to determine the impact on bedside nursing practice. The results of the survey were not available at the time of writing this thesis, but an important consideration emerges: can we assume self-report regarding the positive impact of being reflective necessarily means change at the bedside?

The CNO's expectations regarding reflective practice are reinforced throughout the course outlines, with several of the learning outcomes being the same. This observation reveals the degree to which both educational and professional nursing bodies have embraced a predominant discourse that tells nurses that being reflective is good and desirable. This sets up an environment where the claims to truth associated with this position cannot be easily

challenged. For example, it is not enough to consider oneself reflective, students are required to demonstrate a specific kind of reflective thinking that will illustrate specified learning outcomes. Case in point, the students in this study are not encouraged to reflect upon broader sociopolitical issues that might significantly impact upon their ability to practice autonomously, especially within more traditional hierarchical workplace environments.

As Taylor (1997) points out, the political climate in which nurses are required to practice is not necessarily supportive of nurses who would like to critically reflect upon aspects of their practice. This suggests that being reflective within the work environment means overcoming significant obstacles. This is not to say that the philosophical beliefs that underpin the idea of being a reflective practitioner are not worthwhile, rather that little debate seems to be directed at how new nurses will be able to successfully negotiate all of the expectations directed at them. Certainly, the students I interviewed were concerned about their ability to engage in the process of reflection upon entering the workplace.

DISCUSSION

So what do these observations mean in relationship to a Foucauldian analysis? I conclude this study by linking the findings associated with each predominant discursive framework to the work of Foucault. Previously, I discussed how discourses constrain and influence the production of knowledge. Each of the three major discursive frameworks that emerged from the findings in this study reinforce the widely held belief that reflective journaling is an essential learning tool. (see Appendix F for a conceptual diagram of dominant discourses). In addition, each of the discourses I explore in this analysis contributes to the constructed notion of today's *authentic* nurse. Application of Foucault's

concept of the panoptic gaze provides us with the theoretical tools to deconstruct how these discursive frameworks remain in place and influence each other.

Previous discussion emphasized the importance of relating the concept of discourse to Foucault's theorizing of the role of power in the production of knowledge. A Foucauldian analysis maintains that knowledge is discursively produced and intimately linked to the concept of discipline (McHoul & Grace, 1993). This results in the production of a body of knowledge that is afforded more legitimacy than alternative possibilities. For example, this study reveals that the belief in the assumed importance of reflective journaling can be demonstrated in the following ways: (a) professional licensing bodies reinforce the belief that to be reflective is an essential component of contemporary nursing practice; (b) the concept of reflection is associated with specific learning outcomes that are most often documented within the format of a journal; (c) despite a lack of empirical evidence to support the utility of this approach, nursing research demonstrates an on-going commitment to the use of reflective learning strategies; and (d) nurse educators play an important role in creating a learning environment that supports the idea that journal writing is a meaningful activity. The end result is a firmly entrenched discourse that discourages alternative possibilities for thinking and speaking about reflective journal writing within the scope of nursing education. In this manner, claims to truth associated with reflective journal writing are generated and maintained. If the uncritical acceptance of journal writing represents a distinct body of knowledge within the profession of nursing, the disciplinary institutions that make up schools of nursing exercise the social control necessary to establish and maintain this position.

A unique aspect of a Foucauldian application towards the concept of discourse focuses on its assertion that discourses represent clearly delineated areas of knowledge that are historically specific (McHoul & Grace, 1993). This means that any discourse surrounding the process of reflection and reflective practice is historically delineated and subject to change. Incorporating reflective learning activities into nursing education is a relatively new phenomenon. It is entirely possible that contemporary influences within educational paradigms, combined with a more fully developed understanding of the concept of reflection may shift future understandings of this process. An example of the discontinuous nature of discourse was explained earlier when I discussed the requirements for the “good” nurse. Clearly those expectations have changed over the course of time. Currently, the profession of nursing operates within a new “reflective” paradigm and the beliefs associated with this approach define the characteristics of desirable and competent practitioners.

Creating the Necessary Conditions

It is difficult to establish exactly why the profession of nursing has so overwhelmingly embraced reflective practice and, more specifically, journal writing as a useful way to meet specific outcomes and goals. However, a number of factors may have influenced this belief. Earlier, I outlined the philosophical underpinnings for the new “reflective” teachings. Based on critical social theory, the ideals associated with this approach are appealing to those of us interested in pursuing nursing practice that is critically engaging. The characteristics of this reflective doctrine include a belief in respectfully negotiated egalitarian relationships and reduced hierarchies. Interestingly, this approach parallels contemporary expectations towards relationship building between nurses and their

patients. This new way of thinking about nursing practice also has profound implications for nursing education. The emphasis is placed on the integration of theory and practice along with the promotion of autonomous, empowered practitioners. In theory, these goals seem compatible with a teaching style that is progressive and student-centered. Writing in journals is one type of practice believed to facilitate the goals of a new “reflective” era in teaching and learning. However, it seems clear that the reality of this experience for nursing students is quite different.

Heslop (1996) points out that forcing students to write in reflective journals is incongruent with the development of reduced hierarchies and egalitarian student-teacher relationships. Despite this observation, widespread use of reflective journals in nursing education continues. Is there something about nursing education in particular that makes it difficult for educators to engage in a more critical debate about reflective journaling? Allen (1990) suggests that nurse educators are over-burdened with the responsibility of ensuring their students do not make mistakes. This fear may stem from the fact that nursing students are operating in both the academic and practical arenas. However, he goes on to say that assuming this responsibility results in rigid curricula and authoritarian relationships with students. Ultimately, nursing schools reinforce passivity and compliance at the same time that they espouse the promotion of critical thinking and autonomous decision-making. Although this reference is over a decade old, discussion with the students in this study suggests that Allen’s (1990) perspective maintains some relevancy today.

Of course, the need for safe and supportive guidance is necessary in nursing education. However, the pivotal question here centers on whether the uncritical adoption of a particular learning strategy is congruent with a more contemporary approach towards nursing

education. The students interviewed in this study had interesting ideas about how reflective journaling might become more meaningful. In fact, some students were anxious to debate alternative methods directed at improving their ability to think critically. However, the effect of prescribed journaling on the student experience appears to encourage a level of passivity and conformity that should be cause for concern.

The Panoptic Gaze in Nursing Education

The preceding discussion offered some suggestions directed at explaining why nurse educators may have a difficult time behaving in a manner that is consistent with the philosophical principles of reflective teaching and learning. Next I introduce the panopticon as a metaphor to explain how institutions of social control, such as schools, induce a state of self-discipline and compliance. Acknowledging the power of the panoptic gaze provides me with the theoretical tools to deconstruct the nature of the conditions that must be created in order to support an environment that encourages conformity and self-surveillance.

The discourses identified in this study help to create an environment that reinforces and rewards student compliance and self-surveillance. Evidence of the power-based discourses surrounding reflective journal writing is demonstrated throughout this study. Students admit there is a lack of critical debate surrounding the strengths and limitations of reflective journaling. Journaling is most often viewed as rigid, mechanical and somewhat redundant. Those students that openly criticize the practice of reflective journaling are disciplined and this serves to reinforce a certain level of conformity. Finally, educational and professional nursing authorities endorse the practice of reflective journaling. According to Foucault, the success of the panopticon is dependent upon three disciplinary instruments: hierarchical surveillance, normalization and examination. These disciplinary instruments

direct and constrain the accumulation of knowledge. The following discussion recognizes that knowledge gained as a result of disciplinary power is generated according to prescribed ideas of normality.

Hierarchical Observation

The traffic of hierarchical observation is unequal. This means that nursing students are observed and scrutinized by nurse educators without the opportunity to do the same in reverse. The student-facilitator relationships in this study demonstrated that instructors rarely, if at all, discussed their own experiences with reflective journaling. Nor are facilitators required to discuss their understanding of a critically reflective process, and how that might be successfully appraised. This lack of reflexivity was further illustrated by the absence of critical appraisal of reflective journaling to include discussion of the strengths and limitations of this practice. Surveillance also has the effect of permanence even in the absence of constant scrutiny. This is because the effect of surveillance is embedded within a network of power relations. Facilitators scrutinize students, students scrutinize each other, and facilitators come under the expert gaze of professors, which in turn are accountable to an administrative body. In this example, the horizontal and vertical effects of surveillance become apparent. This expert gaze is continuous and judgmental. Students quickly learn how to think and talk in a way that reflects the accepted norm. This is because failure to do so results in discipline. The end result is students that conform. For example, one of the students in my study was critical of a different learning environment where journal writing is not expected. This student's immediate reaction was to judge a learning experience in the absence of reflective journaling as less than, rather than acknowledge that there might equally effective ways to meet professional and educational learning outcomes. Furthermore,

facilitators that teach the importance of reflective journal writing to students do not encourage open and critical debate of this practice. This sets up conditions where serious consideration of the strengths and weakness of reflective journaling is discouraged.

Normalizing Judgement

Surveillance techniques establish normality. The scrutiny of individuals by experts is highly ritualized and individual behavior is used to reinforce conformity and identify deviance from the accepted norm (Cheek & Rudge, 1993). The acceptable method of reflective journaling centers around specific instructions detailed in the course outlines. Students that challenge the utility of prescribed journaling in order to demonstrate specified outcomes are disciplined. By establishing an acceptable standard, it becomes possible to individualize the behavior of students in order to uncover deviant behavior. In this manner the power of normalization suggests homogeneity and conformity, but in reality this process seeks out difference. Identification of students that openly criticized the practice of journaling enables facilitators to discipline them. The form of discipline taken in this instance resulted in several students being asked to rewrite their journals. In addition, the quality of the student/facilitator relationship appeared to suffer as a result of these types of interactions. The students in question revealed that they felt constrained and frustrated by the response of their facilitators to what they considered to be valid criticisms. Importantly, normalizing behavior has the effect of hierarchizing good and bad students in relation to each other. The students I spoke with admitted that they understood the implications for challenging the guidelines, and wanted to avoid being disciplined themselves.

Examination

Hierarchical surveillance and normalizing judgment make it possible for individuals to be classified and judged through the process of examination (Foucault, 1977). In the case of this study, examination is carried out by assessing the quality of student journals. This process facilitates the transfer of knowledge from an expert to novice. The students are given feedback to indicate their level of success in relation to achieving a number of specified objectives. This assessment process is subjective and reflects the experience of individual facilitators. However, each facilitator is in the position to decide what constitutes good reflection as opposed to an unacceptable effort. Since there is no opportunity for students and facilitators to critically challenge the process of journaling, the content of the journals must reflect a prescribed learning experience in order to be considered acceptable. The unspoken assumption here is that facilitators know what is best for students. Of course, the possibility exists that facilitators that would like to be more reflexive and creative in their teaching approach may find that they do not have the necessary support to do so.

Each of these disciplinary techniques has one thing in common. They all involve some type of unequal participation. Hierarchical surveillance is directed in one direction only; normalizing judgment is based on expert knowledge that can only be known by the person in authority. Criteria for examination are set by the person in power and this individual already possesses the skills and knowledge that the students hope to acquire.

The Confession

Previously, I discussed how disciplinary power constrains the learning experience for students. The impact of a pervasive discourse in association with the instruments of power just mentioned creates an environment where conformity and compliance are expected and

rewarded. However, exploration of Foucault's theorizing of the "confessional" provides a more complete understanding of how students negotiate their learning experience.

The ritual of confession unfolds within a power relationship (Foucault, 1980). Writing reflective journals and handing them to an authority figure for evaluation is a form of confession. The confession is a versatile technique that helps to produce a particular truth and two important considerations are related to this process of confessing: individuals do not confess without the presence of an authority figure to judge them; when confession is not spontaneous, it is extracted by threat (Foucault, 1980).

The relationship of power between facilitators and students creates the conditions whereby confession is possible and it seems that in the absence of requirement, students might choose not to reveal their thoughts and feelings to an authority figure. Most of the students I interviewed admitted that they would not voluntarily journal. However, within the context of this learning experience, successful participation in the course includes the need to hand in reflective journals. Some of the students admitted that their facilitators encouraged them to reveal more information than they felt comfortable sharing. Several students were told exactly what they needed to write in order to pass the journaling component of their course. However, one possible outcome of non-conformity is to risk failing a required course.

A different consideration acknowledges the power of the confessional in producing discursively framed truths. Since students are required to journal, the content of those journals may reflect what is expected and not necessarily what the students really think. Participants in this study admitted that they wrote what they thought the facilitator wanted to hear. This observation was illustrated frequently throughout the interviews when students

spoke about how they censored their journals. But how does the ritual of confession produce a particular truth?

Combining confession with expert examination provides legitimacy to the content. For example, the use of models and frameworks related to reflective process would be one way to objectively measure how well students are performing. Alternatively, prescribed learning outcomes and objectives can be used to determine whether or not students are achieving specified goals. Combining reflective journal writing with specific expectations provides nursing educators with the means to determine an acceptable effort. Discussion directed towards the ability of reflective journaling to meet specific criteria, such as improved critical thinking, reinforces the belief that in order to become a critically astute practitioner one must successfully reflect. This is despite the fact that much of what is written regarding the claims of reflective journaling to facilitate this process is anecdotal at best. The process of confession is necessary in order to validate claims to truth. In the absence of an authority figure, how would students know that their journals were acceptable? The person in the position of power plays an essential role in generating a discourse of truth that is based on his or her approval. Therefore, in order to be considered relevant, the content of student journals must be scrutinized and evaluated.

Resistance

During the course of interviewing the participants it was apparent that all of the students, to one degree or another, participated in some type of resistance to journal writing. This included open challenges to the practice of journaling, but more often involved a passive response that included modification of journal entries in order to conform and pass the course. This latter behavior resulted in positive and supportive feedback by facilitators.

Alternatively, more direct challenges to the utility of journaling generally invoked an unfavorable response from teachers that ranged from dismissal of student criticisms of journal writing to requiring students to re-write their journals.

The discourse surrounding the practice of reflective journaling has not included a significant amount of work directed at critically challenging the practice of journaling within nursing curricula. In addition, a critical analysis of students' perceptions of reflective journaling has been largely absent. Foucault (1977) maintains that disciplinary power produces multiple sites of resistance and it was interesting to observe how the students in this study were categorized as problematic if they openly challenged the practice of reflective journal writing. Certainly, resistance to the activity of journaling is documented in the nursing research. For example, Francis et al. (1997) acknowledged that students who did not share their values and beliefs regarding reflection and reflective practice were labeled as resistant. This was particularly true of students that challenged institutional understandings of critical inquiry. Francis et al. (1997) go on to emphasize the importance of recognizing that teacher/student relationships are laced with power and meaning. They suggest the following: "rather than positioning resistances as ubiquitous, we need to think of them as possibilities for discursively reconstituting ourselves and the ways we care for and govern the learning context" (p. 276). Similarly, Wellard and Bethune (1996) identified resistance to journaling as a major problem. Students appeared to write what they thought the teacher wanted to hear and seemed reluctant to engage in critical debate. Wellard and Bethune (1996) question the effect of the power relationship in reinforcing this kind of passivity and pose the following question: "how can we engage students in critical reflection in their

practice without increasing their powerlessness in the very arena we are asking them to shape?" (p. 1081).

The implication seems to be that the power-relationship that inevitably exists between teachers and students may have a negative impact on the ability of students to engage critically. By insisting that students relate to journal writing in a particular manner with a view to producing specific results, nurse educators may inadvertently reproduce passivity and disinterest. Several of the students with whom I spoke were excited about the possibility of critically investigating their role as a nurse within a sociopolitical context. The prescribed nature of the journals diminished the ability of these students to challenge their thinking. Other students simply viewed writing in the journals as a means to an end. This approach resulted in superficial journal entries designed to please facilitators. The outcome of this kind of behavior demonstrates that students are deeply affected by the nature of the learning environment in which are required to perform. The interviews in this study revealed that students had become skilled in the art of resistance.

Foucault states that resistance is more effective when it is directed towards a technique of power. This means that students must be aware that disciplinary tactics are being used in the first place (McHoul & Grace, 1993). Most of the students in this study were very aware of the impact that individual facilitators had in shaping the journaling experience. These students understood that the learning environment, as a whole, was influential in determining acceptable ways to think and talk about reflective journaling. Students that were critical of journaling also spoke of the difficulty associated with sharing reflective journals with an authority figure. One student felt as though this gave facilitators the opportunity to judge character rather than performance.

Actively challenging the utility of reflective journaling represents one way to demonstrate resistance. This type of overt criticism directly challenges facilitators to be more reflexive about their approach to teaching and learning. Direct challenges to the practice of journaling could be considered ineffective if success was judged on how receptive facilitators were to this behavior. However, despite being disciplined, these students illustrated that authority figures do not hold the monopoly on power. A Foucauldian interpretation of these events might suggest that even though some students were disciplined, the opportunity was created for facilitators to rethink their approach towards implementing reflective journaling. Power, in this sense, could be viewed as productive. An environment has now been created that could support critical debate between students and teachers. Indeed a different way that resistance can redefine power relations is by making alternative possibilities visible. Taking power, within the confines of what appears to be a powerless relationship is an essential understanding of a Foucauldian analysis. Even students that chose not to reveal how they felt about journaling to their facilitators were able to engage in resistant behavior that resulted in them taking some power. This resistance formed the basis for “getting through” nursing school. While passive resistance is less splashy than open criticism, the end result is that some students are putting forward minimal effort in order to pass. It is very possible that these students are directing their energy and interest towards different aspects of nursing education that hold more meaning for them. This type of disinterest is not conducive to deep, meaningful reflection and it cannot be used to judge how well students will perform in the working world.

Various suggestions directed towards enhancing the meaning of this practice were put forward by the participants in this study. These include: (a) increased flexibility

regarding the process of journal writing; (b) detailed feedback illustrative of facilitator engagement; and (c) critical debate directed at both the strengths and limitations of reflective journaling. Some students do not find journal writing a meaningful tool to facilitate their ability to reflect in a critical manner. It is possible that implementing some of the suggestions just mentioned may shift students' perspectives of this practice. However, this may not necessarily be the case, and holding on to the belief that journal writing is the best way to facilitate critical engagement within nursing practice simply reinforces a pervasive discourse that assumes the importance of this activity.

Limitations

Study limitations indirectly effect the interpretation of research findings and acknowledgment of these limitations impresses upon the reader that the researcher is cognizant of their impact. Certainly, this study is no different, and there are a number of factors that need to be addressed in this regard. While no new themes were brought forward at the conclusion of data collection, the possibility remains that a larger sample may have allowed additional findings to surface. However, this research is poststructuralist in its approach and seeking information to establish a particular version of truth is not a relevant goal. This means that despite the inclusion of additional information, my interpretation remains one version of reality among several alternative possibilities.

Using face to face interviews may have imposed certain limitations on particular students. For example, only students comfortable with expressing their views in a taped interview setting were likely to participate. This places significant limitations upon students who had something valuable to contribute, but felt uncomfortable doing so in an interview.

However, decisions regarding data collection were made with a view to capturing the most detailed information possible.

The fact that the researcher is a student herself may have reduced researcher credibility. In addition, it is possible that interest in the project may have reflected lack of researcher expertise and status within the university setting. However, earlier discussion stressed the importance of reflexivity in poststructuralist approaches towards research. As a result, the inclusion of personal experience and my earlier acknowledgement of bias are essential components of a research process that reflects this philosophy. Finally, Burrell and Morgan (1979) explain that anti-positivist approaches towards research support the idea of understanding a phenomenon from an “insiders” perspective. However, identifying closely with the student experience is congruent with poststructuralist assumptions regarding the research process and my analysis reflects the essential nature of this observation.

CHAPTER VI

FINAL THOUGHTS

In keeping with a poststructuralist approach, this study has attempted to uncover some of the assumptions associated with reflective journaling: (a) students find reflective journaling a useful way to facilitate critical reflection; (b) the belief that students who write acceptable journals are critically reflective, while those that fail to meet the criteria for demonstrating their progress are not; and (c) an assumption is made that writing in journals produces critically engaged practitioners.

Previous discussion explored how some of these assumptions impacted upon the learning experience of the nursing students I interviewed. Students that followed the guidelines associated with writing the journals received positive feedback suggesting that individual students were meeting the learning outcomes attached to the process of reflection. However, many of the students admitted that they wrote what they thought the facilitator wanted to hear. If this is so, is this an appropriate way to determine if students are engaged in critical reflection and does it foster engagement with a critical process?

This study contributes to our understanding of how the meaning and value associated with reflective journal writing is discursively produced. Chapter one identified that the overwhelming trend within the profession of nursing leans towards the uncritical acceptance of journal writing as a useful learning tool. This position is substantiated by two observations: (a) there is overwhelming acceptance of the utility of reflective journaling despite any convincing evidence to suggest that this is a reality; and (b) even researchers that are not looking to empirically demonstrate the usefulness of journaling, make an assumption that this activity is meaningful for nursing students. Chapter two identified a gap in the

nursing literature as far as critical appraisal of journal writing is concerned. Challenges directed towards a belief in the usefulness of reflective journaling are largely absent. Furthermore, poststructuralist approaches focused on uncovering the assumptions associated with the activity of reflective journaling are even less evident. In addition, the student voice is under-represented. This situation is reflective of a pervasive discourse within nursing that assumes journal writing is a worthwhile activity. Chapter three identified that reflective journaling is written and spoken about in specific kinds of ways by different authorities. Therefore, the activity of reflective journaling can be viewed as a discourse. Moreover, powerful discourses serve to shape and constrain how we understand the practice of journaling. In this case, a universalizing assumption that asserts that journaling is inherently useful makes it extremely difficult to challenge this position.

The analysis in chapter four identified three key discursive frameworks that help to maintain a firmly entrenched belief in the utility of this practice. These discourses are represented in the following ways: (a) the discourse of authority: journaling as a facilitator-driven activity; (b) the discourse of conformity: journals as instruments of power; and (c) the professional discourse. This is not to suggest that these are the only discourses that exist in reference to reflective journaling; however, they were most strongly evident in this study. Each discourse uses the practice of journal writing to explore how schools of nursing construct representations of the authentic, critically reflective nurse.

It is important to note that all of the students recognized the importance of “being reflective.” However, the discourse surrounding the importance of reflective journaling, as a means to facilitate the practice of being reflective, was problematic. This is because journaling, for the most part, was seen as prescribed. This observation is in direct opposition

to the values associated with the reflective doctrine that emphasize empowerment and autonomy. To summarize, the students interviewed for this study felt strongly that being a reflective practitioner was important. However, there were considerable differences of opinion regarding the utility of reflective journal writing to facilitate this process. This observation is relevant, since the primary goal of reflective practice is to produce critical and knowledgeable nurses. For the most part, journal writing was viewed as a prescribed activity that was largely facilitator-driven as opposed to student-centered. Frequently it appeared as though reflective journaling was meaningful for facilitators, rather than students. The students identified several key factors that impacted upon the ability of journal writing to be a meaningful learning tool. Prescribed learning outcomes combined with an overly rigid structure resulted in an activity that felt redundant and repetitive. Many of the students verbalized their interest in writing about issues that held personal meaning and relevancy. This observation is congruent with theoretical understandings of the reflective process that suggests critical reflection requires individuals be engaged on a personal level. Finally, the students with whom I spoke felt that acknowledging the strengths and limitations of reflective journaling would be a positive experience.

The absence of any critical discussion surrounding the impact of reflective journal writing on the professional development of nursing students is apparent. This study suggests that open debate about the utility of journal writing would invite alternative possibilities for enhancing the meaning of this practice for students. Furthermore, it would provide nurse educators with the opportunity to be reflexive about their own assumptions related to this practice. By holding on to the belief that this practice is inherently useful, nursing education is inadvertently promoting an environment that encourages passivity and compliance.

A Foucauldian analysis explains that powerful discourses create an environment where compliance and conformity are rewarded. This observation was readily apparent upon speaking with the students in this study. Students quickly learned what the expectations were regarding an acceptable journaling effort and they understood the implications for not following the guidelines. Students that actively challenged the utility of journal writing were generally met with an unfavorable response. Some students were asked to redo their journals and this had the effect of disciplining the remaining students. However, most of the students engaged in what I describe as “passive” resistance. This was characterized by students making superficial entries in their journals that reflected a lack of personal engagement. It is important to note that this degree of conformity has no bearing on a process that reflects critical engagement. Students that censor their work as a means to avoid being disciplined hand in journals that are not reflective of meaningful engagement. Finally, since there is no opportunity provided to critically appraise the strengths and weaknesses of reflective journaling, an assumption is made that this practice is useful for all the students.

Professional associations such as the CNO assert that reflective practice results in better client outcomes and improved nursing skills. Intuitively, this assertion may well hold some truth, but there is no firm evidence to suggest that this is the case. As mentioned previously the characteristics associated with the reflective paradigm are appealing to those of use interested in pursuing autonomous and empowered nursing practice. However, assumptions are made that nurses will be able to realize this type of practice in a variety of hierarchized and tradition-bound work environments. In this sense, the broader social and political context of what it means to be a truly reflective practitioner is lost. Several of the students had concerns about their ability to continue journal writing when they finally

entered the work place. Moreover, the students seemed to have the impression that on-going journal writing was an expectation of the CNO. This illustrates the degree to which nursing education has misrepresented expectations directed at journal writing in the workplace.

As with any poststructuralist analysis, this study has raised a number of questions that serve to challenge truth claims that are based on assumptions and beliefs. The questions raised in this analysis form the basis for a more critical approach to the topic of reflective journal writing. A more fully developed understanding of the effect of power and resistance within nursing education creates the opportunity to consider alternative considerations for the implementation of reflective journaling within nursing curricula. Obviously, students that are resistant to the activity of journaling are not deriving the kind of learning experience from this activity that was originally intended. In this sense, nurse educators are forced to acknowledge that critical appraisal of journal writing is an essential and productive process.

Implementation of reflective learning strategies within nursing curricula has powerful implications for nurse educators and students alike. An enormous amount of time and energy is spent directing the process of reflective journaling. This study suggests that critical appraisal of reflective journal writing is necessary in order to determine the real value of its contribution. Presuming the importance of any activity precludes discussion directed at alternative possibilities. Providing space for nursing students to challenge and debate current practice reinforces the notion that critically engaged practitioners are desirable. Furthermore, acknowledging the strengths and limitations of any practice creates an environment where creativity and possibility can flourish.

This study has generated some insights that could be used to guide future research efforts directed towards improving our understanding of reflective journal writing as a

pedagogical tool. Suggestions include the following: (a) the student voice is under-represented in the literature and further research needs to be focused on exploring how nursing students feel about reflective journaling; (b) the limitations of being able to be reflective in the workplace have not been fully explored. Additional research is needed to explore the broader sociopolitical implications for integrating reflective philosophies within workplace culture; and (c) this study generates questions about the connection between reflective journal writing, and claims of authenticity. A poststructuralist analysis of how the concepts of reflection and authenticity interrelate would provide an alternative way of understanding the complexity of this relationship. In closing, this study challenges students, researchers and educators to develop alternative discourses that problematize the uncritical acceptance of reflective journaling within contemporary nursing education.

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Appendix A

Recruitment Text

This is an invitation to participate in a research project conducted by a Master's of Nursing Student, Faculty of Health Sciences, University of Ottawa. The purpose of the research is to explore student nurses' perceptions of reflective journal writing.

Who may participate

Third year, undergraduate, nursing students currently enrolled in Integration Seminars at the University of Ottawa, who have had a personal experience with reflective journal writing.

Students who feel comfortable discussing their experiences in a one-on-one interview setting

Students who are comfortable conversing in English. Since the researcher does not speak French, the interviews will be conducted in English only.

What is involved

Participation in one taped interview lasting approximately one hour, not to exceed one and a half hours unless mutually agreed upon. This interview will consist of a series of open-ended questions related to student perceptions of reflective journal writing.

The possibility of being contacted for a follow-up interview for the purposes of clarification. This interview to last approximately thirty minutes, not longer than one hour unless mutually agreed upon.

Contact: Ms. Lorraine Chick
5 Markland St.
Kingston, Ontario
K7K 1S2
1-613-548-3688
lorrainechick@yahoo.com (e-mail is the preferred method of communication)

*participants, please provide a method of contact that ensures the greatest degree of privacy

Appendix B

Letter of Information

This research has been undertaken to fulfil the requirements of the Master of Science in Nursing program at the University of Ottawa. Lorraine Chick is conducting a qualitative project directed at exploring student nurses' perceptions of reflective journal writing. Within the discipline of nursing, written narratives are often used as a means to enhance the reflective process. Exploring the student perspective is relevant in facilitating a more informed understanding of how to make this a meaningful educational tool.

You will be invited to participate in one taped interview with the researcher. This will be arranged at the convenience of both the researcher and participant. This interview will take approximately one to one and a half hours. A follow-up interview may be required in order to clarify and expand on certain information. This is expected to take approximately thirty minutes. All of the interviews will be conducted in English, however you will be given the option of a consent form that has been translated into French, should you wish. The transcribed tapes will be used for the purposes of completing a master's thesis and will provide the basis for an oral defense. The possibility exists that this research might be published at a later date.

Participation is entirely voluntary, and is not required in order to fulfil course objectives. There is no financial reimbursement offered. You may choose to withdraw from the research study at any time, without penalty. You may refuse to answer any question(s) or request that the tape recorder be turned off. Potential benefits from participating in this research include the opportunity to share your student experience in a way that recognizes the valuable contribution of personal knowledge. The possibility exists that sensitive

information might be uncovered. The researcher will be prepared to offer appropriate resources and support, should this be required.

Following obtaining approval from your professor, the researcher will present a brief, oral presentation of the research project. Recruitment information will be distributed in class time and students will be asked to indicate their interest by contacting the researcher directly. Students are reminded to provide the researcher with contact information for themselves that provides the most degree of privacy. Information shared with the researcher will be kept strictly confidential. Your professor has no role in choosing or excluding participants. No identifying names will be attached to the transcripts. The identity of participants will be disguised within the body of the text, if necessary. Participants will have the opportunity to review their transcripts for the purposes of clarification and accuracy. Participants will also have the option of removing specific passages from their transcript, if they choose. Transcripts of taped interviews will be securely locked in the supervisor's office, at the University of Ottawa. Data will be conserved for a period of up to five years, and then destroyed.

Participants should be aware that interviews will be conducted until saturation of data is achieved. This means that there is the possibility that not all interested participants will be contacted. Your interest is greatly appreciated. Those students who are contacted to participate in the research study, will be required to sign a consent form prior to the interviewing process. Finally, students who have participated in the study will be given the opportunity to review the finished research project, should they wish.

Concerns related to ethics should be directed to the Protocol Officer for Ethics in Research, 1-613-562-5387. Email: ethics@uottawa.ca. In addition, questions regarding the conduct of the study can be directed to:

Meryn Stuart, PhD (Supervisor)
613-562-5800 ext. 8435
mstuart@uottawa.ca

Lorraine Chick (Researcher)
613-548-3688
lorrainechick@yahoo.com

Appendix CProposed List of Interview Questions

1. How are you using reflective journal writing in the Integration Seminars?
2. How has the concept of reflection been explained to you by nurse educators?
3. What were you told about journal writing?
4. What is your opinion of reflective journal writing as a learning tool ?
5. How do you feel about using reflective journals?
6. Do you think reflective journal writing has impacted upon your clinical practice?
If so, how? If not, why not?
7. How do you think your perception of reflective journal writing has changed over the course of your nursing program?
8. Is there anything else you would like to share regarding your experience of reflective journal writing?

Interview Guide

1. How are you using reflective journal writing in the Integration Seminars?

- implementation of journalling in the seminar i.e. how often, when are they submitted
- format of journal activities i.e. level of disclosure, structured etc.

2. How has the concept of reflection been explained to you by nurse educators?

- what is your understanding/definition in your own words
- goals of reflective practice
- expectations
- inquiries RE: different kinds of reflective activities, previous experiences
- other activities such as discussion, role playing, critically appraising literature

3. What were you told about journal writing?

- goals and expectations of this activity
- was there anything that might have made this clearer?
- student safety
- acknowledgement of the power relationship between teacher and student
- comfort using a writing tool
- was discussion raised about the both the positive and negative aspects of this type of tool

4. What is your opinion of reflective journal writing as a learning tool?

- has it been useful
- skills enhanced?
- in what ways. Ask for examples
- if not, why not
- do you journal for personal use?

5. How do you feel about using reflective journals?

- i.e. safe, empowered, fear of judgement, bored
- recommendations to make this learning strategy more meaningful for you

6. Do you think reflective journal writing has impacted upon your clinical practice?

- what is your opinion
- in what ways, if not why not
- examples directly related to changes in practice
- concern about being judged if didn't find it helpful

7. How do you think your perception of reflective journal writing has changed over the course of your nursing program?

- more or less meaningful
- im pact of different professors
- feeling more confident about clinical setting.
- is there more or less time to implement a reflective process?
- reality of work culture and environment - impact of this
- improved clarity around goals and expectations of journalling over time?

8. Is there anything else you would like to share regarding your experience of reflective journal writing?

- anything I have missed!

Appendix D
Consent (on university letterhead)

Title: Student nurses' perceptions of reflective journal writing: A poststructuralist approach

Name of researcher: Lorraine Chick, student in M.Sc.N program, University of Ottawa

Supervisor: Meryn Stuart, RN, PhD.

Institution: University of Ottawa, School of Nursing

I ----- have read the Letter of Information and agree to participate in the research conducted by Lorraine Chick of the School of Nursing, Faculty of Health Sciences at the University of Ottawa. The project is supervised by Meryn Stuart, RN, PhD. The purpose of the research is to learn about student nurses' perceptions of reflective journal writing. It is hoped that information collected might be helpful to nurse educators in planning and utilizing this type of learning strategy.

My participation will consist of initially attending one, audiotaped interview. Only the participant and researcher will be present. Each interview is expected to take approximately one hour, but no longer than one and a half hours, unless mutually agreed upon by the researcher and participant. It is anticipated these interviews will be scheduled during the months of January/February 2003. Additional interview time may be required to confirm and clarify information. This may require approximately thirty minutes, but no longer than one hour. I will be asked a series of open-ended questions regarding my perceptions of reflective journal writing. Transcripts of the interviews will be made for study purposes. I understand that information collected will be used to complete a master's thesis and provide the basis for an oral defense. I understand that there is the possibility that publication may result from this research. The interviews will be conducted in English only. However, I will be given the option to sign a consent form that has been translated into French, if I wish. I understand that there is no financial reimbursement offered in exchange for participating in this research study.

Information shared with the researcher during interviews will remain strictly confidential. Names will not be attached to interview transcripts and the identity of the participant(s) will be disguised within the body of the report, if necessary. I will be given the opportunity to review my interview transcript and remove specific passages, should I wish to do so. Information will not be shared with those not directly involved in the research project itself.

Anonymity is respected in the following ways: Recruitment information will be handed out to all the students in class. Students will be advised not to indicate interest to the researcher during class time, but will be provided with contact information and will identify their interest in participating by communicating with the researcher directly. I understand that the professor will have no part in choosing, or excluding students from this research project. Transcripts of taped interviews will be securely locked in the supervisor's office at the

University of Ottawa. Data will be conserved for a period of up to five years, after which time it will be destroyed.

I understand that should sensitive information be uncovered, the researcher is prepared to offer appropriate support and resources. I have been assured that I am free to withdraw from this project at any time without penalty of any kind, and that my participation is voluntary. I understand that participation in this project is not required to fulfil the objectives of this course. I may decline to answer a particular question or questions, I may request that the tape recorder be turned off at any point during the interview, and I will be given the opportunity to view my transcript for the purpose of clarification and accuracy. Finally, as a study participant, I will be given the opportunity to review the finished research project, should I wish.

Information regarding my rights as a participant may be addressed to the Protocol Officer for Ethics in Research, (613) 562-5387 or ethics@uottawa.ca

There are two copies of this consent, one of which I may keep.

I would like to review the finished research project Yes ----- No-----

If I have any questions about the conduct of the research project, I may contact the researcher or her supervisor

Supervisor
 Dr. Meryn Stuart, PhD
 Faculty of Health Sciences
 School of Nursing
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lorrainechick@yahoo.com

Researcher signature Date

Participant's signature Date

Annexe E

Formulaire de consentement

Titre : Perceptions des étudiants en sciences infirmières face à la rédaction d'un journal de réflexion – une approche poststructuraliste et empirique.

Nom du chercheur : Lorraine Chick, étudiante au programme M.Sc.N, Université d'Ottawa

Directeur : Meryn Stuart, RN, Ph.D.

Établissement : Université d'Ottawa, École des sciences infirmières

Je, (nom du participant), déclare avoir lu la lettre d'information et accepte de participer à la recherche menée par Lorraine Chick de l'école des sciences infirmières, Faculté des sciences de la santé à l'Université d'Ottawa. Le projet est dirigé par Meryn Stuart, RN, Ph.D. Le but de la recherche est de mieux connaître les perceptions qu'ont les étudiants en sciences infirmières de la rédaction d'un journal de réflexion. On espère que les renseignements recueillis seront utiles aux professeurs en sciences infirmières dans la planification et l'usage de ce type de stratégie éducative.

Ma participation consistera d'abord à assister à une entrevue enregistrée par magnétophone. Seuls le participant et le chercheur seront présents. On s'attend à ce que chaque entrevue dure environ une heure, sans excéder une heure et demie, à moins que le chercheur et le participant soient d'accord pour continuer. On prévoit que ces entrevues se tiendront en janvier/février 2003. Il est possible que l'on ait besoin d'entrevues supplémentaire pour confirmer et clarifier les renseignements obtenus. Cela pourrait nécessiter environ trente minutes, sans excéder une heure. On me demandera une série de questions ouvertes concernant mes perceptions de la rédaction d'un journal de réflexion. On fera la transcription des entrevues à des fins d'étude. Je comprends que les renseignements recueillis seront utilisés pour compléter la rédaction d'un mémoire de maître et servir de point de départ à sa soutenance. Je comprends qu'il est possible qu'une publication résulte de cette recherche. Les entrevues se tiendront en anglais seulement. Je comprends qu'aucune compensation financière ne découle de ma participation à cette étude de recherche.

Les renseignements confiés au chercheur au cours de ces entrevues demeureront strictement confidentiels. À cause de la nature du contact direct nécessaire aux entrevues, je ne pourrai conserver l'anonymat face au chercheur. Les noms ne seront pas annexés aux transcriptions et l'identité des participants sera modifiée au besoin lors de la rédaction. J'aurai l'occasion d'examiner la transcription de mon entrevue et de retirer certains passages si je le désire. Les renseignements ne seront partagés qu'entre les individus directement associés au projet de recherche.

On respectera l'anonymat de la façon suivante : on distribuera l'information relative au recrutement à tous les étudiants du cours. On précisera aux étudiants de ne pas manifester

Conceptual Map of the Dominant Discourses Influencing Student Nurses' Perceptions of Reflective Journal Writing

