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Is reflection 'overdone' in nursing education?

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Abstract

Nursing educators, and indeed almost every healthcare practitioner, advocates the notion of reflection on practice (deVries & Timmins, 2016). With healthcare aspiring to bridge the theory-practice gap, critical reflection is required so that healthcare professionals are empowered and have capacity for change. Then they are able to contribute to improving health outcomes. We know this is true, but can reflection be overdone with nursing students so that the meaning and value of reflection is lost.

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Short article:

Is reflection 'overdone' in nursing education?

Nursing educators, and indeed almost every healthcare practitioner, advocates the notion of reflection on practice (deVries & Timmins, 2016). With healthcare aspiring to bridge the theory-practice gap, critical reflection is required so that healthcare professionals are empowered and have capacity for change. Then they are able to contribute to improving health outcomes. We know this is true, but can reflection be overdone with nursing students so that the meaning and value of reflection is lost.

Reflection can make sense of an experience, and is fundamental to improving practice. However, when it is a part of numerous aspects of student learning – individually and in groups, assessment, and clinical placement, it can be perceived by students as indulgent and not important or relevant to real world practices and pace. How can reflection be seen as meaningful and consequently transform student's learning?

When reflection does occur, its effectiveness can be questioned, particularly personal reflection which tends to focus on feelings. Introspection is the dominant approach to personal reflective practice, with prime focus being on individual and personal thoughts, feelings and behaviours. This often is seen by students as adequate and appropriate reflective practice, but a practice that is 'fluffy' and irrelevant. Perhaps it is purely naval gazing and needs to be challenged in students so that *critical* reflection occurs that can lead to change, development and growth. Mutual and reciprocal sharing in a more critically reflexive approach seems to be lacking in students. If this occurs, will students see value and the necessity for inclusion of reflection and reflective practices throughout a curriculum?

I consider critical reflection to be transformational learning and should focus on consistency and inconsistency of compassionate care in alignment with values, standards and regulatory requirements (in any setting and context). It should perhaps also be viewed as a touchstone for our effectiveness in doing our work and believing we are good healthcare practitioners. This is important so learning can be evaluated through the individuals lived experience and learning can then be connected to relevant theory and personal understandings. This perspective may, perchance, influence and challenge student nurses to connect to the value of reflection.

References

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