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Editorial

Can Reflection be Successfully Implemented in Thai Nursing Education?

“The art of teaching is the art of assisting discovery”

-Mark Van Doren

Reflection is a metacognitive teaching and learning strategy that helps learners to examine past experiences, actions, and decisions. Practitioners engage in reflection when problems arise. Using critical thinking, they consider the circumstances surrounding a phenomenon and choose ethical solutions. Educators who promote reflective practice in their classrooms ensure student engagement in the process of creating meaning, as well as organize instruction so that students produce knowledge rather than simply consume it. Reflection is based on pedagogy of competencies and has been well-known and widely used for 30 years in many education sectors in western developed countries.

Can reflection be successfully applied in Thai nursing education?

The authors have conducted a comparative study in nursing education in the USA and Thailand for the last three years. As a result of that experience, we believe that reflection could be integrated into Thai nursing education. However, two main barriers to doing so have been identified. Nursing educators may have difficulty applying reflection due to few experiences of this themselves and a lack of skills to incorporate the technique into questioning, applying learning activities, managing classes, giving feedback to students, and evaluating learning. Nursing educators must overcome these challenges for successfully reflective classes. They should acknowledge the obstacles of nursing instruction using reflection due to differences in culture and student learning styles within these two countries. Additionally, most of the Thai education system is not based on pedagogy of competence, but on memorization and knowledge. From our experience, Thai students have not been prepared to engage into self-evaluation, critical distance, or anything resulting from an individual point of view. In contrast, students in the USA are taught from different perspectives and are encouraged to cultivate their own individuality. In western countries, the teacher-learner relationship is largely horizontal while those in the Southern College Network of Nursing and Public Health (SC-net) of Thailand tend to focus more on the importance of a collective mode of apprenticeship in which decision-making is vertical.

Reflection is a difficult concept to embrace, but how challenging!

Since reflection is significantly related to important learning skills, as is critical thinking to nursing competency, we believe that nursing educators should incorporate reflection into nursing programs and instructional processes.

The Thai Qualification Framework for Higher Education (TQF) is designed to support implementation of the educational guidelines set out in the National Education Act. Incorporated in nursing education since 2009, the TQF has defined learning outcomes of graduates in at least five domains. Regarding TQF, we expect that

nursing students should develop and enhance higher level of cognitive skills, with particular attention to critical thinking.¹ However, previous studies found that most nursing students lacked cognitive skills, had insufficient critical thinking skills, and were unable to bridge knowledge and experiences into practice.^{2,3,4}

Reflective thinking is a cognitive skill that enables learners to think critically, understand self-potential and realization, and gain knowledge from their own experiences. Furthermore, developing skills must include life-long learning and problem solving for continuously improving work.^{5,6}

Currently, 30 nursing colleges under the jurisdiction of Praboromarajchanok Institute for Health Workforces Development, Ministry of Public Health, Thailand are attempting to implement reflection as a teaching strategy in nursing education. Interestingly, a study conducted by Borommarajonani College of Nursing, Trang revealed that nursing educators realized the importance and need for knowledge development and the application of reflective thinking into nursing education.⁷ As results of this study, the factors of successfully implementing reflective practice included:

1. Being supported by an administrator. Directors of nursing colleges play a crucial role in championing the implementation of reflective thinking as a teaching strategy.
2. Nursing institutions should integrate reflective thinking into educational policy to develop students' critical thinking competency. First, institutions may build public policy to encourage nursing faculty to integrate reflective thinking in their courses. The policy needs to contain a commitment and strategic plan to employ reflective learning activities. Second, institutions may incorporate reflective thinking into curriculum by designing guidelines for integrating reflective thinking to create consistency and coherence across the educational system.
3. Nursing schools may improve nursing instructors' capacity to integrate reflective thinking into instruction. Nursing instructors should master using reflective thinking since colleges and universities publicize using this teaching technique in coursework. Institutions may use training courses, faculty practice forums, and professional communities of practice to help nursing faculty implement reflective thinking and learning strategies.
4. Nursing educators should create course syllabi and learning experiences using reflective teaching and learning strategies. Particular attention should be given to use appropriate reflective questions in any process seeking to augment knowledge, resolve doubt, or solve a problem.
5. Nursing educators need to evaluate and provide feedback to students which helps them recognize their strengths and weaknesses in using reflection.

Examples of reflective learning activities

A variety of reflective learning activities can be used in nursing instruction including verbal and written reflection, as well as mixed strategies. While **debriefing** is considered a very effective instructional strategy, **reflective journaling** is among the most commonly used learning strategies.⁸

Debriefing after simulation is one kind of reflective teaching and learning tool widely used in nursing education to encourage students to apply their theoretical knowledge in clinical scenarios.⁹ Debriefing is part of a simulation in which students reflect on their experiences and knowledge afterward. The appropriate time for debriefing is immediately following students' action in a case scenario.¹⁰ The length of debriefing should be two or three times that of the actual simulation as scheduled by the educator.¹⁰ Educators who present simulations play a key role as a facilitator using active listening to guide reflective dialogues, clarify information, and provide constructive feedback.¹¹ In the debriefing process, teachers stimulate self-reflection among students regarding strengths and weaknesses in their decision-making processes during the case scenario. This technique helps students with diverse perspective to reflect and reframe their understanding of practice based on knowledge.⁹

The reflective journal is a crucial tool to help students think from both theoretical and clinical perspectives.¹² Nursing educators can use journal writing which requires students to record, analyze, and integrate their clinical experiences with nursing theory.¹² In order to use reflective journal writing in classrooms or clinical practice, educators can plan lessons which include journal writing as an assignment.¹² On the first day of classes, directions for reflective journaling and reflective thinking techniques for such assignments must be explained clearly to students.¹² Educators must subsequently examine students' progress and encourage them to achieve their goal.¹² Each week, educators must provide clear feedback to students in order to help them recognize and improve the quality of their reflection and writing.¹² Students also must be expected to respond to that feedback.

Conclusion

Reflective thinking is a teaching and learning strategy that can be used to challenge and manage learning in the 21st century. Nursing educators play crucial roles of facilitator and stimulator for effective learning in order to develop students capacity to achieve greater cognitive skill. Educators should continually develop and practice teaching techniques which direct students to use self-reflection. This will assist in developing questions to encourage students to think more deeply about an issue and enable them to understand greater meaning. Therefore, nursing educators and students must be prepared to understand the concepts, theories, and techniques of reflective thinking used in teaching and learning. Furthermore, learning through one's own experience and self-reflection, as well as using technology and media as tool, may help learners and nursing instructors succeed in reflective learning. The successful inclusion of reflective thinking into nursing education will depend on nursing educators who adapt to changes and create a culture of learning that encourages students to develop cognitive skills appropriately over time and with effort.

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