



<http://www.diva-portal.org>

Postprint

This is the accepted version of a paper published in *Nordic journal of nursing research*. This paper has been peer-reviewed but does not include the final publisher proof-corrections or journal pagination.

Citation for the original published paper (version of record):

Knutsson, S., Lundvall, M., Lindberg, E. (2018)

Participating in reflection seminars: Progressing towards a deeper understanding of caring science described by nursing students

Nordic journal of nursing research, 38(2): 111-116

<https://doi.org/10.1177/2057158517721832>

Access to the published version may require subscription.

N.B. When citing this work, cite the original published paper.

Permanent link to this version:

<http://urn.kb.se/resolve?urn=urn:nbn:se:hj:diva-38420>

PARTICIPATING IN REFLECTION SEMINARS - PROGRESSING TOWARDS A DEEPER UNDERSTANDING OF CARING SCIENCE DESCRIBED BY NURSING STUDENTS

Abstract

Few studies focusing how reflection seminars can support the learning of knowledge in caring science when inserted throughout the curriculum. The aim is to describe the students' experiences of participating in reflection seminars, using lifeworld theory and focusing on caring science. A qualitative descriptive study based on interviews were performed and ten students, between 21 - 33 years of age volunteered to participate. A reflective lifeworld research (RLR) approach was used.

Reflection seminars contributes to develop the students' ability to relate to caring and life. A deeper understanding is obtained when reflection sessions are spread over a longer period and when reflection becomes a process. The process helps caring science to become more natural and useful. Reflective seminars based on a theoretical foundation contribute to facilitate learning more readily. A good atmosphere pervaded by a lifeworld perspective characterized by openness and thoughtfulness contributes to learning.

Keywords: Lifeworld perspective, Caring science, Nursing education, Reflection

Introduction

The present study is part of a longitudinal research project focusing on students' learning of caring science during a three year nursing program in a university in western Sweden. Reflection seminars were integrated throughout the three years of education ¹. with the goal to increase the student's preparedness to use caring science in their future profession as nurses ². An earlier study, conducted after the students had completed their first term, described that the reflective seminars contributed to increased understanding of caring science. However; there were certain prerequisites that needed to be fulfilled. As an example, trust and security in the group and a clear framework derived from a lifeworld perspective, were described as important for learning ¹. The present study focuses on how students who have completed their third term of the nursing program experiences learning caring science by participating in reflective seminars grounded in lifeworld perspective and with a focus on caring science.

Background

In Sweden, the nursing programme is a 3-year higher education course. The student nurses must develop a wide range of competences such as; clinical competence and apply a holistic approach to the patient's situation ^{3,4}. Integration of different skills takes place during clinical practice as well as during theoretical parts of nursing education.

In this study, reflective seminars have been integrated as one way to support integration of theory, practice and lived experiences. One nursing class, was followed throughout the education. The students met regularly in groups (8-10 students/group) for a teacher-led reflective seminar. During these seminars, students were encouraged to reflect over their lived experience intertwined with knowledge in caring science. Active participation

was mandatory for passing the course. The content varied between being literature based to include films as well as experiences from clinical praxis (Table 1).

Table 1. The aim and theme for each seminary.

Term	Aim of the reflective seminary	Preparation
1	History of ideas; History of nursing and reflection as a tool in education	Literature connected to the topic at hand and film
	Human as patient	
	Health, wellbeing and suffering	
	Caring relation	
2	Basic needs related to circulation, respiratory, activity, rest and sleep	Literature connected to the topic at hand
	Basic needs related to elimination, body temperature, hygiene and nutrition	
	Care in the end of life	Film
	Reflection in relation to clinical placement	A five week clinical placement
3	Two seminars in which knowledge from the field of caring science, pharmacology and medical science are integrated. Based on a fictitious patient story the students' have to plan, implement and evaluate care	Literature connected to the topic at hand

The theory in focus is caring science from a lifeworld perspective, meaning that patients lived experiences of health, illness and wellbeing is essential in caring ^{5,6}. Furthermore the lifeworld perspective constitutes the ground for the reflective seminars taking into account the students lived experiences in caring and learning situations. The congruence between ontology and epistemology in caring and learning situations is described as important for the outcome of the students learning ^{2,7}. Lifeworld theory was introduced by Husserl ^{8,9} as a way to examine humans lived experiences. The lifeworld is unique for

every human, but at the same time our lifeworld's are intertwined through relations with each other. In a reflection seminary, everyone participating brings with them their unique experiences, and as described by Ekebergh ² the starting point for reflection and learning has to be the student's lifeworld. At the same time the situation per se creates a shared experience, a relational aspect described according to Merleau-Ponty ¹⁰ as intersubjectivity.

Reflection forces the students to step out of their natural attitude and facilitates the transformation process taking part during nursing education². Theory and practice have to be linked together, and research has proven that reflection can contribute to prepare students in their process of becoming an independent nurse ^{11,12}. In our everyday life, the lifeworld is often taken for granted. An attitude described by Husserl ^{8,9} as the natural attitude. In the natural attitude human encounter the world in an unreflective manner. One purpose of reflection can be to make prerequisites for the student to challenge their natural attitude. One way to do this is by confuse, disarrange and thereby awaken the self ². In the same time as the natural attitude has to be challenged, the importance of taking into account the students' earlier experiences ¹¹ and lifeworld ² and interwove these aspects in the current situation has been highlighted.

The informants were half way in their process of becoming professional nurses. Nursing education is about becoming, which can be understood as an inner transformation facilitated during reflections with preceptors and fellow students ¹². However; the situation can be challenging for the students and therefore it was felt important to illuminate how reflection seminars can contribute to the process of becoming a nurse.

Aim

The aim is to describe students' experience of participating in reflection seminars, using lifeworld theory and focusing on caring science.

Method

Design

This qualitative study is based on a reflective lifeworld research (RLR) approach ^{13,14}.

RLR is based on Husserl's ⁸ lifeworld theory and theory of intentionality. The lifeworld theory was further developed by Merleau-Ponty ¹⁰. The goal of RLR is to describe human beings lived experiences of a specific phenomenon ¹³. The phenomenon in this study is; Reflection seminars grounded in lifeworld theory and focusing on caring science; from the students' perspective.

RLR requires openness and flexibility towards the phenomenon in search for the phenomenon's meaning and therefore the research process is characterized by a reflective attitude. A reflective attitude enables things that are not directly visible to become visible. As a phenomenon is related to the world, researchers also need to be aware, not only of their own pre-understandings, but also of the phenomenon's relation to everything else in the world. This reflective attitude, characterized by openness, thoughtfulness, reflection, and close examination are in RLR described as bridling ¹³. During the entire research process the researchers has strived for an attitude of bridling. The pre-understandings of the authors in this study have been discussed and considered throughout the research process.

Data collection

The criteria for inclusion were students that had ended their third term in the nursing program. The students should have had reflection seminars from the beginning.

Ten students; eight females and two males, between 21 - 33 years of age volunteered to participate. Place and time for the interviews were determined by the student. Before the beginning of the interview the students were orally and verbally informed about the study. Thereafter the students were asked to describe their experiences of reflection seminars in order to support the integration of theory, practice and lived experiences. They were encouraged to speak freely and follow-up questions such as “How do you mean?” or “Tell me more about...?” were asked for clarification and understanding. The interviews lasted from 30 to 45 minutes, were recorded and performed in a private room and later transcribed verbatim.

Data analysis

Data were analysed according to RLR¹³. According to Dahlberg et al.¹³ the different analysis's parts in RLR can be seen as elements in an intertwining process. In order to obtain an overall sense of the material all authors' read the interview transcriptions as a whole several times. Then meaning units, related to the phenomenon, were identified. The analysis proceeded in order to understand the meaning of every unit. Meanings were unpacked with a bridling approach. Questions such as: How does learning in reflection seminars appear to students? What does it mean to reflect on caring science concepts? were continuously asked to the text. The constant questioning to the text and the reflection of what the text said revealed meaning of the phenomenon. Thereafter, these meaning differences and similarities were, through a constant movement from parts to whole text and back again, organized into clusters of meaning. Clusters of meaning can be seen as a preliminary meaning structure. The analysis was terminated by further

problematizing the clusters in relation to one another in order to identify patterns that describe the phenomenon^{13,14}. The analysis did not reach the most abstract level (essence) in RLR, but resulted in four themes of meaning presented as: Interpersonal interplay, Expectations regarding to preparation and performance, A process towards deeper understanding and a reflective attitude and Reflection are challenged by knowledge assessment.

Ethical considerations

The study was carried out in accordance with the principles in the Declaration of Helsinki¹⁵. The participants were orally and written informed about the aim of the study, confidentiality and that participation was voluntary and could be determined any time. They all signed a written informed consent. It is important to consider that the students might feel dependence due to their need to pass the exam. At the time of the study, none of the researchers was involved in the reflective seminars, helping the students feel at ease in the situation.

Findings

Interpersonal interplay

The interpersonal encounter occurring in the reflection group is of importance for learning and understanding caring science. By balancing security with challenges a process of development and growth occurs. The continuity of the reflection seminars contributes to a feeling of being comfortable with participating, the situation is familiar and a perception of what will happen is present. The sense of security is enhanced by sharing the common experience of training to be nurses.

"We have chosen to become nurses, ... so somewhere we aim for the same goal and there is some safety in that"

One advantage is the opportunity to share each other's experiences and thoughts, leading to greater understanding of texts that have been read but perhaps not fully understood. By preparing before and then reflect during the seminars the understanding is further expanded. To reflect together are described as a force leading to a sense of responsibility for each other.

"There were people who were very talkative..... but you noticed they were trying to hold back a bit so that the more quiet ones would get the chance to talk"

Alone at home, preparing for reflection seminars a feeling of loneliness can arise. These feeling can be alleviated by the reflection seminar, since questions can be asked and problems can be reflected on. To share questions and reflections with others also leads to confirmation of one's own understanding.

To achieve a deeper understanding through reflection, the safety found in a group where people know each other well, has to be challenged. By dividing the groups randomly the possibility is given to reflect together with other classmates with whom no other relationships exist.

"The ultimate objective is not determined in a reflection, you never know where you will end. Therefore it's better with people you do not really have knowledge about. They surprise and I think that is good"

The challenge is to meet new people's thoughts. Being in a new group represents an insecurity, while, at the same time, perspectives widen and a progression in knowledge comes about. Insecurity can thus lead to a deeper reflection.

Expectations regarding to preparation and performance

Demands are placed on oneself to perform, and a clear structure for what is expected at the reflection seminar is asked for; otherwise feelings of insecurity obscure and interfere with the learning process. The reflection seminars become less meaningful.

A clear structure leads to a sense of security and of being able to participate in a committed way. The commitment is based on the possibility of being able to prepare oneself by reading and shaping own thoughts and ideas that can be discussed together with other students. By in advance receive information about the reflection seminar; a more committed and confident activity can take place.

"It would be good to be a little more structured before the seminar in order to enter the seminar even more prepared..... to assure you have not read the wrong stuff."

Unclear guidelines regarding the purpose of the reflection seminar involves an uncertainty that leaves space for the students to freely interpret how they should prepare. This leads to uncertainty and unsafety which complicates a deeper understanding. In situations when the reflection seminar is based on a patient's story, it is significant that this is grounded in a clinical situation and derives from a relevant context for it to be meaningful.

Through the patients' stories, caring science can come alive, and reflection results in a fusion of theory and practice and contributes to a greater understanding of what it means to become a patient. It also deepens the understanding of the importance of take hold of the patients' story. Care can be provided with greater security when the patient's situation is reflected upon.

A process towards deeper understanding and a reflective attitude

Since reflection seminars are conducted over a long period of time they will not only lead to greater knowledge in the essence of caring science, but in itself leads to a developed ability to adopt a reflective stance. During theoretical parts of the first three terms of the education, an understanding of the difference between the reflection seminars and seminars is obtained.

The experience is that a seminar is more like a lecture where a correct answer must be accomplished, while a reflection seminar is more like a dialogue with fellow students to achieve the experience of others around a topic, and thereby obtain a greater knowledge and understanding of the wholeness.

"The amount of literature made people become much stressed thinking it was another seminar. That..... I will be assessed here on what I can and can't. But..... it was reflection... where one can learn from each other. That's a difference. "

By participating in reflection seminars for three semesters the understanding of caring sciences has deepened. Previously, caring science concepts was experienced as "worn out" and it was hard to understand what they really meant. Through reflection seminars a deeper and increased knowledge has been attained. The caring science concepts are

integrated more and more in one's own approach and thus become more useful in the everyday language with fellow students.

"..because you've always been forced to think according to the caring science concepts.... and now it has become so naturally for you... you have it, sort of, constantly in mind.... "

The acquisition of a reflective attitude shows for example through that reflection also takes place outside the reflection seminar. The reflection process starts before and continues after a reflection seminar. The process is also present in ordinary conversation and in lectures. During lecture a more assertive and curious attitude are developed when courage is found so that questions to the lecturer can be asked.

A need is seen to introduce more reflection in the education and clinical practice. A wish is to have reflection even during the medical courses since it often are many facts here to be learned. Benefits are seen in reflecting with others in order to understand and integrate knowledge in relation to medical and caring science.

"There have been many medicine courses that we have read, it has been much divided, first it was biology then heart and vessels. We have been reading in parts, and tried to get it together"

It is hoped that the reflective approach is present even when they are actual nurses, and that the possibility for reflection exists in the health care unit they are to work in.

Reflection are challenged by knowledge assessment

It is important how the learning environment is shaped to be perceived safe. As the seminars are mandatory one dimension includes the assessment, which means that

everyone must be given space and get their voice heard. This is seen as a difficult balancing act and the reflection seminar can be perceived as too controlling.

"There was no time to talk, the atmosphere was not felt free, we went around in a circle and everyone had to say something, spontaneity is absent, everything happens on command....the quality will not be as good"

Depending on the reflection leader's approach and attitude a safe or unsafe atmosphere is created in the group. If each student is given a question to answer, it feels more outpointed and stressful, a feeling of verbal assessment arises which means that reflection do not occur. If they are lucky they know the answer of the question assigned, if they are unlucky, they cannot answer which could lead to a feeling of being singled out, which in turn creates worries in the whole group.

"It's very difficult to sit next to someone who is very uncomfortable in the situationsomeone who do not know which answer to be expected.....there will be uncertainty and people will be embarrassed. The atmosphere in the room becomes very pressed"

The control of knowledge is done at the expense of reflection. Being forced to perform a correct answer can, in the situation, be perceived as contradictory. Performance becomes linked to being heard when it also may be that the activity is strongly present in the silence and the listening.

"The brain is spinning all the time although I may not say anything during the whole time I feel very active, even if I'm quiet"

If instead, the words are set free, this can lead to a greater understanding of the phenomenon. This means a confirmation of that own thoughts and ideas are important.

Reflection leaders' difficulty balancing act are addressed during the seminar. The challenge is to give everyone the opportunity to take place. Participants who do not say much are affected to the highest degree. The silence can spring from a discomfort speaking in groups, or for example, not having Swedish as a native language. The fear of saying something wrong may inhibit the ability to take place in the situation. Stuttering or a general discomfort about talking in a group may be other factors that affect.

Discussion

The reflective seminars described in this study are based on caring science and a lifeworld perspective. Using a specific approach in reflection contributes according to Cox ¹⁶ to facilitate learning more readily, compared to when reflection is used without theoretical foundation. The lifeworld perspective contributes to develop the students' ability to intertwine reflection as a means of being and as a way to relate to caring and life. Reflection has become a process enriching each day with new knowledge and understanding of phenomenon encountered during education. They have also adopted a reflective stance. If reflection seminars are conducted over a longer period of time and are integrated in the courses, the students experience that an understanding of the meaning of reflection is developed. These insights developed in caring science and reflection may hopefully move to a general intention to use them in their future profession as nurses.

The interpersonal dimension affects the experience of participating in reflection seminars. This dimension is often described as an atmosphere of ambiguity in which

security and insecurity are simultaneously present. There is thus no dualism between security and insecurity; instead the in-between space between them can be understood as a dynamic field in which the everyday taken for granted knowledge is challenged by taking part in reflection. According to Merleau-Ponty ¹⁰, the dialogue creates common ground among humans as perspectives merge into each other, leading to a feeling of coexistence.

Interpersonal encounters among those who have no other relationship lead to broader perspectives and deeper knowledge but also produce tensions in the group. But as described by Gadamer ¹⁷, to understand is to look beyond what is close at hand and to be open to a fusion of horizons. Openness according to oneself and the others might contribute to an understanding in which a fusion of horizons can take place. It is important to consider that the teacher must be attentive to the process taking place in the group ¹⁸. Berglund et al. ¹⁹ argue that unsafety and insecurity are learning forces which can lead to good and valuable results but are also challenging because learning is constantly in motion and demands a balance between challenge and safety. Gadamer ¹⁷ argues that risk taking is a prerequisite to understanding new matters and argues that understanding is a demanding activity requiring courage and will.

In the current context, students also have to pass the reflection seminars meaning they have to prove knowledge in accordance to the curriculum. This assessing part of reflection seminars can contribute to build barriers to learning ^{20,21}. The atmosphere in the situation is challenged when reflection and an assessment of knowledge has to be balanced. A good atmosphere pervades that reflection will not be obscured by the knowledge assessment and ensures that knowledge is generated through reflection. To be

supported and to feel that you belong in the group, that there is an interest of you as a person and that you are welcome, is important for a positive learning environment ².

As the reflective seminars are integrated regular during the education, sensitivity according to the needs of fellow students is developed. Learning and performance should not always be linked to being heard as the students think happens when the reflection leader takes rounds and everyone has to speak. The atmosphere should also permeate the power of the free speech where the constituents silence and listening also have a great impact on learning and performance. To be able to listen one needs to be open and thoughtful as mirror the lifeworld perspective ². Listening can carry the other student through the reflection and may take a person out of loneliness ²². Developing the ability to be a skillful listener contributes to an understanding of the importance of attentiveness when listening to a patient's story ¹⁸. Ekebergh ² describe that if students are not allowed or able to share experience and theoretical knowledge a sense of loneliness arises. The reflective seminars were however, experienced as alleviating loneliness and hopefully this experience can contribute to increased learning.

The students had expectations for learning in the reflection seminars and they had demands on themselves to perform. They wanted clear directives and guidelines regarding how to prepare and be prepared in good times before the seminar. These findings are congruent with earlier research ^{1,18}. Clear information given can lead to maintain control and thereby also a higher level of satisfaction. On the other hand; reflection is a processing of what is experienced in relation to past experiences ². In this encounter between ongoing experience and previously proven understanding a new understanding and knowledge are created. To get there, humans must have a desire to

adopt an open mind, a willingness to understand something new that does not exist in the natural setting¹⁷. There is a desire for structure, while it may not be too controlling since openness and curiosity may then be lost. The lifeworld perspective is grounded on a reflective attitude, characterized by openness and thoughtfulness¹³ and since the seminars are implemented on a life-world theoretical basis it's important that openness is not lost.

Limitations

A qualitative descriptive study with a RLR approach^{13,14} were seen as an appropriate approach to this topic. Openness and flexibility, a reflective attitude, towards the phenomenon were seen to enable the researchers to make things visible that are not directly visible. We chose to follow one class throughout their education. The students volunteered to participate in the study and this may imply that they had a special interest and positive view of the topic. This is always a risk, however, in this study diverse views emerged. The students determined place and time for the interviews which according to Polit and Beck²³ makes it easier for respondents to participate and to make them feel confident and safe.

The interviewers tried to be open-minded, sensitive and aware of their pre-understanding which, according to Dahlberg et al.¹³, is of significance when using the RLR. We have tried to use a bridled approach and the focus has remained on the phenomenon.

Reflections and discussions between the researchers have been performed and have been a way to ensure validity of the results. Presenting the research process in as much detail as possible may also contribute to ensuring validity. However, the analysis did not reach the most abstract level (essence) in RLR, so transferability might be limited.

Conclusions

The findings show that the lifeworld perspective contributes to develop the students' ability to intertwine reflection as a means of being and as a way to relate to caring and life. A good atmosphere is crucial for learning outcomes in the reflective seminars and limits that reflection will be obscured by assessment of knowledge. The approach of the reflection leader is crucial. There is a desire for structure, however, it may not be too controlling since the lifeworld perspective is characterized by openness and thoughtfulness and this may then be lost. A deeper understanding is obtained when reflection sessions are spread over a longer period of time and when reflection becomes a process enriching each day with new knowledge and understanding. Caring science has become more valuable and useful. These insights may hopefully then be intertwined in their forthcoming education and future work as nurses.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests'

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

Funding

This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

References

1. Knutsson S, Jarling A, Thorén, A-B. "It has given me tools to meet patients' needs": Students' experiences of learning caring science in reflection seminars. *Reflective Practise* 2015; 16(4): 459-471.
2. Ekebergh M. A learning model for nursing students during clinical studies. *Nurs Educ Practice* 2011; 11: 384- 389.
3. Severinsson E, Johansson I, Lindqvist I. Effects of process-oriented group supervision – a comparison of three groups of student nurses. *J Nurs Manag* 2014; 22: 443–451.
4. ICN (2012). Code of Ethics for Nurses. International Council of Nurses, Geneva, Switzerland. <http://www.icn.ch/who-we-are/code-of-ethics-for-nurses/>
5. Arman M, Ranheim A, Rydenlund K, Rytterström P, Rehnsfeldt A. The Nordic Tradition of Caring Science: The Works of Three Theorists. *Nurs Sci Quart* 2015; 28(4): 288-296.
6. Galvin K, Todres L. Caring and well-being: a lifeworld approach. New York: Routledge, 2013.
7. Ekebergh M. Lifeworld -based reflection and learning: a contribution to the reflective practice in nursing and nursing education. *Reflective Practice: International and Multidisciplinary Perspectives* 2007; 8(3): 331–343.
8. Husserl E. *The crisis of European sciences and transcendental phenomenology* (trans. D. Carr). Evanstone: North Western University Press, 1970/1936.
9. Husserl E. *Experience and judgement* (trans. J.S. Churchill & K. Ameriks). Evanstone: North Western University Press, 1973/1939.
10. Merleau-Ponty M. *Phenomenology of perception*. (D. Landes, Trans.). London: Routledge, 2011/1945.
11. Sandvik A-H, Eriksson K, Hilli Y. Becoming a caring nurse – A Nordic study on students' learning and development in clinical education. *Nurs Educ Practice* 2014; 14: 286-292.
12. Sandvik A-H, Eriksson K, Hilli Y. Understanding and becoming – the heart of the matter in nurse education. *Scand J Caring Sci* 2015; 29: 62-72.
13. Dahlberg K, Dahlberg H, Nyström M. *Reflective lifeworld research*. Lund: Studentlitteratur, 2008.
14. Dahlberg K. *Att undersöka hälsa och vårdande* [To examine health and caring]. Stockholm: Natur & Kultur, 2014.
15. Declaration of Helsinki (World Medical Association, 2008)
16. Cox E. Adult learners learning from experience: using a reflective practice model to support work-based learning. *Reflective Practice* 2005; 6(4): 459–472.
17. Gadamer H-G. *Truth and Method* (trans. Weinsheimer, J. & Marshall, D.). London: Bloomsbury, 2013/1960.
18. Westin L, Johansson Sundler A, Berglund M. Students' experiences of learning in relation to didactic strategies during the first year of a nursing programme: a qualitative study. *BMC Med Educ* 2015; 15(49).
19. Berglund M, Sjögren R, Ekebergh M. Reflect and learn together - when two supervisors interact in the learning support process of nurse education. *J Nurs Manag* 2012; 20(2): 152-8.
20. Coward M. Does the use of reflective models restrict critical thinking and therefore learning in nurse education? What have we done? *Nurs Educ Today* 2011; 31: 883- 886.

21. O'Donovan M. Implementing reflection: Insights from pre-registration mental health students. *Nurs Educ Today* 2007; 27: 610-616.
22. Koskinen CA, Lindström UÅ. An envisioning about the caring in listening. *Scand J Caring Sci* 2015; 29(3): 548-54.
23. Polit DF, Beck, CT. *Nursing research: Generating and assessing evidence for nursing practice*. Philadelphia: Wolters Kluwer Health/Lippincott Williams & Wilkins, 2012.