Constructing the concept of reflection in nursing:
Exploring reflection through a post-registration palliative care programme in the UK
Objective and Research Question

• Overall Objective – Greater understanding of how reflection is perceived and used in Nursing.

• What did the concept of reflection mean to post-registration students and nurse teachers?
Philosophical Approach

- Social Construction
  (Denzin and Lincoln 2000)
- Reflection does not have an independent existence outside of the way people talk and write about it, since concepts have no other life other than what we give them through their use.
  (Wittgenstein 1967)
Methodology and Methods

• Interpretive ethnographic approach (Creswell 2007)
• Ethnographic data collection strategies - observations of teaching and learning, interviews with participants and extracts for programme documents and Reflective Learning Contracts (RLCs).
Data Collection

- **Fieldwork Diary**
- **In-depth Semi-Structured Interviews** - 11 students and 9 teachers.
- **Observation** - Introductory Day for 30 students, 16 seminars and tutorials, meetings, plus informal conversations.
- **Documentary Data** - programme handbook, clinical supervisor handbook, two module handbooks and 11 RLCs.
Data Analysis


- **Observations** — (Spradley 1980).

- **Documentary data** — (Silverman 2001).

- **Integration of Data Analysis** — Data were compared and contrasted to show facets emerging from different data sources (Richardson 1994), and to develop overarching themes and categories (Silverman 2000).

- Captured similarities and also significant differences in data. So not only **common categories/themes** also **‘lone voices’** (Wittgenstein 1967, Foucault 1972).
Study Findings
Making Sense of Experience - ‘moving on’ and ‘doing better’

• Reflection was constructed as a positive way to make sense of experience.

• Connected with a professional motivation to ‘move on’ and ‘do better’ within practice in order to learn and critically examine ‘self’.
Reflective learning contracts have just given me such an opportunity to learn about me as a person, that has allowed me to develop my nursing practice as a result... Instead of being this little caged bird...I have been allowed to sort of expand as a result.

Interview Extract Sally (student)
Being critical about experience

• ‘Converting’ to being critical
• Encouraging critical reflection
• The limits of being critical
Penny – ‘What do we know about reflecting on our experiences and reviewing that against the literature? (No response from the group. Penny tries another tack.) What is important about the way we use the literature?’

A student – ‘Don’t take it at face value, be critical, compare it with practice and compare it with other work.’

Penny – ‘What next? Have a ...gin because I have completed the analysis?’ (Laughter from everyone.)

Memo - Teachers appear to encourage students to critique and there is a real sense that this is hard work, as is shown in students’ response to comments about having a gin after having finished critical analysis.

Observation Extracts.
Feelings and self-awareness in making sense of experience

• The affective as an element of reflection
• Reflecting on feelings – gaining confidence
• Analysis of the affective
• Developing self-awareness
• I don’t think we should try and be feelingless, soulless rationalists, or whatever...we’d have really lost the fundamentals of nursing if we did that...feelings have to be part of reflection but they have to be challenged, in the same way that other thoughts need challenging...

• Interview: Paul (teacher)
...if you have no real sense about how you come across to people or how things affect you; the relationships in the work place are going to be difficult. I am not sure nursing is the type of job that you can just be a sort of a doer in.

Interview Extract.
Anita (teacher)
Action as part of reflection

• Commitment to action through reflection
• Potential for change
• Change and action but not necessarily emancipation
Intermingling the propositional, affective and active through reflection

• Feelings, self-awareness and commitment to action but also:
• Propositional knowledge an essential part of reflection on the programme
• All seen as important to reflection
Some Conclusions in Brief

• Reflection was constructed as a process of searching for solutions to practice experiences, in order to make sense of them.

• Professional motivation – ‘move on’ ‘do better’ (Dewey 1933, Schon 1987, Freshwater et al. 2008.4)

• More than a cognitive process – inter-twined cognitive, affective and active (Barnett 1997).
• Reflective process was not discarding propositional knowledge in favour of purely personal knowledge (Powell 1998, Collington and Hunt 2006, McGrath and Higgins 2006, O’Donovan 2007).

• Influences and limitations of rationality (Smith and Gray 2001, Cotton 2001)
• Limitations to the focus on self (Aldridge 1994, Latimer 2000, Paterson and Zderad 1988).

References

References