

**JOURNALING AS AN INSTRUCTIONAL TOOL FOR NURSING  
STUDENTS**

by

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## Abstract

Journaling has become more common in academic work in recent years and nursing has moved toward using this technique with nursing students. Journals have been shown to benefit both students and instructors by promoting reflection, thinking and learning. Instructors use journaling in various ways, with different philosophical foundations, with little understanding about how journaling is done, and with few strategies to optimize the process. The purpose of this study is to better understand how instructors use journals with students, and in conjunction with the existing literature, to develop guidelines for practice for nursing instructors. The research question for this study was: "How and why do nursing instructor's use journaling as an instructional tool?"

This qualitative study used a semi-structured interview process to gather data from five nursing instructors at a university with Baccalaureate, Master's, and Doctoral Degree-granting status in nursing. All had used or were currently using journaling with nursing students learning in a variety of clinical and classroom settings.

The data collected was categorized into the predominant emergent themes and was discussed in conjunction with the literature. As a result of the findings, practice guidelines were developed to offer suggestions and alternatives to using journals as instructional tools with students.

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## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

My interest in journaling began in the last year of my course work for the Master's Program in Adult Education. I was taking a course in which the bibliography was longer than any paper I had ever written. The ideas and concepts were abstract, and I was having difficulty connecting the information to anything in my work, or personal life. I asked the professor how I could manage the workload and begin to grasp the multitude of concepts, and he suggested keeping a journal about the course work, no rules or guidelines, just write. At first it felt strange to just write, without concern for spelling, sentence structure, or content. I wrote whatever came to mind and occasionally thought I had written something connected to the course material. Before long, ideas and questions came to mind, and as I wrote they slowly started to make sense, and as I read more, and as discussion occurred in class, the journal developed. I created meaning through writing. This experience, at first challenging, quickly became rewarding, and intrigued by this, I began to talk to others about journaling.

As a clinical nursing instructor, I had frequent contact with students and new graduate nurses, and nurses in graduate programs, so I asked about their journaling experiences. It soon became clear that many nursing instructors were assigning journals to students at both the graduate and undergraduate level. Some students thought journals were great opportunities to learn and were pleased with the feedback they received; others thought the journals were a waste of time, and would write up the assignment just before it was due. Students would often talk about what they thought of journal writing, the feedback they received, and their opinions about the process. I wondered how the



instructors assigned the journal, and their reasons for using the technique.

As I spoke with different colleagues about journals, I thought about how the process of journaling differed, if it did, from diary writing. I found several books on diary and journal writing in popular literature and spent time reading about diary writing, in particular. I soon discovered that most books use the two terms interchangeably and discuss why journaling and diary writing might differ from one another. I had always regarded diary writing as the writing that one does during times of great emotion or dramatic events or changes in one's life. According to the popular literature, the key component of diary writing was indeed the expression of emotion, although some authors also used the term journal for the same process. Journal writing, on the other hand, was described primarily as an academic process to document an event or situation to analyze them to either discover new knowledge or to find knowledge to explain the written text, and once again the term journal appeared interchangeably with diary. There continues to be debate among many that believe diaries are emotional accounts of one's personal life and journal writing is done for more academic purposes.

Had I not realized that journals and diaries were interchangeable terms in much of the literature, I would have spent time trying to figure out why I could not find nursing literature on the use of journals in nursing practice. I originally searched the term "journal" and was not able to find any articles. My computer search for literature revealed that only the word "diary" was used to categorize this writing process or instructional tool, although the terms journal and/or diary appeared either within the title or within the text of the articles. The amount of material available was not as extensive as I had hoped,

but reflected what I anticipated. I also discovered that other disciplines, including education used journaling for the development of reading and writing skills for elementary school students.

I have discussed my interest in journaling with several people I know, and was therefore not surprised when a close friend of mine presented me with a beautifully covered bound journal. Her intent was for me to live the experience I was exploring. It has become a truly meaningful gift! I began writing about the process of journaling related to my thesis and the exploration of the topic. I have started, stopped, and started again, because it takes time and commitment to write in a journal consistently. I initially started writing about my thoughts about the thesis process, and before long, all aspects of my life found a place on the page. The journal shapes, directs and inspires ideas that give new meaning and understanding to my work, my personal life, and my university life. I treasure the experience, and it will lead me into opportunities not only to grow, but also to find new ways to share my knowledge with others.

My growing interest in journaling has lead to another endeavour: I am currently submitting a funding proposal to initiate journal use with parents of children suffering from burn injuries. This interest has arisen out of a need to offer some solace to parents dealing with a tragic, life-changing event. Journaling as a therapeutic tool is an inexpensive intervention that allows parents to make meaning from senseless tragedy. My hope is to share my understanding of the journaling process with others so they can share in the healing benefits of journaling.

I am interested in journal work in a variety of ways, from academic journaling to

journaling for healing, or for expression. The diverse or similar ways in which journaling is used will serve as data to assist in developing guidelines to help others use journaling.

I outline below aspects of journaling that have been significant in my information gathering, as I embarked on the study of *journaling as an instructional tool*. I have made these observations by reflecting on my own experience, by talking to colleagues and students, and by reading journaling literature.

1. Journals are based on the concepts of reflection and critical thinking. These concepts are considered important in the development of a competent professional nurse.
2. Journaling is generally viewed as a positive experience for the learner and the instructor, and as an effective instructional tool.
3. Journals are considered useful for many reasons, and the activity varies in structure and process.
4. Nursing instructors generally do not assist learners in effectively understanding the journal process, before assigning journaling in the classroom or clinical setting.
5. Students sometime perceive journaling as a time consuming.

### **Research Question**

My recent interest in journaling, including my personal, professional, and academic experience has influenced my decision to pursue an aspect of journaling for this thesis. My exploration of the topic led me to expand my knowledge through reading both popular and academic literature, and specific education and nursing literature has lead to

the following research question: "How and why do nursing instructors use journaling as an instructional tool?" I am interested in how nursing instructors develop, assign, and mark journals, how and why it is used, the philosophy upon which it is based, and what nursing instructors view as important as they share their experiences. Although some of the student's reactions to journaling are included in the data, they are used to illustrate points about the use of journals by the instructors and not to illustrate the perceptions of the students' experience.

### **Purposes of the Study**

This study will begin a process of collecting data about the use of journals as an instructional tool with nursing students. Journaling has not been frequently researched, and it is important to find out what exists in current practice and to categorize the information as a foundation for future studies. The following are specific purposes of this study:

1. To describe and critically analyze how nursing instructors use journaling as an instructional tool in the classroom and in the clinical setting with nursing students.
2. To both describe the content and to critically analyze the written material nursing instructors give to learners when assigning journaling either within the classroom or within a clinical setting.
3. To contribute to nursing education literature by documenting the experiences nursing instructors identify when using journals with nursing students.
4. Outline implications for using journaling with nursing students, through understanding how journaling is assigned as an instructional tool.

### **Organization of Chapters**

Chapter two is an analysis of the literature related to journaling. Reflection models are analyzed, and contributions to journaling and nursing literature are identified. Similarities, differences, and gaps of recurring themes are identified and discussed, and questions from the researcher's perspective arise from observed gaps in the literature.

Chapter three outlines the research method and the use of semi-structured interviews as a data collection technique. The sample is described and methods for selecting participants explained. Selection criteria, methods of data collection, and setting are described, and the process for analyzing both the interview and document data is outlined.

Chapter four presents the emergent categories from the interviews and documents described. Specific examples selected from the data are used to illustrate or emphasize categories or themes emerging from the data.

Chapter five presents a discussion of the findings, the significance of the analysis in relation to the research question, and how the results are important to journaling in nursing practice. Identified limitations of the study and the transferability of the findings demonstrate how the data may or may not be applicable to other settings.

Chapter six begins with a summary of the thesis and is then followed by conclusions. Recommendations for research and practice are outlined and limitations to this study are discussed. Concluding comments bring a close to the thesis.

## CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Many nursing programs have incorporated journaling as an instructional strategy to develop the reflective or critical thinking skills of the student. Yet despite the number of instructors and institutions using this method, the literature about how journaling is used is limited. The following is a review of literature pertaining to journaling: the concept of reflection, the purposes and outcomes, problems and issues, gaps in the literature, and philosophical beliefs, and opinions about the topic.

### Reflection

The importance of critical reflection in learning is evident through Mezirow's (1990) description. Mezirow states that for an individual to make sense of an experience an interpretation of it must first occur. The interpretation is then a guide for decision-making or action, and thus, when meaning is made learning occurs. Reflection enables individuals to correct distortions in beliefs and errors in problem solving. Beliefs are built on presuppositions and critical reflection involves a critique of these. This concept of reflection is important for nursing students because as the nurse encounters experiences, interpretation of the events and critical reflection occurs, which then lead to learning. If this process happens as stated, then methods such as journaling, that promote reflection, will lead to learning.

Mezirow (1990) has developed a model that illustrates the concept of reflection, and identifies not only the components, but also why reflection is important and *how* transformational learning is triggered as a result. As already mentioned, the nursing literature links the use of the journal with the goal of learning, but Mezirow does this in a

more comprehensive way by using a model to illustrate how this occurs. Mezirow states that strategies, like journaling, can be used to foster reflection. This reflection creates meaning for the individual and meaning becomes learning.

Mezirow's (1990) model identifies action as either non-reflective or reflective. Each of these will be explored in more detail to present a more comprehensive picture of the model. Non-reflective action has two components: habitual action and thoughtful action without reflection. Reflective action also has two components: thoughtful action with reflection and critical reflection.

1. Nonreflective action as habitual action. This is the human action that is purely habitual or thoughtless, not drawing upon what one knows.
2. Nonreflective action as thoughtful action without reflection. This is the human behaviour where an individual draws only upon what is already known in order to act.
3. Reflective action as thoughtful action with reflection. The individual pauses to question or reassess the situation and makes a decision about how to perform immediately. The assumptions are assessed and the reflection becomes an integral part of thoughtful action.
4. Reflective action as critical reflection. This reflection looks back at prior learning (ex-post facto) and focuses on the content and process of the problem, challenging the presuppositions or basis of which the problem has been posed.

Critical reflection becomes an in-depth examination of the core beliefs, values and assumptions about how we interpret the meaning of objects and events in our lives. If

critical reflection is occurring, there is opportunity for learning, and this can be fostered through a number of strategies, including the use of journals. The model outlined is the basis for Mezirow's work on transformative and emancipatory learning, and others, such as Marsick (1990), writing on action learning and reflection in the workplace and Lukinsky (1990) on reflective withdrawal through journal writing have developed specific techniques for fostering critical reflection for this purpose. I have limited my focus to the model of reflection itself to illustrate why journaling in nursing literature is based on reflection.

Boud (1985) shares Mezirow's idea of reflectivity and additionally, separates the process of re-evaluation into four elements: association of new data to what is known, integration of the data through seeking relationships between the parts, validation determining the authenticity of the resulting ideas, and appropriation, which is making the knowledge one's own.

Schon (1987) describes reflection as a dialogue of thinking and action through which one becomes more skilful. This model is somewhat different than Mezirow's, although the basic premise of examining the situation, asking questions, and developing new ways of thinking are similar. Reflection-in-action is a pattern of inquiry resulting in a "sequence of moments" and are outlined in Schon's work as follows:

1. There is a situation in which an individual responds in the usual, or normal manner because it is familiar or because it fits within the boundaries that are viewed as expected.
2. Sometimes a usual situation presents a surprise and does not fit into what the



individual expects to have occurred.

3. The surprise causes the individual to question "What is this?" and thoughts return to the situation at hand.
4. The individual then thinks about why this situation occurred and restructures how the situation is viewed.
5. New action is tried and then re-evaluated depending on the result.

Osterman (1990) discusses Schon's model in his article and states that when a discrepancy occurs between the real and the ideal, or between what occurred and what was expected, one steps back to review the situation. Currently held views are examined, and new perceptions are a means to develop new strategies, and it is in this way that practitioners grow and develop. Osterman (1990) states that historically Schon's reflection model originates in Kolb's experiential learning model, where experience is the basis for learning, and learning cannot take place without reflection. Glen (1995) superimposes Schon's model onto Kolb's model as a way to understand reflection by identifying the process, events, and structure for reflection.

None of the models described account for the affective aspect of reflection. The learning occurs in the models when something is cognitively learned through taking action on reflection. The model then becomes a thinking, action, thinking, cycle model. According to many nursing articles about journaling a large part of what occurs in nursing journals relates to emotions and feelings, in addition to the cognitive aspects. Reflective models do not take into account the affective aspect of journaling and therefore the model would not be as comprehensive if the affective aspect were included.

In addition to using models that may not best serve the activity of journaling due to the small number of reflective models, nurse educators, researchers, and clinicians have used them in part, whole, or combination to show how reflection occurs. The resultant adaptation of the models may further prove to weaken the foundation that reflection does what it purports to. The link between reflective models and the nursing literature is prevalent despite limitations.

Each of these models offers a perspective on reflection and has strengths and gaps. The purpose of journaling is to reflect and the goal is to learn through reflection. The purpose of this paper is not to question the use of reflective models in journaling but to provide the background to what already exists.

### **Purpose of Journals**

The literature indicates journals are primarily used for the following purposes: to learn through writing; create new knowledge; promote personal benefit to the learner; share issues among teachers and learners; enhance patient care; assess and evaluate learning needs; and promote the level of reflection in the learner. Each of these purposes will be addressed here using the existing literature related to the use of journals.

### *Writing to Learn*

Allen (1989) writes that the more current view changed from a paradigm of "learning to write" to "writing to learn" and that nursing education can be enhanced through this way of thinking about learning. She states that many educators now believe information is shaped and understood through the process of writing. Her article outlines several ways in which writing can be used to develop knowledge: 1) re-write previously

written papers in future courses--this provides the student an opportunity to incorporate new knowledge into previously learned information; 2) keep a portfolio of writing assignments so that students can review progress as they learn new content; 3) assign in-class writing of various natures, including short spontaneous assignments or group papers.

Hodges (1996) outlines a levelled approach to "learning to listen to self and others." This article suggests that students can be led through a series of writing exercises in journals to help them move through the levels of learning from receivers of knowledge to creators of knowledge. A short section on how journals are assigned is included, and it is noted that the author states the key to successful journaling is in how it is presented to the learner. This model is based on the premise that knowledge is created through writing as a reflexive practice.

Orem (1997) studied adult education graduate students to look at how keeping a reflective journal enables a practitioner to improve professional practice. His findings revealed that students learn the most when they are given active guidance and positive reinforcement. Students learned through writing as a result of being reflective on their work as adult educators.

These authors suggest that writing will provide an opportunity for learning to occur through the activity itself. The writing assignments can be given to students designed specifically to promote learning through spontaneous in-class exercises or through carefully structuring them. Based on this it is possible that journaling is a tool well suited to promote learning in nursing students.

### *Knowledge Creation*

Given that "writing to learn" is derived from reflection, knowledge is created through this writing. Carper (1978) asserts that student stories, recorded through journaling, generate four ways of knowing: personal, empirical, ethical, and esthetic. Paterson (1995) used these four ways of knowing to guide the learner in her responses to students in dialogue journals. In this way, if the student was writing about only one aspect of knowing, she could reinforce the idea that there is more than one dimension to knowing. The student could then reflect upon the other dimensions of knowing and incorporate them into nursing practice.

Durgahee (1996) found that nurses stated they learned through comparing different circumstances and situations. Knowledge was derived from practice, through in-depth discussion that uncovered assumptions. This led students to a deeper level of dialogue with their own practices and improved communication between patients and staff. Tryssenaar (1995) reports in her article about interactive journals that students responded they had learned a significant amount through this process. Atkins and Murphy (1993) regards the synthesis of knowledge as important because the outcome of reflection requires a new perspective, and therefore, the integration or synthesis of new knowledge with what is already known is crucial. The journal provides an active, integrated way in which to allow the student to reflect on experiences. In this process, the link between theory and practice occurs through journaling (Callister 1993). In addition to creating knowledge through learning, Burnard (1995) proposes that when nurses reflect on practice, there is a desire to learn more.

The literature presented here addresses knowledge as one of the important outcomes of using journals with students. Authors present this view in a variety of ways, stating that knowledge can be created, enhanced by comparing a variety of circumstances and situations, increased significantly in amount, and synthesized. Journals also allow for the integration of theory and increase the student's desire to learn more.

### *Personal Benefit to the Learner*

Several authors allude to the idea that reflective practice is also beneficial for learners because they are able to use these skills in their personal lives. Atkins and Murphy (1993) and Burnard (1995) state that self-awareness is evident in some of the journal entries the students make, but she fails to elaborate further on the implications for learning and practice. Kobert (1995) recognizes that through journaling, the student also benefits; she emphasizes that by processing clinical experiences, the learner can be healed and nurtured. Traumatic experiences can be seen in a new light and the emotional stress attached to the event released through writing. She states that nurses and students need to strive to find their voice to discover meaning, and journaling provides the opportunity to develop a sense of self.

Paterson (1995) recognizes an opportunity to empower a student through dialogue journaling. It is an opportunity for a student to write about a distressing event and have the teacher respond to the situation to provide clarification, assurance or support. Journaling may offer students a chance to articulate their ideas about an issue which they may feel uncomfortable addressing directly with the teacher. In this way, different perceptions of an event may be heard and resolved through understanding one another's

perspective.

### *Teachers and Learners Sharing Issues*

Carswell (1988) views the dialogue journal as a conversation between the student and the teacher: the student writes, the teacher responds, and the student once again builds on the dialogue. In this way, questions are asked and answered, and points of interest are clarified. This author found that clarifying, inquiring, non-judgemental responses required significant time and effort, although the student responses seemed more positive. Roe and Stallman (1994) studied literacy students with a comparative study using response journals and dialogue journals. They found students favored the dialogue journal for helping them to understand the role of the teacher and the context where teaching occurs.

Shuy (1987), in his study of the use of dialogue journals with elementary school students, found that teachers asked fewer questions in journals than in classroom talk, but the biggest difference was in the types of questions asked. In the journals, teachers' questions were information questions, requesting knowledge or something the students had, as opposed to "test type" questions normally asked. In addition, the students showed significantly higher levels of reasoning ability in dialogue journals than in classroom discussion. Although this study focuses on sixth-grade students, it does give some background into the importance of question-asking and of the personal nature of the teacher sharing knowledge in the dialogue journal.

Peyton and Seyoum (1989) view the teacher and student in the journal writing as co-participants. The teacher responds to the student's writing without evaluating or

correcting the writing. The teacher acts as a supporter and sustainer of student participation in journal writing rather than as an initiator or prompter of the process. The teacher is then viewed as a true collaborator. Peyton and Seyoum found that students wrote more interactively with some teachers than others, and through the study of their strategies, it was shown that the interactive collaboration style of teachers elicited a better response.

Paterson (1995) views the dialogue journal as an opportunity for the student and the teacher to share viewpoints and perspectives that have been written by the student. This allows for the examination of their own ideas, and allows these to be challenged and perhaps a new approach to a situation adopted. Smyth (1989) suggests teachers should first contribute their own ideas before asking the student a question; otherwise, the student is put in a position of reacting to a question when unaware of the position of the teacher, and therefore attempts to give the teacher what the student thinks is wanted. Questions to which the teacher does not know the answer tend to stimulate more complex and longer responses from the students.

In an interactive journal, teachers have found that dialogue builds on ideas, influences the questions teachers pose, views the learner and teacher as co-participants, and creates the opportunity to share views and perspectives on similar topics. The literature supports the idea that dialogue between the instructor and the student is of primary importance in the success of the journaling activity because the learning occurs as a result of the interactive nature of sharing issues.

### *Enhancing Patient Care*

Nursing has been in the process of defining itself and what lies at the core of practice. The profession has taken on the concept of "caring" as the basis nursing practice. Davies (1995) states that reflective practice is the focus of caring, and journaling is one of the methods used to promote reflective practice, which in turn promotes caring. She studied nursing students during a clinical course in which journaling was used to promote reflective thinking, and evaluated the student journals each week throughout the course. The study revealed that nursing students became increasingly independent throughout the course, seeking resources other than the instructor. The most valuable outcome, according to the author, was the way in which the student began to see the patient as the central focus.

Burnard (1995) found that students' entries into their journals revealed that nurses perceived reflection as a useful way of helping to improve the work they did as nurses. Reflection was also envisioned as a way of future planning and enhancing nursing practice by analyzing their work. This reflection helped them to use what was learned through reflection and make more informed decisions in the future. Hoffman (1983) and Hounsel (1976) acknowledge journal writing as a reflective practice associated with greater success in higher educational performance and in an increased responsibility for learning. Given this higher level of performance, one might speculate that patient care might also be enhanced as students develop reflective skills.

### *Assessing and Evaluating Learning Needs*

Burnard (1995) views the journal as a method for nurse education to assess



learning needs and evaluate outcomes because they are linked to one another, and it is by the assessment of goals that evaluation occurs. Given this, he states that there are several ways in which the journal can be used as an assessment or evaluation tool. The first way is to use the journal as the source of information upon which discussion can be generated between the student and the instructor on a weekly basis. In this way, progress can be monitored and appropriate interventions made for learning new information. The second is to use the journal as a summative evaluation when a particular course or clinical placement is completed. In this way, progress from start to finish can be identified according to criteria decided upon at the beginning of the course. The third is to use the journal as a part of a group discussion in which students have the opportunity to share experiences and seek feedback from the instructor and other students.

### *Level of Reflection*

Wong, Kember, Chung, and Yan (1995) assessed the level of student reflection from the reflective journals of nursing students. This levelling system was based on two models of reflection: Boud (1985) and Mezirow (1990). Boud (1985) states that when a person has an experience, the person responds. It is only when the person re-evaluates the experience that reflection is initiated. There are four elements to this re-evaluation: association of new data to what is known; integration of the data through seeking relationships between the parts; validation, or determining the authenticity of the resulting ideas; and appropriation, which is making the knowledge one's own. Mezirow (1990) developed a model of reflection to distinguish between non-reflectors (including habitual action and thoughtful action without reflection) and reflectors (including thoughtful

action with reflection and ex-post facto reflection or critical reflectors).

The student journals were analyzed to determine if the student demonstrated the ability to use association, integration, validation, and appropriation. In theory the students who demonstrated the ability to use the most elements were the most critically reflective. The results demonstrated that the non-reflectors demonstrated none of the elements, the reflectors the first two or three elements, and the critical reflectors, the more advanced elements. This study offers some direction in determining the level of student reflection, although it does not offer any information about how to develop or promote reflection.

### **Issues in Journaling**

There are a number of issues arising from the array of literature on reflection and journaling, including program design, structure and rules, preparing the learner, learner centeredness, expectations, teacher response, and trust.

Ligeikis-Clayton (1989) provides information to learners in the form of guidelines, and outlines why journaling has been used as an effective teaching strategy. She also gives a table of "rules" to be followed by the student. The rules are prescriptive about the following: how many times and when the journal must be handed in, what is to be written about, the kind of notebook to be used, and the five categories to be used as headings for categorizing the entries. The purpose of the journal is to monitor academic growth, personal growth, and patterns of thought and does not receive a grade, although is expected to be kept up to date according to the discretion of the teacher.

Carswell (1988) introduces the journal assignment with a handout about journaling entitled "Why Journals--Why Write"? In this document she explains why one

might write a journal and that the journal will be a dialogue between the teacher and the learner. Some structure is given to the number of entries (every two weeks for fifteen weeks) and the grade the journal will receive. She specifies the grade will start with an "A" and marks will be deducted only for journals that are not handed in. Spelling, grammar and sentence structure are not of concern. The journal is the private property of the student and is only shared with the teacher.

Hodges (1996) approaches the journal assignment in a series of levels from level I to level IV. Students are not assigned to a level, although the teacher uses the level system as a guide to propose questions to the students. The students primarily respond to the teacher's questions. The details of grading are not specified, except that all aspects of the writing are considered important. All grammar, spelling, sentence structure, clarity and argument development are marked. An introductory letter is given to the students to describe the nature of the journaling assignment.

Paterson (1995) provides some detail about how journaling is introduced to students. Two hours is spent teaching the students about why and how journaling might be done. Small groups analyze narratives and discussion amongst the students centers around the differences in perspectives about the same narrative. Guidelines are given about what might be included in the journal entry. The requested information is given, using terms such as describe or discuss. The teacher is a participant in the process, not an evaluator. Several ways in which journals can be graded are suggested, and the issue is left here with no resolution or prescription for universal grading.

There continues to be a wide variety of beliefs and ideas about how journaling

may be assigned to produce reflective entries from students. The range of rules and structure varies, the beliefs about grades and ways to evaluate remain unresolved, and methods for promoting the practice differ. The one aspect of journaling most teachers do agree on, however, is that students do benefit from the process. As journaling continues to be studied the growing body of knowledge about the journaling process will further inform how and why it is used, and perhaps how to use it more effectively as an instructional tool. The literature has prompted me to reflect on issues I have found in the literature. Here I will offer some of my observations for reflection presented in question form. Some questions address gaps or problems, and others clarification.

There seems to be a continuous balancing between the amount of structure that is "best" for the most reflection to occur in the journal. Some promote set rules and others give the students almost unlimited freedom. No one way is likely the best way, and more research may help to guide instructors about how much structure is helpful for particular students and teachers, and in particular circumstances. There currently exists no model of journaling to suit a variety of learners and each style of learning. Too much structure is prescriptive, and not enough may cause the student to flounder. Many talk about preparing the learner, but few give clues about how this is done and what helps the students know what is expected from them.

- What philosophical foundation do instructors use for the journaling process?
- What instruction and preparation do instructors give students when assigning journaling?
- What are the criteria for assigning the journal, and how are the journals evaluated

or marked?

- What preparation do instructors do, and what resources do they use to prepare themselves to use journaling with nursing students?
- What evidence do instructors look for to indicate that journaling has been successful?
- What are the perceived benefits of journaling for nursing students?
- How do instructors benefit from the journaling process?

Journaling requires the learner to share information that is confidential and personal. Journaling puts the student in a vulnerable position, and this can block learning if trust with the instructor is broken or rapport is not developed.

- How do instructors build trusting relationships?

Gaps in the literature are numerous and thus provide an opportunity for varied and numerous research studies. Practice guidelines in the literature are sparse or incomplete, and no research asks nursing instructors how they use journaling as an instructional tool. Few studies focus on how students perceive the journaling process, and there is minimal focus on a learner-centered approach.

### **Summary**

The nursing and educational literature about journals is primarily based on the concept of reflection. A number of models are cited including those developed by Schon, Boud, and Mezirow. Kolb's learning experiential cycle is often used with reflective models. Journaling has been used for many purposes, including the following: writing to learn, expanding knowledge, personal benefits to the learner, sharing of issues between

students and teachers, enhancing patient care, assessing and evaluating learning needs, and assessing the level of reflection for students. All of these reasons are discussed with varying degrees of research background, and many are from personal, anecdotal information from teachers using journaling as an instructional technique.

Controversial and diverse views noted in the literature about journaling include the following: how the program is designed, the nature of structure and rules applied to the content and process, how the student is prepared, the amount of learner centeredness required, the need for student and instructor response and trust. Gaps and problems in the literature are numerous and many areas need further research for journaling to become understood in more depth and critically analyzed as a method for promoting reflection.

## **CHAPTER 3: METHODS AND DESIGN**

### **Research Design**

The question "How and why do nursing instructors use journaling as an instructional tool?" was designed to explore the experiences of nursing instructors using journaling. This exploration lead to asking instructors about their knowledge level, justification for using journals, their concept of reflection, how was evaluation determine and what was the desired outcome of the journal process. This type of exploration required a method by which the personal experiences of the instructors could be accessed.

A qualitative research approach was used for this study because relatively little is known about the topic of journaling. No theoretical model currently exists to inform the study of journaling. Morse and Field (1995) state that the qualitative approach to understanding, explaining, and developing theory is inductive. This approach brings new knowledge into view by thoroughly describing a phenomenon by examining the context. The researcher's goal is to identify patterns or commonalties in the data in which the specifics develop into more generalizable themes or concepts. This research approach is a process that builds theory over a period in a step-like fashion and changes over time.

Morse and Field (1995) also explain that it is difficult to develop a research plan for qualitative research prior to data collection. To rigidly outline what will be done in the course of the research is not always possible because exactly what is to be studied emerges from the data collected. Therefore, it is difficult to ascertain the exact question, participant number, and what will be studied. A research question is developed to guide in the information to be collected and the number of participants is determined by the

amount and nature of information gathered that helps to answer the research question. The goal of qualitative research is to provide the reader with understanding that enables others to make sense of the topic under study. Based on the description of what essentially constitutes qualitative research, the previous two chapters describing the interest in the topic area, and the current literature, this study is well suited to a qualitative research approach.

Thorne (1997) describes interpretive description as a method of qualitative research suited for developing nursing knowledge. She encourages researchers to make it explicit when nurse researchers make departures from the traditional methods of qualitative research. She states that other disciplines have departed from traditional approaches and have maintained credibility and it is an appropriate time for nursing to adopt methods of research that are methodologically sound and suited for nursing knowledge.

There are two particular aspects of this approach that make the interpretive description method useful for this study. The first is the perspective that the description and interpretation of the phenomenon is most accurate from those who live it. Although she refers to a health or illness phenomenon it can apply to the lived experience of those using journaling with nursing students. The second aspect of this approach is that the nurse researcher begins to know the participant intimately, and the individual experience creates a larger, or more general body of knowledge, which can then be applied back to individual experience of the participant.

Although there are a number of traditional approaches to research in both the



quantitative and qualitative realm nursing research does not easily fit into any particular one. Mixing of a number of types of research has not been considered as sound research. My approach for this type of study did not fit any pure research type and I questioned the validity of attempting to make it fit. Choosing to not name the approach is often considered unacceptable in most research methodological literature and developing a new form of research category did not seem feasible for one study. As previously mentioned, Thorne (1997) has described the interpretive descriptive method as a sound approach which closely represents the research conducted in this thesis.

### **Study Participants**

The participants were contacted initially through a letter, which invited them to contact the researcher if they agreed to participate in the study. The letters were delivered to instructors through the University of British Columbia School of Nursing mailboxes, and a return address and phone number allowed potential participants to contact the researcher. Access to mailboxes and e-mail addresses was requested through the School of Nursing at the University of British Columbia.

The participants were expected to meet the following criteria:

1. Be an employee of the University of British Columbia, either on a permanent or contract basis, in the School of Nursing.
2. To have assigned journaling to nursing students within approximately the last eighteen months, either in a clinical or in a classroom setting.

Once initial contact was made through the mailbox system at the university, a follow-up e-mail letter was sent to all instructors who met the criteria for selection. Less

than the target of ten participants was reached, and a second invitation to participate was e-mailed to instructors about three weeks following the initial letter. A total of five participants agreed to participate in the study.

Morse and Field (1995) outline appropriateness and adequacy as two essential principles for qualitative sampling of participants. Appropriateness refers to the participants who are selected because of their ability to best inform the study. Small sample sizes in qualitative research produce an enormous amount of data and participants who are not able to inform the study, which could occur in random sampling, could create a lot of work with little informative results. This approach to selecting participants assumes the researcher knows which to select. In this study, the parameters were designed in a manner to select participants who were more likely to provide information about the study topic, although all employed instructors were invited to participate.

The second essential principle described by Morse and Field (1995) is adequacy. This principle refers to the depth and richness of the data gathered in the study. There is no minimum or maximum number of participants required to determine adequacy. Each of the five interviews in the study was over one hour in length and each transcript varied from 20 to 30 typewritten pages.

### **Sources of Data**

Nursing instructors using journaling with nursing students were asked to participate in this descriptive study which offers two levels of participation: 1) providing documents only, or 2) participating in an interview and providing documents. Although two levels of participation were offered, the option to provide documents only did not

receive any responses. Of the five participants who were interviewed, three of the participants provided documents.

### *Documents*

For this option the instructor was asked to submit two documents for analysis, including

- *written material given to the students when journaling is assigned.* These documents provide data about how journaling is used as an instructional tool.
- *written copy of the course outline in which journaling is assigned.* These documents provide the specifics about the purpose and learning intentions of the course and give information about the foundation upon which journaling is assigned as an instructional tool.

### *Interview and Documents*

- Interviews were semi-structured, consisting of open-ended questions related to the research question. The questions elicited information from the participants about how journaling is assigned as an instructional tool in either the classroom or in the clinical setting.
- In addition, the participants were asked to submit the above documents under *document analysis*.

### **Data Collection and Setting**

All five participants agreed to participate in the interview portion of the study, and the interviews were conducted and audiotaped. Two of the five participants produced documents for analysis. One of the two produced documents for two separate courses in

which journaling was used, although the document format was identical in both cases. One additional participant used the same document as the other participant who submitted a document, although did not submit a copy herself.

The semi-structured interviews were conducted in mutually convenient locations for the researcher and the participant. In this meeting, the purpose of the research and guidelines for participation were reviewed prior to the instructor signing the written consent form. A copy of the form was given to the participant and a copy kept for the researcher's records. The interview was conducted, audiotaped, and transcribed verbatim, stored on labelled computer disc, and printed on a hard copy for coding purposes.

A small binder was used to identify and organize the participant data, which included the signed consent, the audiotape, the labelled computer disc, and a hard copy of the transcribed interview. Each participant's information was marked with an identifying number to protect the identity of the participant.

### **Data Analysis**

Transcripts of all interviews were read initially to develop an overall understanding of the content. After the initial reading, coding began for words, sentences, and categories of information. The categories ranged from specific to general and a system of levels of coding emerged from the data. Some of the initial coding categories were used because they had been repeatedly mentioned in the literature about journaling. Some of the categories were separated as they became filled with data and new categories emerged. Some smaller categories were linked together if they had similar findings.

A system was developed to keep track of the data in specific categories, which

included the use of a large paper chart with the major and sub-headings for all of the initial categories. Interviews were given a number, and as each was read, brief excerpts were extracted and categorized under the theme headings by the number of the interview and the page of the transcript. Once all data had been analyzed, final theme headings were determined to provide organizational structure. The interviews were read again to identify any additional categories, missing information was added to categories, and some information was moved to more appropriate categories.

The documents were analyzed in a similar manner as the interviews. The emerging themes were more limited than the interviews and provided information primarily about specific expectations of the student and evaluation procedures. The data was integrated into the categories already coded for the interviews.

### **Credibility, Fittingness, and Trustworthiness**

Credibility and fittingness are important issues to address to produce qualitative research with rigor. Each of these is briefly described in the context of human subjects from the work of Sandelowski (1986). A study is considered credible when the data presents faithful descriptions of the topic under study. In addition, the "truth" is participant-defined, as opposed to researcher-defined. In this study, the data was elicited from the participant with a series of open-ended probing questions, and the participants shared their experiences. Consequently, the credibility comes out of the experience of the subject.

In qualitative research, the data is contextual, and multiple realities about the data exist because a subject belonging to a specific group represents that group. The data "fits"

the context in which it is studied, and the researcher, or other reader of the data, uses the context of the study and subjects to decide if the information fits similar situations. This study will make explicit the context of the data and the study so others can determine their own "fittingness."

Lincoln and Guba (1995) have identified that trustworthiness is how rigor is demonstrated in qualitative and quantitative studies. This model was developed because empirical researchers believed qualitative researchers lacked control over validity and reliability. This model was a way to demonstrate quality research using a framework specific to the event or situation under study. Morse and Field (1995) describe the model using the four aspects of trustworthiness: truth-value or credibility, applicability, consistency, and neutrality.

Truth-value or credibility in qualitative research refers to the reporting of the participant's information from her perspective. This approach takes into account the idea that there is more than one reality to be measured. Applicability refers to the ability of the findings to be applied in other contexts, settings, or groups. Consistency refers to the ability of the study or instrument to have similar results if it were replicated with similar participants. In qualitative research, emphasis on the uniqueness of the human experience and variation, as opposed to repetition, is expected to occur. Neutrality or confirmability is the attempt to minimize bias in the research procedure and results. One way this may be done in qualitative research is to attempt to identify the researcher's biases through consultation with other researchers.

The qualitative approach to the topic of journaling allows for a rich, contextual

account of how and why nursing instructors use journaling as an instructional tool. These accounts are the building blocks for practice implications and future research for using journaling as an instructional tool.

### **Ethics**

The research proposal for this thesis was submitted for ethical review to The University of British Columbia Behavioural Research Ethics Board for approval by the Behavioural Sciences Screening Committee. All conditions were met through the completion of the required ethics review submission. The informed consent is attached as appendix E.

## CHAPTER 4: PRESENTATION OF THE FINDINGS

This chapter presents the data collected from the participants. Each of the five participants is briefly described, as is the student or student groups and academic course in which journaling was used as an instructional tool. The four major emergent categories are 1) philosophical background, 2) rationale 3) structure, and 4) process, related to how journaling is used. Subcategories exist within each of the four areas and further expand on the major category.

### Participants

The five participants are employed by an Accredited School of Nursing with Baccalaureate, Master's and Doctoral Degree granting status, and have used journaling with upper level Baccalaureate Degree and Master's nursing students. The details of the students and the courses for each participant are as follows:

#### *Participant # 1*

Journaling is used with upper level and Master's students, although the interview primarily focuses on the use of journaling with the Master's students. The groups of students are about twelve to eighteen in size. The course is eight months long and divided into two sections. The first four-month term is "Teaching in Clinical Nursing," and the second four-month term is "Practicum in Education Processes in Nursing."

This instructor has used journaling for about five years and 1-3 times each year. She feels her experience has grown as she has used journaling, and primarily has learned and adapted her presentation of the assignment based on responses in the



journals and by the verbal and written feedback students have given her. She has a Master's Degree in Nursing and a Doctoral Degree in Adult Education.

*Participant #2*

This instructor has used journaling in two settings: one in which journaling was used with students in a clinical practicum in acute care nursing and one in which the students were working in a community placement. The students were all in their third year of a four-year degree program. This instructor has a Master's Degree in Nursing and has been teaching students in the clinical setting of pediatric nursing. Her experience with the use of journals has varied from having students take fieldnotes to using the more formal dialogue journal.

*Participant #3*

This instructor enabled students to develop a contract, negotiated with the instructor, for an independent study in an area of interest in nursing. The journal was negotiated with the instructor as part of the contract. The students discussed in the interview worked overseas in a developing country and the instructor was the "expert" for work in this area of interest. Students approached her or were directed to her by other instructors when the student identified an interest in completing an independent nursing project overseas. The student and the instructor worked together to develop the project. The instructor then performed a facilitation and guidance role to meet the student's needs in all aspects of working in a nursing role overseas. The number of students she supervised varied because the course is an independent, elective course in which the student approached her

to participate. She supervises about 2-6 students per year in this capacity.

*Participant #4*

This instructor used journaling in two different situations. She formally participated in a course in which journaling was used with third-year students of a four-year degree program, where half the students were in a community placement and the other half in a hospital setting. The two groups switched to the opposite placement halfway through the course. The second journaling experience was via e-mail with a student who was taking an elective course and teaching other students in a clinical placement area. This instructor was interested in learning more about journaling, has read some articles about journaling, and has talked to others about the topic. She hopes to use journaling again in the future and feels she has a lot more to learn to continually make the process work better for students. This instructor has a Master's Degree in Nursing.

*Participant #5*

This instructor used journaling involving both a clinical placement and community placement for the students in the third year of a four-year nursing program. When she began teaching in the course the journal assignment was already in existence and continued for one more year. This meant that she used journaling for two university terms. The journaling assignment was then removed from the course as a result of a discussion amongst all the instructors involved in the course. The decision to remove the assignment was based on a perception that the workload on the students was too much and that the journal assignment was

considered the least important.

### **Justifying Reflection**

Each of the participants was asked about the basis upon which they used journaling and reflection was the key concept for all instructors. One of the five participants discussed using journaling based in a Heideggarian philosophy, and explicitly expressed the faults of models based in reflection. In particular, she stated:

*My notion of reflection really is based somewhat in Heideggarian Philosophy and I must add, integration of contemplative and calculative thinking. So the same argument that I have with nursing that you cannot say that nursing is a science and an art--nursing just is. It is the same with reflective thinking, you cannot say that it's either that form, and then there is calculative thinking which is scientific thinking--you need both. So that's more my area. Many models including Dewey and Schon, many of these people they are very cognitively based models, there's no room for the affective in them and I think that's wrong because I think most of us are driven by our desires in life and wants and they don't account for those, and we don't acknowledge that and we miss the point. So, I look for a kind of holistic thinking and I look for that to develop as time goes on.*

The others based journaling in the concept of reflection as well, although they did not link reflection to any theoretical model or framework. One of the instructors described reflection in the following way:

*I think of R E F L E C T as in reflect, as in a mirror, as in looking back on the image from somewhere in the past, whether it's recent or distant and when one is reflective one is thoughtful; it isn't just remembering details to me, it's mulling over the experience, thinking about the impact, the importance, the feelings, the value--often with an evaluator influence inside. I missed that or I should have done that, or I missed that when I was talking to that person and I wasn't listening because she said this and my response was that, and my response was not helpful, so there is a valuable component there...I tried, I'm just learning and I know now what I can do better, and next time I will do better.*

All the instructors discussed using reflection as the basis for journaling and often

referred to the concept, one participant provided her thoughts on what reflection meant for her and how she defined it in relation to a particular philosophy. The other instructors had developed their own definitions of reflection based on personal interpretations. All instructors identified why they thought journaling was important and expressed reasons for the purpose of promoting reflection through the use of journal writing.

### **Why Journaling?**

Instructors were able to identify a number of reasons they felt journaling was an important instructional tool to allow for original thought, to promote reflection and learning, and to promote thinking by outside their usual boundaries of what they already know. One instructor stated that little original thought is allowed in writing papers. Another thought the actual writing of the words added depth to the learning experience because the student could then remember the details, reflect and respond to the events of the day. Yet another instructor thought she promoted thinking by stretching the students' boundaries by using articles in class to challenge the students. More details of these, and other examples, follow.

The instructor mentioned above, felt that too much emphasis was put on students to write academic papers that focused on getting the "right" source, date, author, citation, and answer to fulfil the requirement of the assignment, whereas journal writing provided an opportunity for the student to express original thoughts without having to have a reference to prove that someone else actually had the thought prior to the student. She felt not enough opportunity or permission was given to the students to provide their own thoughts:

*...we don't allow their [students] thoughts in papers--if you can't back it up, take it out because it's not--you don't have an original thought--you're not allowed to have an original thought because you're just not.... Only the people who do research have original thoughts--and that they're dated. So original thoughts are kind of taboo in a paper. Journaling allows for some original thought...we could try a little bit of saying that they had to connect in their papers situations with their own nursing care.*

This example reflects the instructor's thoughts about how the academic curriculum has been set up to deter students from expressing original thoughts and connects them to the nursing care they are giving.

The instructor can help uncover blind spots or access insights that might not otherwise surface. The instructor below identified how she was able to help the student "see from the outside":

*There might have been an element of the situation that the student hadn't quite seen, and when you are in the middle of it, of course, you know you don't always see as clearly as you see from the outside, so it was my window in what was happening, my vision of what that was and reflecting that to her and then asking, "What do you think?" It is sort of a read on what was happening.*

In addition to uncovering blind spots, the writing gives the student the opportunity to make meaning out of complex experiences and figure out what and how they might do things differently, and learn from it.

Often the journal was a record of events and reflection upon those events. Some journals students wrote contained a lot of personal information and expression of emotions related to experiences. Journaling offered an opportunity for students to feel supported or encouraged. If the journal is an ongoing dialogue, the instructor can acknowledge their feelings more immediately, but in the case of the overseas students, the

journal was the source of support, because the instructor did not read it until the students returned. The following comment reveals some of the emotional aspects of the students' overseas experience:

*They [students] will read excerpts from them because there's no other place that they would have recorded that kind of concise feeling or memory and, you know, it isn't all good, and they'll talk about how frustrating it was for a day or how sad it was--babies die and there seems to be such little value put on life. Some of them are very emotionally heart-tugging, heart-rending...It tunes them into a lot of the details of reality that they might not have remembered otherwise, or it makes them thoughtful about what they are recording; they have to reflect on what happened and how they responded during the day, how excited they were or how distraught or distressed they were.*

The students often would re-read journals after the experience and share them with friends and family, or use them to make presentations about experiencing nursing in a developing country. The journal served as a record of the event and an opportunity to express emotion at a time when friends and family were not there to support and encourage them. Although these are benefits to the students, and this thesis focuses on instructors, the instructor views these benefits as an important outcome of journal writing because the student perceives the activity as beneficial.

Two instructors talked about "stretching" the students or "pushing boundaries," and two examples illustrate how they tried to do this. The first example is a strategy used by one instructor in an attempt to stretch the students in a theory class, and although it is not directly related to journaling, she perceives that dialogue journaling can also assist students to stretch their thinking abilities by applying theory to practical situations. In this example, she identifies that more thinking needs to occur and will use the article as a tool

in enhance critical thinking:

*I begin class by giving them an article to read by an educational philosopher who teaches the philosophy of Kindergarten, and the article is about community inquiry; it's about kindergarten community and these students couldn't translate that into their own experience so I knew that we had some stretching to do; like they would talk about the children and the children's experience, and what they read in the article and about general education but they couldn't relate it to their own experience of community. So it means a lot of stretching on this ground.*

One student, journaling about her experiences in teaching undergraduate students, discussed her teaching difficulties with the instructor, who was then able to respond via journaling and help the student "push her boundaries" to use new strategies for teaching:

*I think what I saw was a student really trying to make meaning of the interactions that she had had with [undergraduate] students and trying to understand how the strategies that she used with this group of [undergraduate] students were effective or not effective. So I thought that what made it successful was her trying to explore the meaning, explore that understanding and also be confronted by some discomfort that she was having...she couldn't fall back on the same pathway...she [student] was having to push her boundaries out and there was some discomfort there, and as I said, I thought my read on it was that there was some rigidity that she was struggling with, discomfort around trying to push her boundaries a little bit, and when I could see that in fact some insight was happening around that, then I could see that there was a success, that she had reached some deeper level of understanding about herself and herself in that role of teaching...she was going from not seeing the group of students [undergraduate] not having much strength to realizing that they had strengths, but that they were just different from what she was really looking for and that was interesting.*

As this instructor saw the student open up and become less rigid, she knew that pushing the students' boundaries through e-mail dialogue journaling had been successful; and the student realized that she now saw strengths in the students she had not seen before, because what she *thought* were their strengths were different from their actual strengths.

### Structure of Journaling

The amount of structure associated with assigning journaling was variable. A number of components related to the structure were identified, and categories emerged to reflect these components. Six categories emerged here as relevant to the journal assignment by the instructor: 1) type of course, 2) journal format, 3) mandatory assignment, 4) evaluation, 5) criteria and guidelines, and 6) other specifics. (See Appendix A for a summary table of specifics for structure.)

#### *Type of Course*

Instructors assumed that clinical courses were more suited to journaling than theory courses because it was easier for the students to reflect on experiences that had human interaction than on theoretical knowledge that did not directly relate to the students' experience. One instructor had experience with journaling in both theory and clinical courses. The following is an example of how she saw journaling as more effective with clinical courses, or theory and clinical combined and less effective with theory courses:

*In the other course it did [journaling was useful in a theory course] a theory and practicum concurrently and they journalled, and it was wonderful because we just had nice dialogues, the entries were so practical. I think having people journal in theory courses is tricky, and sometimes all you get back is theory and not the experience.*

This instructor also stated that when the theory part of the course was a prerequisite to the clinical part of the course, journaling did not fit as well: "I don't think journaling fits, yes, I don't think the journaling fits."

Another instructor refers to a course in epidemiology as one in which she could



not imagine that journaling would be constructive, although the students' first clinical experience would be a wonderful opportunity for a journal. Another example given was a course on professional nursing in which the students could reflect and write on some of the ideas communicated in class in relation to the students' personal thoughts or observations. Further to this, she states, "I think it [journaling] would be particularly valuable if, of course, you could bring some more human interest into it [the journal] and have them spend the day with real live nurses and just see how it is in reality--that would make it more valuable."

Other instructors thought that both the community experience for the nurse and the acute care clinical experience were appropriate experiences for journal writing, although they expressed some difficulties in how they would be able to make it work, when they did not see the students much when they were in a community placement.

#### *Type of Journal*

All instructors used the journal as a dialogue journal in which the student could write and the instructor respond. In one case, where the student was overseas in a developing country, the dialogue, the expression of experiences, occurred between the student and the journal instead of between the student and the instructor. In addition, the number of journal entries, the length of journal entry, and the length of the instructor's response varied widely. Journal entries varied in number from five to possibly forty, depending on the criteria set out for the assignment and on the commitment of the student.

In a formal clinical course there may be five entries over ten weeks and either

short or long responses from the instructor. This occurred in four of the five situations in which the instructors were teaching. One of these four instructors used journaling in a clinical course as previously described, and in another case, used a one-to-one e-mail with a student teaching undergraduate students. In the case of the overseas students, journal entries may have been written every day, or every couple of days, for eight weeks, and the instructor would respond at the end of the entire journal entry, when the student returned home.

### *Mandatory Assignment*

Of the five instructors who participated in the study, four required mandatory journaling assignments. One instructor journalled with a student as part of an elective course, as well, and this was a negotiated non-mandatory activity. One instructor did not require mandatory journaling as part of the course, although she suggested journaling to the students, and negotiated how it was to be done; all students did complete journals as a requirement for the course. The instructor for this course gave the students a syllabus outlining all requirements, including the journal. The required reading included an article about maintaining and developing reflection through journaling, and each week the student was asked to answer several questions in the journal in response to reflecting on the experiences in the prior week. The activity was presented in the following manner:

*Record in your journal: What did you learn this week that was significant to your learning about clinical education? Why was it significant? What are the implications of this learning to your role as a clinical teacher?*

### *Evaluation*

Not surprisingly, how journaling was evaluated varied with the course and the

instructor: in three of the five courses, instructors marked journals with a pass or fail grade; one instructor stipulated a grade based on 25% of the total marks for the course; another instructor negotiated the grade percentage of the total marks with the student at the beginning of the course; and another assigned no grade to the student in the elective course who journalled by e-mail.

### *Criteria and Guidelines*

#### *Interview #1*

This instructor used journaling in two courses, "Practicum in Education Processes in Nursing," and "Teaching in Clinical Nursing." An overview of the first course is described in the syllabus as follows:

*Learning in this course involves a thoughtful stance of inquiry directed toward what students have previously known and experienced. It is an opportunity to identify personal knowledge, biases and values that directly or indirectly affect your view of the world and the experience of teaching/learning. The course provides an occasion to engage in reflective thought and analytic action in the planning, development, and evaluation of teaching/learning experiences. The practicum experiences involve the use of a dialogic journal, observations/interview of a chosen mentor, and implementation of specific aspects of clinical teaching, staff development, client teaching, and curriculum or program development under the supervision of a mentor.*

An overview of the second course is described as follows:

*This course is based on a model of clinical teaching in nursing education as represented by...The course will entail the teaching/learning strategies of seminar, mentorship, self-reflexive exercises, and discussion concerning the issues and their solutions in clinical nursing education. Clinical teaching in a variety of settings and with a variety of students will be explored. The practicum experience for this course consists of learning activities including a dialogical journal, observation/interview of a chosen mentor, and implementation of specific aspects of clinical teaching under the supervision of a mentor. The practicum experiences will take approximately three hours per week of the student's time.*

The grading system for these two courses was the same, and the following is a description of the preamble to journal writing and evaluation criteria.

*Journal writing, 25%. Students are required to submit bi-weekly reflections about their learning in a journal. This is an opportunity for one-to-one dialogue about what you are learning each week, the significance of that learning for you and the implications of this learning, for you, in your role as a nurse-educator. I will respond to each of your submissions. My questions and comments are thoughts that arise in me as I read your words. They are thoughts alongside your thoughts and not intended as criticisms. You will find that in responding I frequently ask questions. The purpose of my questions is to encourage you to further expand or deepen your ideas. You generally find one questions with an asterisk placed in front of it. It is to this question that I am asking you to respond in your next journal entry. Marks for the journal writing exercise will be allotted in the following manner:*

The description of the grading system summarizes the general expectations for the student. The grading ranged from 0 marks for less than two journal entries and little effort to critically reflect on learning, to full marks with 5 journal entries, submitted on time, and consistently demonstrating a reasonable effort to critically reflect on the issues of educational processes and student learning. The student must also always respond to the previous entry. (For full details see Appendix B.)

#### *Interview #2*

In the course offered by this instructor the students were expected to keep a notebook with information that would help the student in an office consultation with the instructor. The students were to come prepared to discuss articles, books, materials read, plans for the next couple of weeks, a brief statement about the experience, problems encountered, and questions for the community instructor. At the end of the experience the students were expected to use the written information over the term in their notebook and

address the following:

- 1) Based on your assessment of the school, and the children in the school as a whole, analyze the data collected and draw conclusions about:
  - the health related strengths of the children
  - the potential and or actual health problems of the children
  - the major ways the school addresses or might improve on how it addresses the goals of the health promotion and prevention of accidents/illnesses for the school as a whole.
- 2) Determine the way in which and how well the resource contributes to the promotion and protection of health and prevention of childhood accidents/illnesses in your developmental group of children and their families.
- 3) Discuss major strengths and shortcomings of your assigned community with regard to the health promotion, protection and prevention of childhood accidents/illnesses for your developmental group of children and their families.
- 4) List the skills you feel are most important to be a community health nurse. Do these differ from hospital nursing, if so, how?
- 5) What you learned about marketing and public relations.
- 6) The ways in which what you have learned during the experience relates to the hospitalization experience of children and their families.
- 7) Major areas of professional growth as a result of the community experience.

### *Interview #3*

In the course offered by this instructor each student was supervised and individually negotiated with. All students had the option of choosing to participate in journal writing, and though most did, it was not required. All aspects of the individual project were negotiated and contracted, and therefore, a standard syllabus or guidelines did not exist. The journal could be worth as much as the student and instructor contracted for. The instructor talked to the student about journal keeping in an informal way but did not give written criteria or additional information. The instructor graded the journal based on her own subjective marking criteria. This primarily was based on the student's ability to connect nursing experiences in another country to existing knowledge, or to reflect on questions or dilemmas the student encountered.

*Interview #4*

This instructor used an e-mail dialogue journal with a student due to the physical distance between where the student was teaching and the instructor was working. The journal started as a communication tool with which the two could discuss issues. As time went on it took on the shape of a more formal dialogue journal. There were no criteria or guidelines set up at the beginning of the interaction, so no formal written guidelines, syllabus, or course description were available. No evaluation or marks were assigned to this journal.

The second experience of this instructor with journaling had been a number of years ago, and her recollection of the experience was that students handed in journals twice over a 13-week university term, one at the mid-point and once at the end. The journals were marked subjectively out of 5 marks each time. The total mark for the journal was 10 marks out of 100 for the final grade in the course.

*Interview #5*

This instructor had used journaling several times over the last few years, and each time the criteria for the journal and the presentation of the assignment were different. The journal assignment was a pass or fail grade and no numerical marks were given. The journals were handed in periodically throughout the term, and the instructor would write brief notes back to the student.

*Notebook Type*

Some instructors commented on specifics, such as the type of notebook the entries were recorded in. One instructor commented that it did not matter, as long as it was not a

heavy binder-type book. One course outline specified it was necessary to hand in the journal in a coil type notebook. In addition to required notebook style, one of the five instructors wanted each entry to be handed in each time so she could read what was written before, and refer back to information if the student responded to her journal response.

### **Process of Journaling**

Instructors gave detailed and specific information around a number of issues. The presentation of how this information is categorized demonstrates some of the major themes emerging from the data. Although the data might be organized in a number of different ways, the categories flowed with the natural progression of questions in the interviews. And although the interviews were semi-structured, not all questions were exactly alike, and a strict interview format was not followed. My discussion of the findings will be organized from some of the concepts pulled from these categories so links can be seen between them, and provide the basis by which guidelines can be developed.

### *Instructor Education About Journaling*

All of the instructors had done some reading about journaling with nursing students. The level of interest in reading varied and most had read one or several articles. Several instructors commented that there was "very little good literature out there." Although not much discussion had occurred amongst instructors about journaling, all identified the same one instructor within the institution who had influenced them to use journaling. This particular instructor had written an article and introduced the concept of

journaling to the School of Nursing and into several courses. One instructor suggested that journal workshops were "stale," but did not elaborate on the workshops themselves. One instructor mentioned that she just "went with her gut" about the process and learned by experience. This approach to journaling is likely to be occurring as a result of the lack of information that is relevant and current to assist instructors in using a method of journaling that minimizes a trial and error approach.

### *Challenges to Journaling*

There are a number of issues that instructors perceived as barriers or shortcomings to the journaling process: heavy workload, level of reflection in student entries, difficulty in marking, criteria for marking and assigning, and the instructor's lack of knowledge about journaling itself. Instructors were explicit about the issues they perceived important, and provided examples. In addition to the workload on students, instructors commented that it took a significant amount of time and work to respond to the journals, such as one or more hours for a lengthy entry or many more hours for a journal that had been kept for eight weeks prior to the instructor reading the entries. Although the instructors were not directly asked about the specific amount of time spent on journal responses, many commented that response writing was time consuming and could take one or more hours. The journals of the overseas students that were not read and responded to until completion took the instructor "many, many hours."

### *Workload*

Instructors commented that students were often expected to journal in more than one course, and it was just one more thing to do after a long day in the clinical area. The



students would complain about the workload, and journaling was one more assignment in addition to all the others. One instructor said she thought journaling was "plunked in" by the teaching team for the course as an "extra" assignment. The following excerpt is from an interview in which the instructor thought it was not acceptable to have students journal at the end of a clinical day:

*Of course my favorite one is the teacher who says, "well I give them time in post conference to do it" and I think, oh yeah, journal and reflect on demand, it's like pee on demand! Not everyone can do it...you know I think the whole idea is you think about it a little bit, but here, sit down after you eight hour shift and you're good and tired and give it to me when you're done...before 3:30. I want it. It's ridiculous.*

In the interviews, all instructors expressed some dissatisfaction with one or more aspect of the journaling assignment, either because of it just being added as an extra piece of work for the student, as something that took too much time. The following is an example from one instructor who felt that the student's workload in the course was just too heavy, and it was the journal assignment that was chosen by the team as the assignment to eliminate:

*...the students were complaining about work, you know too many little assignments that they had to do--a communication assignment in this course where they had to tape a conversation with a client, they had to analyze, they had a major paper to do, they had a mid term exam and a final exam and this little journaling then and it was just like--ah--we'll throw the journal out...rather than take the time to rework it to see if we could build it in differently as a group, the group teaching the course decided that we could just toss it. So it really had a sad demise.*

Another instructor stated, "...the problem is like I said before, we plunk it in on top of everything else, say you have a paper--and this and that--oh, and do some journaling as well." It was as if journaling was the assignment that was either added as an

extra or dropped out when the workload on the students was perceived to be too much.

Not only did some instructors feel the workload was too heavy for the students, they acknowledged the amount of work required for them to review and respond to the journals and get them back to the students. One instructor stated she would spend the time it took to read the journal entry, think about what was written and respond with three typewritten, double-spaced pages per student entry. The overseas students had volumes of writing during an eight-week experience, and the instructor said she spent "hours and hours" reading the material and responding in a meaningful way.

#### *Level of Reflection*

The level of reflection instructors received from students was varied. The responses ranged from no reflection, which was referred to as "anecdotal notes," to a high level of reflection, as perceived by the instructor.

All instructors agreed that at some time in the journaling process students would give lists or examples of activities or tasks completed during the day. One instructor commented on this type of anecdotal note taking in the following way:

*You see, in the past I found that when you used journaling it didn't work because not every student wanted to write their thoughts, and what happened was they would go home and the next day you would get their journal or over the next few days you would get all that and it would be is, "I did this today, I did that today, this is what I did," and that wasn't the whole point. The whole point was it was supposed to be a reflective journaling in the thought process, that kind of thing. So I found the same thing with these students, a lot of them don't want to write everything that they do down, it just sort of becomes a little bit of a mish/mash of everything that they've done but it just...because it's easy, not because it's something that they want to do and they get a lot of benefit out of it.*

Another instructor stated that she believed students who thought journaling was

being used as an evaluation tool would "just tell them [instructors] everything then, that's my journal, but there wasn't any reflection within that."

### *Marking*

There were several issues mentioned related to marking journals, including that it took a lot of time and energy for what one instructor thought the students benefited from writing the journal. Some thought marking journals was difficult because it was a reflective dialogue, "If I have people doing reflective journaling that's something that I don't believe is markable, that's simply a dialogue between myself and someone that is aimed at uncovering an experience and the future meaning of the experience."

Another instructor commented that journaling was difficult to mark when criteria were not well determined.

*The students interpreted quantity versus quality, so if they wrote lots they thought they should get a good mark, and if they didn't have very much to write, they then wanted us to mark it based on the quality, so it was a no-win situation because we hadn't set up really good criteria for how to do that--it was sort of a disaster at large.*

One instructor commented that as long as the student met the pre-determined criteria, the journals were not difficult to mark; she felt she was an empathetic marker and had never had a student complain about the grade. Another instructor marked according to well-defined criteria and found that although she was strict about the structure, the actual process of responding to the student and resisting structure was important and beneficial to building relationships with students.

Two instructors who participated in this study were in a situation in which they

each worked with another instructor who was not a participant in this study. In each of these situations some journals were marked by one instructor and the rest by the other instructor. The students were aware of two different instructors were marking the journals and compared marks with one another. This resulted in the students vocalizing dissatisfaction with their grades. In both of these cases the journal assignment was worth 10% of the final grade and the journal was handed in twice for a mark out of five. Most students received scores of four and five each time, and yet the students continued to voice unhappiness about the grades.

### *Criteria*

Instructors who had less positive experiences with journaling stated that the criteria set up for the process were inadequate. One instructor stated, "we hadn't formalized anything about the process and it just kind of happened. We had not built in marking criteria so that we could sort of do an evaluation of the process, and so I felt that in some ways as though there was more feedback going from me to her and not so much coming back." This participant was using an example in which she and the student were e-mailing, which started out as a means to communicate, and evolved into a dialogue journal process. The instructor felt that if criteria had been established prior to the process, there would have been a clearer understanding on behalf of both the instructor and the student about what was expected from one another.

Another instructor said that although there were criteria for writing the journal, it was not well integrated into the course, and marking students was difficult because in this course the grade was either a pass or fail, and she would be hard pressed to fail a journal.

Instructors who had clear, set criteria for the process found that marking the journal was easier because criteria were set up prior to the student beginning the journal.

### *Instructors Lack of Knowledge*

Earlier in the chapter, examples of what instructors were taught or learned about journaling was discussed. One instructor said, "I think there's a lack of knowledge and I think there's a lack of experience." Other instructors talked about just going from the "gut," and yet others wanting to read literature were unable to find "good literature out there." Generally, instructors stated a lack of information about how best to assign and use journaling.

### *What Makes Journaling Work?*

Most of the reasons instructors gave for journaling being successful were related to developing a trusting relationship with the student, which are illustrated here with extracts from the interviews. Other factors included preparing the learner for the activity and learner maturity.

When one instructor was asked about what works in helping students respond to journaling she said,

*It's a trust issue. Um, I find that with master's students, that sometimes the initial journal entries are extremely tentative and superficial, and they try to give you critical theory rather than critical thought, and what I do is I show my own experiences and I make sure something from that literature that I give out and talk about that a little and give it back to them. I think what they need to learn to do is to trust you before they can share, and I think it's the same thing with undergrads.*

In this example there is an element of how the instructor builds trust through

sharing her own experiences and responding with literature and her own thoughts.

Another instructor gave the following example about how important she saw trust in the use of journals:

*Trust and rapport is exceedingly important in that students need to trust the faculty a lot. The faculty members are to honor their confidences and will not be hurtful in comments, will be constructive, will be accepting but not necessarily say that everything is okay, and not say things that will damage self esteem, so trust is, I think, is very important.*

To further demonstrate the emphasis instructors put on trust as an important issue, a third example clarifies the issue of confidentiality:

*A journal to me is a two way process, at least in the way that I've seen it used and I think that I want to be using it, and so it would need to be clear that it is a dialogue; we are going back and forth and we need to feel safe in being able to do that, and so I think there needs to be a bit of discussion about that, how much you can disclose with it and still be safe. It is confidential maybe between two people, and that it's not for other eyes and so that hopefully there's a relationship built up with the individual before the journaling even starts such that journaling fits within the trusting relationship that you have.*

Instructors do trust and relationship building in a number of ways with the students. Some engage themselves and their personal experiences into the responses, some ask questions, some make meaningful connections using carefully chosen "stickers," and others acknowledge emotions expressed by the students. These are some specific examples of ways participants promote trust and relationship. The instructor quoted above originally used stickers as a way to keep track of student entries, but found that through using stickers she could also build a relationship with students by connecting with them and using the stickers as a "way in" to get the students involved:

*I put stickers on students' journals and I started it years ago as a technique for*

*knowing when the last journal entry was. It's my way of keeping track because I thought there was something funny going on with a couple of people, so it was my way of keeping track--my sticker I know I read to this point. They caught on and I just do it. I put stickers on because people often respond to my stickers, so I get pictures or other stickers, I get cartoons a lot, or poems, people write poetry, lots of people cut cartoons out of the newspaper and I get those a lot. I thought this was funny, I think you will like to read them too. Lots of poetry, lots of poetry. Cartoons I try to find...I use stickers and I try to make them meaningful.*

So what began as a technique to keep track of journal entries for this instructor, became a method of connecting with the students in a unique fashion that turned out to be meaningful and worthwhile. The activity became purposeful for the instructor as a way to develop a closer relationship with the student, find out what interested them, and promote thinking through another mode than just comments or question asking. Innovative ideas are often created accidentally or as a side benefit of the intentional use of the activity.

Appreciating the student's honesty and openness in sharing through journal writing is clearly illustrated in the following quote:

*I really appreciate it when the students share, and I appreciate their honesty. Especially the students who are putting down their front, and I appreciate their honesty and what they're saying, and I make sure that they know that.*

Not only is the instructor appreciating the honesty and effort of the student, she is identifying that an important part of building rapport and relationships is also acknowledging the student's contributions. When asked about the importance of relationship building the reply was, "I think that's what it's all about."

Most instructors engaged the students by asking them questions, making comments, and acknowledging the students' feelings. The questions were to promote thinking on a particular area of interest, and the instructor may ask the student to respond

to a question in the next journal entry. All instructors thought responding to journals with questions helped engage the student in the journal process and assisted reflection.

One instructor commented several times on the importance of acknowledging the emotional aspect of the journal entries. The students working with this instructor worked overseas and used the journal as dialogue with themselves. In addition, the working environment was foreign and the culture different from the students' prior experiences. The instructor was only able to acknowledge the experience after the student had returned and submitted the completed journal. This prevented the instructor from giving feedback that may have helped the student to reflect deeper during the experience itself. Feedback after the journal is completed may be helpful for the student to look back and determine what she might have done differently, but does not help the student to reflect during the experience and perhaps take a new course of action in a situation with which she is struggling. Ongoing feedback during the experience may lead the student to deeper understanding and assist them in choosing a different course of action, which would encourage further learning, reflection, and possibly better nursing care for those she is caring for.

Another instructor journaling with a student struggling with a difficult clinical teaching situation also talked about addressing the emotional aspect of the writing and asking questions to promote reflection:

*I think I was trying to reach something that was more an exploration of how she was feeling about her experiences rather than me commenting on, oh, that was a good thing to have said or that looked like that was a good approach in that particular case. I think I still did some of that as time went along but it was more that I was reflecting on her reflection and then I think coming back to her with*



*questions or a way that would encourage her to think more about something, would take it a little further, explore it a bit more fully.*

*I was also trying to help her see that there was a wider range of strategies to use, and so it was sort of opening up for her. Some of my questions/comments were attempting to say there are some other ways to think about this, that it's not just this way or the highway, but rather it might be this or this or this way, so you might have a bouquet of different strategies as compared to maybe just one or two that were tried through once.*

These were two situations in which the instructors find negotiation of the criteria and guidelines as important. One instructor negotiates a contract with every student, and criteria are developed together so each has an understanding of the expectations prior to the experience. The other instructor stated that negotiation of the expectations is required prior to the experience, and when this did not happen, as in one experience, the journaling experience was, in her opinion, less than satisfactory.

There are a number of other aspects instructors stated as important to the process. It was a consensus that it worked better for smaller groups of students, that it was important to prepare the students for the experience, and that greater learner maturity helped the process go well. The following example illustrates how this instructor believed that a positive attitude toward the process was necessary:

*I think we all have to agree and be positive when we're talking to people that have to do it [journaling]; if you go in and you tell them - well, you have to do journaling because that's what somebody decided. We all have to seek value - what are you getting out of this? Are we making work? If we think that it has some real value we have to make sure that the students understand; otherwise, they are not going to bother.*

All instructors had a number of strategies and ideas about what they thought

promoted the process of journaling with nursing students. The primary focus was on building trusting relationships through a variety of ways, including such things as engaging the student in a dialogue, asking questions, and offering information about one's own reflections.

*What Would Instructors Do Differently?*

One instructor thought the process worked very well and would do nothing to change how journaling was done in her course. Another instructor also would not change the way in which she did journaling but did want to learn more about the process.

The other instructors talked about the necessity of journaling being an integral part of a course and a required part of the curriculum. The following are excerpts from two separate interviews:

*I think it [journaling] would work in any situation providing that it's clearly defined and purposes set and there are some clear expectation-makes a lot more sense to me that it be built into the students' experience right from the very beginning. What's happened, I think, in the current curriculum is that it's done piece meal. It's just kind of popped in there when someone thinks it's a good idea or a favorite tool of a particular faculty member or a group of faculty members, and so the students get exposed to it hit and miss and it doesn't become something that is actually really a tool of professional practice, the reflection part of it anyways, and so I think if it's built in from the very beginning of a program and then it's just something that you do and there's common understanding of why you're doing it, common mechanism for how, but it's something that students could come to expect as part of what they do.*

*It would be interesting to see if it was possible to have it integrated into the curriculum such that it was a standard event. I would like to take a look over a long period of time to see what has happened with it.*

Although these excerpts are lengthy and explicit, they reflect a need for journaling to

become more formalized in the nursing curriculum. This need for integration is consistent with comments made by instructors in their interviews. The next example illustrates how one instructor describes the successful integration of journaling into a course:

*When they were working with their family they kept all of their thoughts and they wrote them all down and we would talk, and we would meet and they would still have them written--that in the end when they put everything together about their family--the family that they were visiting, it was quite meaningful to them and that was part of the course. It was--I can't remember if the mark was a pass or fail; actually, I think there were marks to it and they had to put in the literature at the end, you know, to sort of justify their thoughts and their feelings about how things had gone in their role. That makes better sense to them; that was part of the course that was important to do. I once had a 100 page one about all of the things that she had done and her thoughts and what her analysis was in relation to all of it and it was wonderful and she threw in literature and it was part of the course. Not something we threw on top of them and said, do this, that's your paper and the mid term and an assessment. It becomes a part of the course and it's made just as important as the rest of the class and it's valued--it all comes together and it has meaning.*

In addition, one instructor commented that all instructors needed to be "on the same page,":

*I would like to think that we had common expectations with consensus around expectation with what we would want to get out of it and to view how we're going to get there. ...I think I would want to make sure that we were on the same page about what journaling is so maybe come to some common definition of it or something that would, say, okay the purpose, what it is and then how are we going to achieve that and from what my expectations would be around the profession should be moving towards meaning, reflecting on the action and how that may take one in the future towards future actions, so we would be integrating what one knows to what one learns through the personal experience of whatever's happening in the journal.*

The common ground amongst the instructors was that they believe journaling needed to be valued, integrated into the curriculum at the beginning of a program, integrated into

the course as an assignment, and not as an additional assignment. In this way, the students would see the importance and notice the value because it was not only seen as valued by the instructor but also valued by the program.

Three of the instructors thought it would be beneficial to have smaller groups of students when using journaling. A group of thirty students to journal with was perceived as almost impossible, and that perhaps groups of four or five students may be more appropriate. Smaller numbers were perceived to help the instructors get to know the students better and develop a relationship.

One instructor also stated that she would like to see ways of promoting reflection used in addition to using journaling. Her suggestions were to have students use tape recorders to record the reflections, as this would save time for the student. Another method she suggested was to have one-to-one dialogues with the students so that responses were more immediate and so that some issues that needed more timely resolution would happen without delay.

#### *Instructor Benefits*

Four of the five instructors felt that they had benefited from the process of journaling with students. They expressed positive results in the level of reflection and thinking, the ability to clear the mind, an increasing understanding, an appreciation of the student's experience, an opportunity to learn from the student and a validation of their own experiences. Following are several participant comments about what was important for them in journaling:

*You could have a course go really badly, but if you are journaling, the course*

*would be great. I think it's because it allows for the development of the intimate, the one-to-one and it allows for sharing, and lets people put their thoughts out, and once they trust you to put their thoughts out then you can simply respond.*

*I've gotten better with interpreting and at critical thinking, myself, so I am much more knowledgeable than I was, and willing to write intimate things; and I think to some extent I've gotten better at asking questions.*

*For me of course the value is, well for one thing it is proof that they have done what they've done. It's very enlightening, I mean I've learned a lot from the journal. I really can keep tabs on how things are progressing in various parts of the world, and it helps me to appreciate the hardships that the students have been through, and to appreciate the assertiveness that they have demonstrated, their endurance, their hardiness, their risk taking.*

*It is such fascinating material that I also make notes and I make pages of notes from their journals. Whether I will ever use it or not, I'll never know. I have written an article that is being reviewed for publication, which has excerpted some student stuff.*

*So it [journaling] was sort of a personal interest. And something that I felt was part of my own growth and learning was to find out more about it and I think I discovered while I was doing that, that although I don't journal regularly myself I think I do a lot of reflection of my own practice and my own activities so it kind of fit. It was like validating something that I was already doing although I didn't put it down on paper and that, okay, well I do that. Do that process of sort of thinking about, making meaning of, trying to see where I can grow from that and take it and use it somewhere else.*

Instructors were able to identify that the journaling experience was not only positive for the students, but the instructors were able to benefit as well. Most instructors found that responding to the student's entries forced them to engage in a reflective process, and as a result learned through the experiences of the students. The interactions with the students were thought provoking and helped the instructor gain insight into the student's learning. The instructors own learning increased as they responded to the student and reflected on the students' and their own knowledge. The journal served as a co-

learning opportunity for both the student and the instructor.

### **Summary**

This chapter describes the predominant findings from the five interviews with nursing instructors who use journaling with nursing students. Philosophy, rationale, structure, and process categories served to organize the data. These findings will be discussed in the following chapter, in conjunction with relevant journaling literature.



## CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS

This chapter will discuss the findings from the previous chapter in relation to the existing literature about nursing instructors using journaling with nursing students. The categories of findings will be discussed in a similar order to the previous chapter.

### **Justifying Reflection**

Only one of the participants expressed that journaling was based on a specific philosophy. This instructor identified the Heideggarian philosophy as her foundation, although she did not discuss the nature of the philosophy and how she saw it connected to journaling. No current literature identified this philosophy as one used by others. This instructor did express some of her beliefs which included the following: students should not be boxed in learning style types, strict rules for journaling were not appropriate, and that even having a course syllabus was constraining. It is possible that instructors may base journaling on this philosophy, although it was not explicit in the literature.

All instructors talked about reflection as the basis for using journaling as an instructional tool. The literature did not explicitly state that instructors were asked about which theory they based journaling on, but many articles identified "reflection" as a reason or foundational concept. A number of articles including those written by Burrows (1995), Durgahee (1996), and Tryssenaar (1994) refer to Schon's model of reflection as a way of thinking about journaling. Atkins (1993) and Wong (1995) also refer to Mezirow's levels of reflection as important to journaling. The data collected shows limited emphasis on theoretical models for reflection. Instructors all stated reflection was the purpose for using journals, and yet did not identify with any one, or part, of any particular model



when asked if either a theoretical framework or model was used as a basis for journaling.

Given the lack of information about the role of any particular model in journaling, it is difficult to make strong links between models, reflection, journaling and outcomes. It is not evident in this study or in the literature why instructors have not adopted a model. I believe this may include some of the following possibilities: lack of knowledge about the existence of models; limited knowledge of a model; inadequate models for the purpose of the exercise; or a lack of interest or time on behalf of instructors to find out what models exist.

The concept of reflection is primary both within this study and within the literature. It is upon this concept that all journaling is based. Whether or not reflection is the only concept or most appropriate one, it is in this frame all of the instructors function. In addition, even if instructors were to base their work on a reflective model, it may not be correct to assume the model does what it claims, or is appropriate for the situation. This does not negate journaling as a beneficial tool, because there is much evidence here and in the literature to illustrate benefits both to the instructors and to the students. The concept of reflection provides an opportunity for instructors to think about why and how they do what they do when using journaling and provides the overall purpose when assigning journaling to students.

Whether journaling is based on a particular philosophy, a model of reflection, or the concept of reflection itself, it is evident that more research and work needs to be done to build stronger links between the foundational concepts of journaling and the activity itself. I find it difficult to conceive that so much of the literature and work done related to

journaling has consistently fallen short of building these links. There is relatively little information available in the literature, few research articles written, and limited discussion among colleagues was reported in this study, and yet journaling is used as an accepted practice to enhance reflection with nursing students.

Journaling will become a more successful tool in developing reflection with nursing students if action is taken to increase the knowledge and expertise of those working in this area. Some ways that may help to broaden and encourage the growth and success of journaling are to develop a wider held philosophical belief about the benefits of journaling, develop models about the concept of reflection, and develop strategies to increase the interest and motivations of instructors and researchers to use journaling.

### **Why Journal?**

Participants did not ask for formal written feedback from students about the benefits of journaling, but did articulate how they thought students benefited through student journal responses and verbal feedback. Some students stated they disliked the process, although this negativity has not been reflected in the literature; primarily the positive benefits are highlighted. The instructors in this study identified a number of ways in which students were perceived to benefit from using journals: to promote thinking, learning, and insight; as an opportunity to express original thought and emotion; to stretch the student's abilities; and to explore meaning to reach understanding.

Mezirow (1990) states that journaling fosters reflection, reflection creates meaning for the individual, and meaning then becomes transformative learning. Hodges (1996) suggests that through journal-writing exercises, learners can move from receivers

of knowledge to creators of knowledge. Kobert (1995) states that traumatic experiences can be seen in a new light, and the emotional stress attached to the event released through writing. She also states that nurses and students need to strive to find their voice to discover meaning, and journaling provides the opportunity to develop a sense of self. In addition, Paterson (1995) states that writing is an opportunity for a student to record a distressing event and have the instructor respond to the situation to provide clarification, assurance or support.

The findings of the study are consistent with the literature. There is agreement that significant benefits to the learner are perceived to occur. Although some instructors in the study were in journaling situations that had less positive outcomes, they still believed that journaling had benefits for the student, as described in the literature. These instructors identified ways journaling could be improved to be more positive, and expressed a desire in wanting it to work better the next time.

Instructors in the study based the success of the journaling assignment primarily on subjective criteria, such as the student saying the journaling process was a positive one, or subjectively "quantified" an informal measurement that provided them with enough structure to justify the measure of the journal's success. This informal measurement was usually an internal process of thinking about whether or not the journal showed some degree of reflection based on their own definition. Students have been left out of most studies, although some anecdotal notes about what students have said about journaling are used in articles written by instructors.

This study does not address students' perceptions about the benefits of journaling,

even though the instructors interviewed say they believe the students benefit from the process. If more attention were given to studying the students' perceptions, a more complete picture of the journaling process could provide instructors with a greater understanding of how journaling could be used more effectively as an instructional tool.

Overall, instructors in this study and those in the literature agree that journaling is a useful technique for enhancing reflection for students for a number of reasons, and yet much work needs to be done to make the process more effective. Developing evaluation processes for journaling and studying the students' perceived benefits are two ways in which a researcher could gather further information to assist in filling the gap between what is known and what needs to be known to develop journaling more fully as an effective instructional tool.

### **Structure of Journaling**

This major section addresses some of the structural components related to journaling, including the following: types of courses in which journaling is used; the type of journal used by the instructors; whether or not the journal is mandatory; how evaluation occurs; and the criteria and guidelines set out for the assignment. Each section will be discussed in relation to the relevant literature.

#### *Type of Course*

The instructors in the study identified the courses considered appropriate or inappropriate for journaling. Instructors thought journaling was difficult to use in theory courses because students would write about theory as opposed to reflecting on how theory connected to practice or the human experience of oneself or others. There was consensus

that the event or course in which the student was writing required a human element for it to be meaningful.

One instructor used journaling in a theory course in which there was no clinical component. She found that students would often write a lot of theory into the journal but not connect it to anything practical in life or demonstrate that the theory had any applicable meaning. Through questioning and comments she was able to help the students use the theory in a more reflective practical way as the course progressed. Other instructors found that even in the clinical courses, students sometimes would just give theory, but if they were questioned about how it connected to the clinical setting the students were often able to make these connections. Perhaps instructors, knowing how often students write about theory in journals, assumed theory courses would be less suitable for reflective journaling, where it was easier for students to make the connections between theory and clinical application through reflection.

The literature does not differentiate between types of courses or experiences, nor are there specific references to any research in this area. All of the literature discusses journaling within the context of clinical nursing experiences involving the human factor expressed in this study. The literature and this study concur that journaling generally works well with students in a clinical or human interaction experience, and it is not known if journaling has been widely used in more theoretically based courses. The importance of the context of the course is also not known, and the information presented here relates almost exclusively to clinically based courses.

Instructors indicated that courses in which the students wrote about experiences in

relation to people or included a "human experience element," were the most appropriate for journaling. They also indicated that other courses could also be considered appropriate. Theory courses not connected in an experiential way to the material are often based on abstract concepts and ideas. To study these in isolation from the real world of nursing encourages the meaningless perpetuation of disconnection. Journaling may serve as an important tool in bridging the gap between theoretical knowledge and clinical practice. Using the written word to organize and express ideas can act as a catalyst in connecting ideas to one another, and knowledge can be developed and created.

Instructors have a role and responsibility to ensure that theory and clinical are connected, and if journaling is to be used as a technique to bridge the gap, their involvement in finding strategies to make that happen are critical. As mentioned earlier, one instructor found that she could help students become more reflective, even in theoretical courses, by using questions and comments on the journals to encourage reflection. I believe that a key component to successful journaling are thoughtful and strategic methods employed by the instructor to help students succeed at journaling.

If journaling is used as a technique for reflection, and if the purpose is to increase knowledge and understanding of nursing practice, journaling can work in a theory-based course. I would be suspicious of a course that cannot be somehow connected to clinical practice. A theory course with no relevance to practice does not enhance knowledge or provide new opportunities for learning, but journaling about the ideas and concepts in a theory course can assist in making relevant sometimes seemingly meaningless material.

### *Type of Journal*

All instructors in the study described the type of journal they used with students as a dialogue journal. One instructor considered the interaction between the student and the journaling process itself as a form of dialogue, and therefore considered this style of journaling as a dialogue, even though she only read the student's completed journal at the end of the assignment. There is nothing in the literature describing this type of journaling. Carswell (1988), Paterson (1995), and Shuy (1987) view the journal as a dialogue or conversation between the instructor and the learner. Peyton and Seyoum (1989) describe the teacher and learner as co-participants in the process.

Roe and Stallman (1994) conducted a study comparing dialogue journals and response journals in a graduate class for literacy educators. The dialogue journals were handed in weekly and the instructor wrote reflective notes about the journal entry. The response journals were read only at the end of all the completed entries, which was a total of five for each group. The results reported by the researchers indicated that the students not only preferred the dialogue journal type, but also were more successful at developing an understanding of the role of the teacher and the context in where teaching occurs. There were no significant differences for the learning of course content or spending more time with course ideas. The overall satisfaction of the activity favored the dialogue journal and was perceived as more helpful and interesting by the students. The instructors found the most learning seemed to occur with the dialogue journal as well.

There is agreement among the participants in this study and the literature as a whole that journals are in essence a dialogue between the instructor and the learner. In

particular, the two types of journals most often described are interactive and dialogue journals, although Roe and Stallman (1994) also described the response type journal. Interactive journals are question and answer type journals in which the student and instructor answer questions posed by one another. The instructor may actually give the initial questions to the student prior to the first journal entry. Dialogue journals may incorporate this interactive technique in addition to comments or other types of feedback, such as cartoons or information. The response journal, in fact, was used by one instructor in the participant group where the students overseas wrote a journal over a period of eight weeks and the instructor read the journal at the end.

Given the relatively small body of literature about journaling in nursing it is not surprising that other types of journals in addition to interactive and dialogue journals, have not been discussed. A study conducted using response and dialogue journals is a rare find because it is a comparative study of two particular types of journal writing. The study does indicate that although more research is necessary to confirm results, it does give instructors some direction in how to assign journal-writing assignments. The importance of the instructor being involved in the process in a participatory way was clearly important to the students, and the trust relationship between them was critical in building an environment in which students felt comfortable writing.

Dialogue journals are viewed as a method that encourages reflection and learning to occur in many student groups across both the undergraduate and graduate level. Perhaps in the future, as journaling becomes more evolved as a process, other types of journals will become more commonplace and meet the needs of individual instructors and



students alike. Continued study about a variety of types of journals in a variety of learning environments will help to develop strategies to maximize the learning experience, by outlining the activity in a manner that best suits the purpose and goals of the course. Clearly, the students as recipients and contributors of journal writing need to be involved in the research to develop a greater understanding of how the relationship between the instructor and the learner contributes to the success of journaling.

#### *Mandatory Assignment*

Of the participants interviewed, most of the instructors used journaling in a course in which it was a requirement. Only one instructor gave the students the option of choosing journaling as part of the overall course requirement, and negotiated the details with them individually. Although journaling was an option, every student in this course chose to journal as part of the course requirement. Each instructor has some authority about whether or not journaling could be mandatory or not. In some cases where the course had several instructors the team would decide on the assignments as a group. If it was an individual instructor teaching a course then the decision was up to them. The institution as a whole did not have a standard to make journaling mandatory in any class. If the assignment was used in the course then it was considered "mandatory" for that particular course. Students did not generally have the opportunity to choose whether or not they would like to do journaling. The one independent study course allowed journaling to be an option for an assignment.

The instructors in this study believed journaling would be more successful if it was a part of the curriculum from the beginning of the nursing program. It is not

necessary to be in every course, but should be a part of the course as a valid assignment, and not one just added to the existing workload. Introducing journaling into every clinical or theory course may lead to boredom from repetition and as a result, reflectivity may decrease. Reflectivity is the premise upon which journaling is based and if reflectivity is not happening the benefits are decreased.

Not only does the individual instructor need to plan for the introduction of the journal assignment, but she should also be a part of a team working with colleagues in planning the overall curriculum for the entire school of nursing. Careful and appropriate planning is necessary to prevent repetitive journaling occurring as a result of using the technique in too many courses. Curriculum planners need to consider the importance of integrating journaling into the program for maximum benefit for students and instructors.

I believe that finding a balance between structuring some journaling opportunities into a curriculum or program, and giving students options for choosing journaling as an assignment, is critical to its success in any academic institution. On one hand, offering enough structure and support for the process, and on the other giving students opportunities to choose, could be done in a number of ways, depending on the institution, and the commitment to, and valuing of, journaling as a learning tool. Perhaps a "mandatory" introductory course about the purpose, goals, and benefits of journaling, with some opportunity to practice in the initial stages of entering a nursing program would lay the foundation for the process and demonstrate the value placed on the importance of the process.

Once students have used journaling to become more reflective learners, they could

be given more opportunity to choose journaling as an option, or perhaps choose other assignments if journaling was not the method by which they felt they could learn the most. Offering journaling as a choice before the student has experienced the benefits of reflection on practice may result in few students using the technique to improve their thinking and practice. Encouragement and support balanced with choice and opportunity gives students control over their own learning. Although this study has a primary focus on how instructors use journaling, it is important to remember that it is the students who are the primary focus for learning, and instructors have a responsibility to give them the best opportunity possible.

### *Evaluation*

The participants in this study evaluated the journal in a number of different ways. They ranged from a pass/fail grade, to a percentage grade that was either pre-determined by the instructor or negotiated at the beginning of the process. In one instance no grade at all was attached to the journal. The decision on whether or not to evaluate or assign a grade to a journal and how that might be done appears to be one of the most contentious issues in the literature. The arguments are numerous for and against a number of evaluation methods. Paterson (1995) describes four methods in which grades may be used to maximize the student's willingness to participate and reflect. Such suggestions include the following: only a pass/fail grade; a weekly journal handed in for no marks, but a completed paper for marks at the end; marks for only completeness and effort; or deducting marks from a total only if the journal is not handed in.

There are concerns with each suggestion. Carswell (1988) states that it is difficult

to assign a grade to someone's opinion; and yet, if no grades are assigned, does this tell the student that it is not an important activity? If it is not an important activity, will the students put in only enough effort to meet the requirement? As Paterson (1995) states, the issue remains unresolved. I believe that when issues are unresolved it is often related to a lack of knowledge about the "best way" to resolve the dilemma. This does not mean one might be right and another wrong, just that little information is available and a decision is difficult to make when the matter comes down to personal philosophy or preference. Each situation may require a different approach depending on a number of variables that may include the learners needs and expectations, the instructors expectations, purpose and goals, the relationship between the learner and instructor, the opportunity for negotiation, and the constraints of the course or institution.

Given that each evaluation may need to be individualized to a student or a group of students, any combination of the methods mentioned here may provide more guidance for the instructor and choices for the learner. Another method of evaluation, which has not been discussed, is self-evaluation. Self-evaluation by the student may provide an opportunity for students to set goals and measure their own progress towards them. It could promote reflective thinking about the process itself and help the student more clearly articulate how their ideas connect to other knowledge and how they have grown or changed in their thinking or practice. This self-evaluation also gives the student a participatory role and may reduce defensiveness about a mark being given to them about "their own thoughts and feelings" by someone "judging" them.

The decision about the evaluation process requires much thought on behalf of the

instructor, and negotiating with the students might be helpful in coming to an agreement that creates a win/win situation for all involved. Individualizing assignments requires a lot of time and effort, not to mention patience, although the long term result may be more satisfactory for both the instructor and the learner because partnership and collaboration increase the success of the learning activity.

The difficulty and diversity in evaluating journals is currently unresolved and evident within this study and within the literature. It is not one that is likely to be resolved easily or quickly, because this problem exists in learning situations where the instructor was, or is, the authority, and this style of teaching has been in existence prior to the move towards more collaborative and co-learning relationships between the learner and the instructor. Due to the diverse teaching and learning philosophies and styles, it will be difficult to find any one method of evaluation to satisfy all involved. Keeping this in mind is one of the first steps to finding creative solutions to challenging issues, such as the one of evaluation.

### *Criteria and Guidelines*

The instructors interviewed for this study offered varying amounts of information in this area. One instructor gave detailed criteria about what was expected and how the journals would be graded. This instructor expressed the most positive experience with students and suggested that preparing students for learning is helpful. In the other formal courses, instructors gave a one-page sheet with limited guidelines about what the student was to do. Three of the five instructors were unable to provide a copy of the written documents that were given to students when journaling was assigned. Two instructors did

not have written guidelines for journaling and the guidelines for the other course were not kept when the journaling assignment was removed from the course. One instructor, who did not have guidelines for the course, had the students develop a learning contract each time for the journaling assignment and the other had used journaling in impromptu situations. The latter instructor stated that if she were to use journaling again with students she would have written expectations developed prior to the start of the assignment. The instructors who gave the students less preparation expressed a need to have clearer expectations written and offered to the students.

Hahneman (1986) stated that it was important for students to have guidelines and criteria but was not specific about the details for how they were given or addressed with the students. Paterson (1995) not only provided a two hour workshop and introductory session to the students about journaling, she gave them written guidelines to define the purpose and outline expectations for journal writing. Providing information for the students and making expectations clear are important for all assignments and work experiences that students have. Even though instructors saw a need to prepare students, it was at times done poorly. This may be due to the limited amount of information for strategically planning for successful journaling, time involved, workload, lack of expertise with criteria and guideline development, or perhaps placing less importance on the value of guidelines.

In my experience as an educator, working primarily with Diploma or Baccalaureate Degree adult learners, I have found that students prefer to know what is expected of them and to have input into the process of deciding these expectations.

Sometimes, by providing a rationale for particular decisions, it is more clearly understood why a situation has certain qualities that have little or no negotiation potential and others that are totally open for change. Information and explanation have proven critical components in developing relationships in which learning can be maximized. This philosophy can be applied to situations in which there is a more formal role in which the instructor structures a course and provides guidelines and criteria for expectations and evaluation. Some learners require more direction than others, and tailoring this can provide each learner a starting point with provision to grow into more independence.

### **Process of Journaling**

This major section will discuss the literature in relation to the challenges faced by instructors: what instructors identified as strategies to make journaling work, what instructors would do differently, and how instructors benefited personally from journaling.

### *Challenges to Journaling*

Instructors in the study outlined a number of challenges to journaling, including lack of education for instructors, workload, for both the student and the instructor, level of reflection, marking, and criteria. These are the primary challenges that need to be overcome to maximize the success of journaling in a nursing program.

### *Instructor Education for Journaling*

All of the instructors in this study had read some information about journaling, although the reading was limited to one or two articles. Instructors talked to one or two others about journaling, and there was one instructor whom they considered a resource for

journaling within the institution. Several instructors had heard a workshop had been offered at the university, although they had not attended it. The nursing instructors believed journaling would be more successful if more information was available about the topic.

The literature does not address how instructors learn about journaling, and the reasons for this are currently unknown. It is not surprising; then, to find that in some situations journaling has not been successful. If journaling has not been studied and no instruction provided for those using journaling, how is it possible that it would be successfully used in a variety of situations by a variety of instructors? Trial and error methods may work some of the time but are prone to failure when reasons for the failures are not carefully examined. Collecting data on a particular approach to journaling would offer more information about the success of the technique. Part of the difficulty in designing successful journaling assignments is the lack of overall knowledge and research related to the study of this topic. This is a particularly difficult challenge, because the knowledge base is just beginning to develop, and the amount of work and time required to build a foundation for practice is overwhelming. It will require the effort and dedication of a number of researchers and educators, with the support of institutions, to see work in this area move forward.

Increasing awareness of journaling as an instructional tool and the benefits to students and instructors can be accomplished in a number of ways. Pooling resources and connecting people who have an interest in the topic area will help to bring more information to those who need and want it. Efforts to get the material out to those using



journaling will promote the topic and could be in the following forms: submitting formal research to journals; developing bibliographies and reference lists and giving them out to schools of nursing; presenting papers, posters and graduating theses to groups of nurses or educators in formal educational forums; talking about the topic with colleagues and students; involving interested people on small projects with journaling as a component; and seeking help from institutions to support research projects related to journaling.

These strategies require time and effort, but until more is done to resolve the knowledge gap, the use of journaling as an instructional tool will remain somewhat trial and error.

### *Workload*

Tryssenaar (1995) observes that students and faculty have time constraints, and this can be an issue, although there is no discussion about the impact of this constraint. Instructors in the study did indicate that significant time was required for the students to write the journals and for instructors to respond. One of the other issues related to time constraints is that journals are "plunked" into the course as an additional assignment. Time spent on journaling is likely to be less if other assignments are more heavily marked, because students often tend to be mark-focussed. If less time is spent on the journal, it is possible that less reflection occurs. If instructors do not take the time to respond in a way that values the student's work and promotes further thought, the exercise is also less valuable. On the other hand, to have this process occur in a way that maximizes the student's learning, more time is required on behalf of both the student and the instructor.

*Level of Reflection*

Wong (1995) developed a tool by which she was able to assess the level of student reflection from reflective journal writing. The framework she developed was based on Boud et al. (1995) model of reflection and Mezirow's (1990) model of reflection.

Although measures were taken to monitor the reliability of the coding, no other studies have been done to either support or refute the results. The students were categorized in three groups: non-reflectors, reflectors, and critical reflectors, and the study outlined the specific criteria related to how each of the students was classified. This particular study gave enough detail that it could be used to replicate a similar study with another population of nursing students. This is the only study that attempts to quantify the level of reflection of students. The method in this study is cumbersome and not in a format that would be easily adapted or adopted by instructors to use as an evaluation tool with students. Simplification of the criteria may make Wong's tool useful in assessing the level of evaluation in journal assignments. This study is an example about how the research in the area of journaling is still in the early stages of development.

Having just stated that a framework for evaluation based on assessing the level of reflection in students may prove to be a useful tool, it may on the other hand create more difficulty in evaluation. If instructors believe that reflection and journal-keeping should not be evaluated because the students' are writing about values and beliefs, which are subjective, the instructors will resist adopting the framework due to the strong evaluative component.

The instructors in this study observed that some students were more reflective

than others, but the instructors did not know the reasons for this, although graduate students and "mature" learners were cited to be more successful at writing reflective journals. Instructors attempted to help the students by asking them questions and by responding to the journal entries. Instructors also gave some suggestions about how the journal process would be more successful, and some instructors described how they saw the student become more reflective over time through journaling. In essence, instructors knew it worked, knew how to promote it most of the time, but did not know exactly why it worked or what they could do to make it work even better.

These queries will continue to challenge instructors in their attempts to make journaling more successful. Continued research and careful planning of assignments, ongoing review of the literature, and discussion with colleagues will help. Once again, the process could be slow, because trial and error practice will continue until more is known and understood about the finer points of journaling. It is likely that if journaling experiences become negative experiences, because challenging issues do not reach resolution, journaling will be discarded as an ineffective instructional tool.

#### *What Makes Journaling Work?*

Trust and relationship were common themes throughout the interviews. This sense of instructors building trusting relationships with students was viewed as paramount to the success of the journal. A number of ways to build a trusting relationship were identified by the instructors in the study. In brief, instructors used the following three strategies to build trust: sharing personal experiences, ensuring comments were constructive and not critical, and maintaining confidentiality. The following are three

ways relationship was primarily encouraged: showing interest in the students' work through acknowledgement of effort or feelings, and through negotiating guidelines.

Westburg (1994) identifies trust as important to the reflective process, and that can be achieved by reducing competition, conveying compassion and caring, letting students know instructors as people, and admitting where instructors have areas for growth as well. Paterson (1995) identifies that trust builds over a period of time when the students experience confidentiality and have their opinions validated. Marking seems to be the area that causes students to be cautious about sharing their personal experiences. As outlined previously, there are a number of ways in which marking can be set up to promote trust and reflection.

Carswell (1988) stated that positive entries from students occurred when journal entries were responded to in the following way:

In most cases, I responded to questions, made appropriate comments, revealed some of myself, and asked questions. In my responses, I found that I was individualizing instruction, even sharing my humanness in a way that I might not normally find myself doing. (p.110).

Trust and relationship appear to be the foundation for the practice of journaling. If this is nurtured other aspects of the process seem to work. A number of methods have been described here to promote this trusting relationship, both in the literature and in the study with nursing instructors.

#### *What Would Instructors Do Differently?*

Instructors in the study identified four ways journaling could be done differently

to improve the success and benefit of the activity. These included making it part of the curriculum or course, having guidelines for the process that include more information and strategies, having smaller student groups, and using methods other than journaling to promote reflection. The literature did not address these issues, other than offering suggestions for promoting reflection. Nursing instructors have not been the focus of study in relation to journaling, and so the question about what they would do differently have not been identified in the literature.

Including journaling as a requirement in a nursing program would necessitate instructors and students alike to learn more about and be more prepared for journaling. There would be a natural progression through to the upper levels of nursing. The constraining factors might include obstacles such as loss of individuality in designing a course, or the potential of students being exposed to journaling in more than one course.

Small-group work was also not discussed in the literature, and generally, study participants thought small groups would allow more time to respond to the student entries. The instructors who expressed a need for smaller groups were involved with thirty or more students. The instructors who expressed the most positive experiences had one, several, or up to about fifteen students.

One instructor in the group expressed a need to use methods other than journaling to promote reflection. Ligeikis-Clayton (1989) and Tryssenaar (1994) suggest that other writing forms such as writing exercises, letters and adaptations of journaling are also useful in promoting reflection. One study participant thought the students could respond reflectively by tape recording the experience instead of writing.

Instructors in the study and in the literature identified a number of ways in which journaling can be improved and other methods used to promote reflection. Little research has been done to examine the nature and benefit of a variety of methods, and so there are no "right" ways to use journals as an instructional tool.

### *Instructor Benefits*

Instructors in the study identified the following as ways in which journaling can be beneficial: increase own level of reflection, opportunity to clear the mind, increase understanding, appreciation of the student's experience, opportunity to learn from the student and have their own similar experiences validated.

Kobert (1995) and Tryssenaar (1994) suggest that it is not only the student who benefits from the journaling process, and that it is also an opportunity for faculty to reflect on practice. Faculty found value in the glimpses they get of the clinical experiences and the world as viewed through the eyes of the student. This literature suggests insight helps instructors structure more meaningful learning experiences for the students.

If instructors benefit from a teaching strategy and see the value through positive student responses it is likely that they will be more committed to encouraging the process, finding ways to improve the technique, and spend more time responding to the students. As students see the commitment and value placed on journaling by the instructor, the students will respond in a more positive way to the experience. Given this, benefits to all could be optimized.

### *Technology*

The journaling literature does not specifically discuss technology in relation to

journaling. In this study one instructor and one student used e-mail as a method of correspondence. There are a number of factors to consider in e-mail journaling and are addressed here because our world is increasingly becoming more technological, and as a result, how communication and education occurs is changing as well.

E-mail is more culturally acceptable in some countries than others. For example, the Japanese, Latin American, Arabic, Far East, and Mediterranean countries prefer communication to happen in a variety of ways. Harbaugh's (1997) article entitled, "E-mail, Bloody E-mail," reported on interviews with several cross-cultural specialists and consultants who had negative comments to offer those of us enamoured with e-mail in North America. Edward Hall states that in some countries, such as the ones aforementioned, it is not the words you say, but how you say them, when you say them, the body language used, even whether or not you arrived on time to say them, and what you were wearing when you said them. In this same article Garry Johnson states that e-mail is as low in context as you can get. Other countries such as most American and European countries put more emphasis on the actual words and as long as they are written that is the important issue.

Farson in Stamp's (1997) article states that communities can be built into the workplace using e-mail. It has not been particularly successful because management just expects that if you connect people to the computer, community networks will develop, and this is not the case. E-mail can connect people in the technological sense, but can it really *connect* people?

Perhaps the change from handwritten journals to typed black and white print has

had a more dramatic effect on the interaction between the reader and the writer, than the actual introduction of e-mail, where the black and white print already existed, but now is just sent more easily. There is a loss of intimacy when technology replaces handwritten words in journals because the senses are not challenged in the same way. Touch, smell, sound, sight, and hearing are all involved in a more intimate way in a journal written by hand. E-mail relies on the physical features of the word and the specific words used. The speed of the computer and the color, texture, and set-up of the screen also give context to the e-mail journal. The words used by the writer determine the flow and feeling of the words. The reader interprets the words based on their own personal biases.

E-mail is quick, connects people technologically, and diminishes distance, time and effort. Handwritten journals offer a richer context. Comparing the two may just be an exercise in recognizing the similarities or differences in relation to journaling, for if the point of journaling is to reflect, it does not matter how the reflection happens. This is certainly a thought requiring further investigation.

Instructors have identified learning needs and not taken action on them, attempted to used journaling within an academic system that does not value and support journaling as an academic tool, integrated the use of journaling in some courses and not adequately prepared the students' or themselves, individualized the process of journaling based on their own ideas for criteria, and are not clear on what the intended learning outcomes might be. In addition, building trust relationships has been inconsistent among instructors and is paramount to the reflection that students are willing to contribute to the journal entries. This is particularly evident in an academic environment when students may



perceive their own ideas or original thoughts are of little value to the instructor. If there is a "right" answer the students will find out what it is and respond accordingly. This results in the student not developing their own knowledge because of fear of it not being worthy knowledge. If the outcome of journaling is to increase reflection then to encourage the notion that there is one right answer defeats the purpose of using journals. How reflection is encouraged through dialogue journal entries is largely dependent on the relationship between the students and the instructor. Given this, more knowledge about how to teach students to be more reflective becomes the focus in moving the theoretical knowledge about reflection to the practice of developing reflection.

The goal of the instructors is to encourage and develop reflective thinking in nursing students and the constraints outlined have hindered the process. Perhaps to focus on the goal of increasing knowledge and promoting reflection by responding to students that promotes trust and places value on the journal, and minimizing the focus on rigid criteria and guidelines the success of the experience would be enhanced.

The academic university setting has contributed to the notion that scholarly work requires strict guidelines and criteria and a marking schedule that allows the instructor to quantify or measure the students' success at reflecting. The type of learning that occurs in reflective journaling is not easily measured and the subjectivity of the experience that each student reflects on and writes about is their own. Instructors tend to objectify journal entries that are subjective. If instructors have a personal need to relate the work to objective standards it removes the conflict that can occur when a student disagrees with the instructor's comments or marking. To use a more subjective approach requires the

instructor to move from a comfort zone because much academic work had been evaluated based on rigid pre-determined criteria.

The personal learning style or style of communication may also influence the need for more rigid criteria and guidelines. Deciding the approach based on one's knowledge and comfort level with journaling may result in developing an assignment that suits the needs of the instructor but not the needs to the students.

### **Summary**

This chapter discusses the findings from chapter 4 in conjunction with the existing literature about journaling. Instructors identify journaling with the concept of reflection, and yet, have little preparation for instructing students on the process. This is a result of limited information in the literature, lack of utilization of the existing literature, and few resources within the institution. Comprehensive practice guidelines are limited, which leads to a trial and error approach to journaling.

## **CHAPTER 6: SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS, LIMITATIONS, AND CONCLUDING COMMENTS**

### **Summary**

The purposes of this study were 1) to describe and critically analyze how nursing instructors use journaling as an instructional tool in the classroom and clinical setting with nursing students, 2) to both describe the content and to critically analyze the written material nursing instructors give to learners when assigning journaling, either within the classroom or within a clinical setting, 3) to contribute to nursing education literature by documenting the experiences nursing instructors identify when using journals with nursing students, and 4) to outline implications for using journaling with nursing students through understanding how journaling is assigned as an instructional tool.

This study used a semi-structured interview method, and the audiotaped data were transcribed for analysis. In addition, course outlines and documents instructors used for the journal assignment were analyzed. The participants were all University Nursing Instructors from one institution which has Baccalaureate, Master's, and Doctoral Degree granting status.

Journaling has become a more common method for the promotion of reflection, critical thinking and learning. How nursing instructors use it varies greatly, although there are some common elements. The participants in this study and the literature agree in many areas and on others there is a lack of information, and, my conclusions are based on the data collected for this thesis and the literature on journaling.

Reflection is the purpose of journaling, and a number of different reflective

models are used to frame the experience. These models inherently have aspects that are helpful and also lack components that may be important to reflection. As journaling is further researched more information will become available to look more closely at how reflective models promote or inhibit the reflective and learning process in relation to the use of journals.

The range of strategies for using journals varies greatly, and although several authors have developed some guidelines, the actual practice of journaling in this study showed a similar response. A careful review of the data and the literature has been helpful in designing some practical guidelines for the use of journaling with nursing students. In general, instructors and the literature view journaling as successful, valuable and purposeful. The way in which it is done varies and is perceived to have variable results.

### **Conclusions**

1. Instructors require more information and resources to enhance their own learning about journaling.
2. Research and written information about journaling is limited.
3. Instructors individualize the journal process based on their own ideas about what is likely to make it work.
4. Careful program design by instructors is required to optimize the success of the journaling experience.
5. Journaling is based in the concept of reflection, and is the overall purpose for this activity.

### **Recommendations**

From this study a number of recommendations have arisen and they are outlined specific to both practice and for future research.

#### *For Practice*

Academic institutions could enhance the reflective journal process by supporting instructors in the institution by systematically developing a plan to incorporate journaling into the nursing programs. Through a consultative and collaborative process with other institutions and their instructors a comprehensive journal curriculum could be developed to prevent overlap of journaling activities and support the best practice for assignment delivery.

In addition instructors could learn more about journaling by discussing issues with colleagues and collecting some resources from the available literature. Questioning one's own practice and reflecting on experiences will contribute to a body of knowledge that is slowly emerging as an accepted academic endeavour based on reflection.

Journaling has a place in promoting reflection, although students and instructors who are not committed to the time and effort required to make the endeavour a valuable and successful experience will be disappointed in the outcome. Forcing students to succumb to a process that is not contributing to their learning due to personal preference or learning style, will fail to see the benefits and not be able to reflect and respond in a meaningful way that encourages learning. This same idea applies equally to nursing instructors. Not knowing how to respond and build trusting relationships with the students through non-critical response to journal entries is detrimental to the success of

the journal.

Although other strategies for developing reflection have not been discussed here this is another area requiring further investigation as a means to offer alternate assignments to student's who choose not to journal or for instructors who do not wish to use this method.

#### *For Future Research*

Academic institutions and other funding agencies could support researchers with funding and consultative services to encourage research in the area of journaling. As further research is conducted, a broader base of knowledge is acquired, which consequently leads to better practice standards for journaling activities.

Nursing instructors and other educators can share knowledge through discussion, poster presentations, and presentations at conferences to increase awareness about journaling as an educational tool. As awareness increases, more interest in research is sparked and, once again, more knowledge is added to the topic area.

Involving students in the process of gaining knowledge about the practice of using journals is crucial, and instructors and researchers could benefit from them. A student perspective is lacking in the literature, which provides a prime opportunity for students, instructors, and researchers to work collaboratively to develop effective journaling methods.

There are a number of areas within the topic of journaling that could provide ongoing support to a developing knowledge base about the use of journals. These include, identifying the students' perspective on journaling, further investigating nursing

instructors perspectives and the perspectives of other disciplines using journals for teaching and learning. Developing a model for journaling based on current information available and conducting research to identify how the model works in practice and how practice further informs the development of the model.

### **Limitations**

The number of participants who chose to participate in the study limited the range of data collected. The participants were all instructors at the same university and the academic culture of an institution may influence how these instructors viewed journaling. Given the criteria for participation, the results of this study are limited to the experiences of this group of nursing instructors with journaling. The implications for practice in using journaling as an instructional tool were developed in conjunction with the data collected from the participants and the relatively little literature available about journaling.

### **Concluding Comments**

This study has lead to an enhanced understanding about how and why five nursing instructors use journaling as an instructional tool with nursing students. Their experiences are instrumental in illustrating the benefits and challenges encountered as a result of using journaling, and contributes to the slowly building literature about the use of journals. Continued work on this topic area will further extend the knowledge base of information, which may lead to a more journaling that is comprehensive and effective.

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**Appendix A: Structure Summary Table**

	Course	Type of Journal	Criteria Guidelines	Mandatory	Marks Evaluation	Other Specifics
#1	Clinical and Theory	Dialogue	Specific Criteria	Yes	25% of grade	no three ring binders
#2	Clinical	Dialogue	Limited	Yes	Pass or Fail	None
#3	Self Directed Study	Dialogue one instructor response	Negotiated Specific	No	Flexible Negotiated	None
#4	1)Clinical 2)Elective	Dialogue	1) Yes 2) No	1) Yes 2) No	1) Pass or Fail 2) No	1) No 2) E-mail
#5	Clinical	Dialogue	Limited (not available)	Yes	Pass or Fail	None

## Appendix B: Course Requirement

The learning outcomes of this course will be evaluated accordingly:

### 1. JOURNAL WRITING 25%

Students are required to submit bi-weekly reflections about their learning in a journal. This is an opportunity for one-to-one dialogue about what you are learning each week, the significance of that learning for you and the implications of this learning, for you, in your role as a nurse-educator. I will respond to each of your submissions. My questions and comments are thoughts that arise in me as I read your words. They are thoughts along side your thoughts and not intended as criticisms. You will find that in responding I frequently ask questions. The purpose of my questions is to encourage you to further expand or deepen your ideas. You will generally find one question with an asterisk placed in front of it. It is to this question that I am asking you to respond in your next journal entry.

Marks for the journal writing exercise will be allotted in the following manner:

- a) Full marks = at least 5 journal entries are submitted during the period of the course; the entries are always submitted on time and consistently demonstrates reasonable effort to critically reflect on the issues pertaining to education processes and the student's learning; the student always responds to the professor's questions/comments in the previous entry.
- b) 75% of full marks = at least 4 journal entries are submitted during the period of the course; entries are generally submitted on time and usually demonstrate reasonable effort to critically reflect on the issues pertaining to education processes and the student's learning; the student usually responds to the professor's questions/comments in the previous entry.
- c) 50% of full marks = at least 3 journal entries are submitted during the period of the course; entries are generally submitted on time and generally demonstrate reasonable effort to critically reflect on the issues pertaining to education processes and on the student's learning; the student occasionally responds to the professor's questions/comments in the previous entry.
- d) 30% of full marks – at least 2 journal entries submitted during the period of the course; entries are often submitted late and inconsistently demonstrate reasonable effort to critically reflect on the issues pertaining to education processes and on the student's learning; the student occasionally responds to the professor's questions/comments in the previous entry.

- e) 0 = less than 2 journal entries submitted during the course; entries rarely demonstrate reasonable effort to critically reflect on the issues pertaining to education processes and on the student's learning; the student occasionally responds to the professor's questions/comments in the previous entry.

## Appendix C: Course Requirement

### Purpose:

The office consultation will serve as your verbal record of the community portion of your experience. Both you and your partner will attend each session. The consultations will provide a method of communication between you and your instructor for the purpose of understanding your experience and sharing of ideas.

### CONSULTATIONS:

- Sign-up for initial consultation during Week 1 Orientation
- Bi-weekly dates and times to be negotiated with instructor at first consultation

### DATA:

In a duo-tang folder or coil notebook keep concise but informative notes to aid you in your discussion with instructor. These will also aid you and be part of your written summary at term end.

### CONTENT:

The office consultation will help you to answer the questions of the “what”, “when”, “why”, and “where” of your community experience as well as discuss how the community experience is going for you.

More specifically be prepared to discuss:

- Articles, books, materials, etc. you have read/viewed to optimize your community experience.
- Your plans for the next couple of weeks re: community experiences
- Brief statement about how the experiences is going and any problems encountered
- Any questions you have for your community instructor.

### SUMMARY:

To be done at the end of the experience and submitted to your community instructor by noon, Friday week 13. (maximum 4-5 pages double spaced). To address the following:

- 1) Based on your assessment of the school, and the children in the school as a whole, analyze the data collected and draw conclusions about:
  - The health-related strengths of the children
  - The potential and/or actual health problems of the children

- The major ways the school does address or might improve on how it address the goals of health promotion and prevention of accidents/illnesses for the school as a whole.

2) Determine the way in which and how well the resource contributes to the promotion and protection of health and prevention of childhood accidents/illnesses for your developmental group of children and their families.

3) Discuss major strengths and shortcomings of your assigned community with regard to the health promotion, protection and prevention of accidents/illnesses for your developmental group of children and their families.

4) List the skills you feel are most important to be a community health nurse. Do these differ from hospital nursing, if so, how?

5) What you learned about marketing and public relations.

6) The ways in which what you have learned during the experience relates to the hospitalization experience of children and their families.

7) Your major areas of professional growth as a result of the community experience.