

REPORT: 9TH INTERNATIONAL REFLECTIVE PRACTICE CONFERENCE: MINDFUL INQUIRY: 23-25 JUNE 2003: ROBINSON COLLEGE, CAMBRIDGE, UNITED KINGDOM

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BACKGROUND INFORMATION

This annual conference is organised by the Institute of Health and Community Studies, Bournemouth University. The purpose of the conference was to open up dialogue with professional colleagues, widening and strengthening the debate around reflective practice. Presenters from diverse professional backgrounds participated, including those from psychology, psychotherapy, nursing, professions allied to medicine (including physical therapists, reflexologists and a teacher of Chinese Medicine), counseling, social work, education, sociology and anthropology. The major themes around which the conference centered were:

- reflections on therapeutic relationships
- facilitating mindfulness to students
- becoming mindful in everyday practice
- mindfulness: the key to creative and caring practice.

This conference was attended by approximately 120 delegates from Australia, Canada, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, the United Kingdom, the United States of America and the Republic South Africa. The delegates' professional backgrounds included those of nursing, medicine, education, psychology, social work, anthropology and theology. A number of complementary health therapists also participated in the conference proceedings. These included reflexologists, physical therapists, teachers of meditation, and a teacher of Chinese Medicine.

KEYNOTE SPEAKERS

The three keynote speakers were:

- **Professor Steen Halling**, Professor of Psychology, Seattle University, USA, was one of the founders of the master's programme in existential-phenomenological therapeutic psychology. His publications addresses the psychology of forgiveness, disillusionment, interpersonal relationships, understanding psychopathology, and qualitative research methods.

Professor Halling's keynote address, entitled *When intimacy is at the core of research: personal and professional challenges*, explored the apparent ambivalence in qualitative research between embracing personal data, while simultaneously attempting to present the data objectively, as if the data existed independently from the researcher's relationship with the data. Together with Dr Jan Rowe, Professor Halling developed the so-called "dialogal phenomenology" qualitative research process where they present both the experiences of research participants and those of the researchers. While reflecting on the researchers' own experiences and feelings deepens self-awareness and provides a clearer focus on the research phenomenon, the risks are that the researchers might become overwhelmed with painful experiences. At this stage qualitative researchers might impose premature structure on highly ambiguous data in an attempt to deal with their painful experiences. When researchers work collaboratively in small groups, they enhance their chances of achieving satisfactory research outcomes, compared to possibilities when engaging in individual research endeavours.

- **Dr Simone Roach**, is a Director of Heritage, Canada and a Sister of St Martha of Antigonish, Nova Scotia, Canada. Her professional career focused on nursing education, while her postdoctoral work concentrated on Ethics. According to Dr Roach she explored the foundations of human caring, focusing on caring ontol-

ogy, its convergence with spirituality and implications for ethics and health care. The 2nd edition of her book published during 2002 is entitled: *Caring the human mode of being: a blueprint for the health professions*.

This keynote address, entitled *Global spirituality, context for health and healing*, emphasised that the reflection on person, health and healing should take place within a global context of spirituality, focusing on the interconnectedness of everything within a self-expanding universe.

- **Christopher Johns** is well known for his publications on reflective practice and caring theory, regarding reflective practice as being a holistic model for nursing, as depicted in his book entitled *Becoming a reflective practitioner*. (He is also a practising reflexologist and therapeutic touch practitioner). This keynote addressed mainly the interrelated and interdependent nature of reflection and caring in nursing.

CONFERENCE PROGRAMME

Every morning commenced at 07:00 with optional meditation and Tai Chi sessions. Keynote, plenary and concurrent sessions continued until 17:00, followed by a poster session the first and a conference dinner the second day. As most delegates stayed at Robinson College Residence numerous discussions continued beyond the conference venues in the tranquil gardens, over cups of tea or coffee and during meal times.

POSTER SESSION

The conference delegates could view the posters exhibited while enjoying food and drinks. This session was opened by one of the conference organisers, Professor Dawn Freshwater. Each poster presenter had to explain the relevance of the poster within 10 minutes. These oral explanations of the poster presentations stimulated much debate.

The poster presented by Dr Valerie Ehlers was entitled: *South African student nurses' perceptions of their development of interpersonal relationships*. The co-presenter was Dr Phyllis Solombela on whose D Litt et Phil thesis this poster was based. The poster portrayed that first year student nurses in the Eastern Cape Province of the Republic of South Africa espoused more positive interpersonal relationships with their colleagues, seniors, patients and patients' relatives/friends than fourth year student nurses. These research results, contradicting expectations that fourth year student nurses should espouse more positive interpersonal relationships than first year student nurses, stimulated much conversation during the duration of the conference.

During the poster session an art exhibition demonstrated how professional nurses from the Netherlands, who are also artists, portrayed their visions of nursing. The presenter, Ms Berri Sciarone from Onze Lieve Vrouwe Gasthuis, Amsterdam, the Netherlands, explained that she attempted to explore the "art" of nursing by seeking links between the creative processes in nursing practice with the creative process of producing art portraying the nature of nursing.

CONCURRENT SESSIONS

Only two outstanding concurrent sessions will be briefly mentioned.

Ms Maureen Harris from the Durban Institute of Technology, Republic of South Africa, presented a concurrent session entitled *Dr Livingstone, I presume? Reflexivity and reflective practice - an exploration into journaling, and through journaling and dialogue, mindfulness*.

This thought provoking paper reported sixteen post basic nursing students' journeys of discovery through processes of written dialogue, and simultaneously on the researcher/lecturer's reflections on her own reflexive journal, documenting the history of events and interactions as well as the reflections on these issues. The students' critical thinking capacities were enhanced through their reflective journaling, enabling them to become more empowered in their professional positions and to engage in more autonomous practices, despite the limitations imposed by the health system and the educational frames of reference of some of these post basic student nurses. This paper evoked lively debates about reflection as a feasible teaching strategy, especially within a multi-cultural setting.

Another memorable concurrent presentation addressed issues concerning the introduction of a nurse educator into a medical/infectious diseases ward of an inner city hospital in the Netherlands. **Andrew Kingsley** from Onze Lieve Vrouwe Gasthuis, Amsterdam, succeeded in enabling the audience to 'visualise' the reflections of both the student nurses and the nurse educator during these encounters by using Dutch porcelain dolls and hand mirrors in ingenuous ways. This 'creative' presentation resulted in lively participation by the delegates who attended this session.

FUTURE CONFERENCES

During the last day of the conference it was decided to link the 10th International Reflective Practice Conference during 2004 with the Conference on Caring, organised annually by Dr Jean Watson in the United States of America. Two separate conferences will probably take place in direct succession of each other, enabling as many delegates as possible to attend both conferences. The exact dates and venues of these 2004 conferences will become available at the following website: <http://www.bournemouth.ac.uk/ihcs>

CONCLUSION

It was a challenging (and exhausting) experience to participate in this lively 9th International Reflective Practice Conference from 23-25 June 2003. The delegates not only from diverse geographic locations, but also from diverse professional and academic backgrounds, provided fertile grounds for in-depth discussions, analyses and numerous "agreements to disagree". It was a stimulating experience, which will hopefully be implemented in future academic endeavours, including the supervision of Master's and Doctoral students.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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