

Reflective Nursing Practice

I am reading *The International Textbook of Reflective Practice in Nursing* recently published by Sigma Theta Tau International (2008) as I prepare for another semester of guiding the educational process of nursing students. I teach both undergraduate students beginning their career and very experienced professional nurses at the graduate level. Those at the graduate level are truly ready and willing to reflect upon their caring practice within the context of health systems from a variety of perspectives; those at the undergraduate level might view a reflective essay as another paper to write. Reflection can develop new insights and perhaps should be given more attention as a method to transform practice and personal perspectives about caring for ourselves and others.

Reflective practice, according to Freshwater, Taylor, and Sherwood (2008), is the process of developing new insights through self awareness and critical reflection upon experiences both in the moment and from past experiences. Reflection is a remarkable learning tool, research methodology, and leadership strategy to gain clarity of inner beliefs and enhance the art of being present in the moment.

Reflective nursing practice in leadership is defined as the capacity to be open to different viewpoints and recognize opportunities for change. Experienced nurses are ready for alternative views of leadership and strategies for change, and effective nursing leaders involve all individuals in the process of transformation toward personal growth through reflection. As a leadership skill, reflection can blend both practice and theory by helping individuals consider alternate views. The reflective process lets go of past beliefs and stretches the empathetic imagination toward awareness of another alternative or point of view. Reflective nursing leadership creates change in every moment toward growth and development in a positive work environment. Reflective leadership utilizes a new perspective in every situation and a personal goal to envision another way, to create and imagine. Reflective leadership style transforms the self toward personal growth and considers another perspective for the future. This act demonstrates deeper analysis, truly being in the moment, remaining open to possibilities for the future – emancipatory reflection brings about social or behavioral change and transformation. Transformative leadership styles are those that focus upon knowing about the other within the context of a situation and then centers on transforming another rather than gaining power over another.

Reflection toward becoming the transforming leader begins and ends with the journey of self-awareness. Leadership is self-directed critical appraisal and a state of continuous expansion of possibilities. Taylor offers three types of reflection that influence effective leaders and any or all can be utilized. These types of reflection are technical, practical, and emancipatory. Technical reflection is empirical knowledge gathered perhaps from evidence-based practice research and literature that facilitates critical appraisal of situations. Practical reflection is being in the moment with another, perhaps with an empathetic outlook or viewpoint for change. Emancipatory reflection is the raised awareness that change is necessary, and it may be within the self, the interaction, or future situations; this is the transformative leader that creates the new way of thinking within the community.

Take some time this coming year to reflect upon the transformation of yourself in any situation toward the growth of another individual or community.

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