

See discussions, stats, and author profiles for this publication at: <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/263065143>

Student Portfolio and Critical Friendship: A Case of a Successful Learning Experience in a Nursing Practicum

Article in *The International Journal of Learning Annual Review* · January 2010

DOI: 10.18848/1447-9494/CGP/v17i10/47311

CITATIONS

2

READS

985

4 authors:



Rui Filipe Gonçalves

Nursing School of Coimbra

24 PUBLICATIONS 120 CITATIONS

SEE PROFILE



Ana V Baptista

Imperial College London

48 PUBLICATIONS 385 CITATIONS

SEE PROFILE



Catarina Lobão

Polytechnic Institute of Leiria

9 PUBLICATIONS 80 CITATIONS

SEE PROFILE



António Melo

Polytechnic of Guarda

15 PUBLICATIONS 17 CITATIONS

SEE PROFILE

THE INTERNATIONAL
JOURNAL
Of **LEARNING**

Volume 17, Number 10

Student Portfolio and Critical Friendship: A Case of
a Successful Learning Experience in a Nursing
Practicum

Rui Gonçalves, Ana Vitória Baptista,
Catarina Lobão and António Melo

THE INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF LEARNING

<http://www.Learning-Journal.com>

First published in 2010 in Champaign, Illinois, USA by Common Ground Publishing LLC
www.CommonGroundPublishing.com.

© 2010 (individual papers), the author(s)

© 2010 (selection and editorial matter) Common Ground

Authors are responsible for the accuracy of citations, quotations, diagrams, tables and maps.

All rights reserved. Apart from fair use for the purposes of study, research, criticism or review as permitted under the Copyright Act (Australia), no part of this work may be reproduced without written permission from the publisher. For permissions and other inquiries, please contact
<cg-support@commongroundpublishing.com>.

ISSN: 1447-9494

Publisher Site: <http://www.Learning-Journal.com>

THE INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF LEARNING is peer-reviewed, supported by rigorous processes of criterion-referenced article ranking and qualitative commentary, ensuring that only intellectual work of the greatest substance and highest significance is published.

Typeset in Common Ground Markup Language using CGCreator multichannel typesetting system

<http://www.commongroundpublishing.com/software/>

Student Portfolio and Critical Friendship: A Case of a Successful Learning Experience in a Nursing Practicum

Rui Gonçalves, Nursing School of Coimbra, Coimbra, Portugal

Ana Vitória Baptista, University of Aveiro, Aveiro, Portugal

Catarina Lobão, Polytechnic Institute of Leiria, Leiria, Portugal

António Melo, Polytechnic Institute of Guarda, Guarda, Portugal

Abstract: Portfolios are used in diverse human activities: it is a common practice among painters, cartoonists, designers, models, actors, and musicians, who select and organise sets of significant part of their work to show their skills to potential clients or employers. In the nursing teaching context, using the portfolio has a high impact, because, when properly used, it is considered an important tool for updating and developing intrapersonal, social academic and professional competences. Falchikov (2005, p.16) states that a consensual definition of portfolio was presented by Arter and Spandel who have described it as a “purposeful collection of student work that tells the story of the student’s efforts, progress, or achievement in (a) given area(s)”. When underlying the importance of this tool in the assessment, teaching and learning process, the same author adds the difficulty in describing a “typical” portfolio due to its personal and flexible character. Nevertheless, this may be a proper form of assessment and learning tool with a great importance in developing critical and meta-analysis skills, and other specific and generic competences. Consequently, the concept of reflection and narrative writing are closely related with the personal construction of the portfolio. Dewey has already considered reflection as an active process with the main objective of thinking on actions to promote several changes (Sá-Chaves, 2007). In the context of Nursing Practicum, a reflective narrative made by the student allows a “reflection-on-action” (Schön, 1983) and enables him/her to describe, confront and (re)construct personal and shared knowledge, leading to a personal, academic and professional awareness, development and transformation. Thus, with this paper we will present a successful learning experience developed in a Nursing Practicum through the use of the strategies of reflective portfolio and critical friendship. Therefore, we propose to present some conclusions that emerge from the analysis of written reflective narratives contained in students’ portfolios made during a Nursing Practicum. Simultaneously, we intend to reflect about the importance that the strategy of critical friendship has in the knowledge appropriation, and its impact on the construction of students’ professional identity. Accordingly, we aim to: (i) characterise the speech used by undergraduate students in the narratives they included in their portfolios; (ii) analyse students’ perspectives regarding the critical friendship strategy; and (iii) test the applicability of these pedagogical strategies in an undergraduate course.

Keywords: Nursing Practicum, Portfolio, Reflective Practice, Critical Friendship

1. Introduction

IN ORDER TO meet diverse social needs and other challenges in health care, Nursing Education has undergone through diverse transformations. Among other aspects, we may observe the academic and social recognition and higher rates of students' enrolment in this Higher Education (HE) course. This social, scientific and academic development may be considered the genesis of specialised vocational training, which requires new models of learning and assessment skills to enable a full articulation of the different academic actors (Franco, 2008).

The evaluation system of teaching and learning of nursing students appears to maintain a continuity in the way the different subjects within this HE course are approached (Souza, 2005; Merino *et al.*, 2006; Franco, 2008). Perhaps a possible explanation is related to the existence of the same conceptions of society, teaching, learning and nursing, which have been considered more or less "established". However, several pedagogical guidelines point out the need of the assessment system to have a systematic and continuous character (Berbel *et al.*, 2006; Capucha *et al.*, 2006). Moreover, the assessment data must show evidences of knowledge, acquired skills, abilities and attitudes developed throughout the course duration. Consequently, different (and innovative) assessment instruments (reflective/learning portfolios, reports, oral presentations, participant observation and others) must be used according to the teaching and learning purposes, which must follow the "constructive alignment" already developed and deeply presented by Biggs (2007). Hence, HE institutions must have the responsibility of preparing their students by equipping them with flexible, reflective, creative and innovative tools, enabling them to be successful at work and in society: ultimately, in various spheres of life.

Taking into account this generic context and concerns, we consider that HE teachers must be aware of the existence of diverse pedagogical strategies and/or tools, so they can enhance academic success and students' development, allowing them to be actively involved in their own learning process. Thus, among other strategies we stress that the use of portfolio (made of reflective and personal narratives) as well as critical friendship, when properly tailored to a pedagogical context, may be extremely relevant to promote a richer learning process. The value and pertinence of the use of portfolio has been very well explored internationally (Davies & LeMahieu, 2003; Buckley *et al.*, 2009; Van Tartwijk & Driessen, 2009). Among others, we may stress the following quotation:

"The use of portfolios and other non conventional writing assignments was process driven and made reference to student centred principles of lifelong learning, active learning and reflection." (Falchikov & Thomson, 2008, p.52)

Consequently, this may lead us (as practitioners) to engage in a reflection about the most suitable strategies that may be put into practice not only to contribute to strengthen students' theoretical knowledge, but also to promote students' self-reflection about the development of their own individual learning process, and engagement with their own personal process of knowledge (re)creation. In fact, we consider that the latter aspect (related to the intimate relationship one student may develop with knowledge) has a truly connection with significant and deep learning:

“In one approach (a deep approach) students aim to understand ideas and seek meanings. They have an intrinsic interest in the task and an expectation of enjoyment in carrying it out. They adopt strategies that help satisfy their curiosity, such as making the task coherent with their own experience; relating and distinguishing evidence and argument; (...) integrating the task with existing awareness; (...) theorizing about it (...).” (Prosser & Trigwell, 1999, p.3)

In fact, all those aspects will be observed with more or less intensity in the results we will present further on. This will demonstrate the value of HE teachers engaging in “new”, innovative and different approaches in the learning, teaching and assessment process.

Also, a process that may be characterised by all those features will lead to an individual, personal, cognitive and epistemological reconstruction or transformation of the person. As we can recognise:

“Learning by its nature implies some degree of change and transformation.” (Sutherland & Crowther, 2008, p.6).

Accordingly, teachers must create challenging pedagogical experiences and environments that stimulate that kind of learning and promote students’ involvement in the entire process. However, this assumption means that HE teachers must be also ready to “change” and to be involved and deeply engaged in the teaching activity: “Good teaching encourages high quality student learning.” (Ramsden, 1992, p.86).

Due to the findings we will present, we strongly believe that reflective portfolios and critical friendship contribute to the enhancement of the process of teaching and learning, in this case of Nursing Practicum. Enabling a dialogic attitude of sharing and confrontation, those strategies are enriching and may be considered an important factor to stimulate students’ engagement both in social and personal process: the teaching and learning process. Consequently, we may recognise that those strategies will benefit (i) the student himself (in a intrapersonal and meta-cognitive perspective), (ii) the student and the (caring) critical friend (in a interpersonal, social and cognitive perspective), (iii) the student and the practice (in a professional and reflective perspective), (iv) the student and the hospital staff (again, in a social and professional perspective), and (v) the student and the theoretical knowledge (in a cognitive and meta-reflective perspective, where the appropriation of knowledge can be a hard process, which benefits from the conjunction of those previous aspects).

Therefore, with this paper we aim to highlight the pertinence of putting in practice these pedagogical and assessment practices (reflective portfolio and critical friendship), and to present the pedagogical experience that was developed in a small class of Nursing Practicum, constituted by 5 undergraduate students. To demonstrate the success of these strategies, we intend to: (i) characterise the speech used by students in the narratives that constitute their personal reflective portfolios; (ii) reflect about the applicability of the strategy of critical friendship in the context of undergraduate training by analysing the individual students’ perspective regarding the use of this methodology of horizontal assessment; and (iii) analyse the process of each student development.

2. Reflective Portfolio and Critical Friendship: Enriching the Process of Learning and Knowledge (re)Construction

In the context of nursing teaching, the portfolio is considered to be an important tool for personal, academic and professional development (Apóstolo, 2001; Davies & LeMahieu, 2003; Buckley *et al.*, 2009; Van Tartwijk & Driessen, 2009), since it is seen as a strategy of continuous knowledge (re)construction and personal development (Sá-Chaves, 2005). Therefore, we recognise and emphasise the importance of the use and construction of the portfolio by the student, future health professional, who is intended to be reflective, autonomous, critical and engaged, among other already mentioned characteristics (Prosser & Trigwell, 1999).

In fact, according to Schön (1990), the portfolio is even more important since it shows evidences of the continuous construction and path made by the (undergraduate) student: it allows the comparison and analysis of different moments, and facilitates the production of inferences (that can be crossed with diverse information sources) and the observation of the process of knowledge (re)construction, in accordance with the principle of totality emphasised by the Epistemology. Consequently, the teacher must present an attitude and concern for the human and holistic development of the student by adopting a critical and reflective perspective (Sá-Chaves, 2007).

In fact, some authors highlight that the portfolio generates a reflective logic, involving several perspectives:

- (i) Descriptive – description of the epistemic relevant episodes, which may constitute key moments in the process of (re)building students' knowledge;
- (ii) Argumentative/ critical - reflection about the facts narrated in the episodes, helping to identify causes, consequences and meanings about the role of contexts in determining the facts;
- (iii) Meta-critical and meta-praxis - reflection of the student about himself/herself, questioning his/her roles, functions, performances and conceptions. The student becomes at the same time the reflective subject and also the object of the self-reflection (meta-cognitive dimension).

Hence, the construction of the reflective portfolio is based on the paradigm of the ecological and critical-reflective rationality (Sá-Chaves, 2007), which takes into consideration a new philosophy (training strategy) based on principles such as: (i) intrapersonality and self-reflection; (ii) self-involvement; (iii) the multiplier effect of diversity (truly potentiated by using the strategy of critical friendship); (iv) the awareness of the incompleteness of human beings; (v) the continuity of training (in a logic of lifelong learning); and (vi) the awareness of transformability as human beings we all are in our multiple roles (such as students and teachers).

Thus, portfolios, constituted by personal, sequential and contextualised narratives along a timeframe, stimulate the levels of reflection and awareness, and potentiate the enhancement of diversification and deepness of students' perspectives. In fact, portfolios may be considered a strategy that not only contributes to the intrapersonal organisation of knowledge but also facilitates the comprehension of the processes involved in the knowledge construction (Sá-Chaves, 2007). Simultaneously, through this strategy, allied with the critical friendship, it

can be recognisable either the nature or the importance of interpersonal relationships which are developed in the learning process.

In fact, the use of portfolios as a pedagogical strategy has already been explored, since there is a need to deepen our understanding about the teaching and learning relationship and process so that we may not only understand its holistic nature but also achieve a higher quality level (Sá-Chaves, 2007). Consequently, we can conclude that this strategy can be used at any level of education, due to its flexibility: it may be explored in any context and aiming a great variety of objectives. Nevertheless, as stated by Kirk (1997):

“Introducing the portfolio process is not easy; it requires considerable planning, organization, and perhaps a change in teaching styles. The teacher must be patient as students experience a new learning and assessment process. The results, however, are well worth the effort. Students are more actively involved in learning and self-assessment with tasks that are more "authentic" to them, which often results in higher levels of student interest and motivation (Mitchell, 1992)”.

The strategy of critical friendship has been extensively used at teachers’ training and development in different teaching levels (Francis, 1995; Golby & Appleby, 1995; Andreu *et al.*, 2003). Nevertheless, we consider that critical friendship features allow this strategy to be adapted to other learning contexts. In fact, it is broadly understood and characterised as being a form of assisted development in the research and learning process as well as a possible key to individual development. Consequently, the dialogue, the emphasis on learning and a concern about the conditions of learning are specific characteristics. Additionally, Sá-Chaves (2005) underlines that this strategy may be powerful in the teaching and learning process at HE institutions, due to the enriching inter-connections and tensions that happen within each pair of critical friends. If, on the one hand, friends bring a high level of unconditional positive support and strength, on the other hand those who criticise may give negative perspectives and may have an intolerant vision when mistakes are done. However, when being critical friends, it is intended to develop and bring both supportive and critical perspectives into the relationship, which is supposed to be of intra- and inter-development and enrichment. Following this idea, we may quote Costa and Kallick (1993):

“A critical friend (...) is a trusted person who asks provocative questions, provides data to be examined through another lens, and offers critique of a person’s work as a friend. (...) The friend is an advocate for the success of that work.” (p.50)

The same previous authors use the metaphor of “changing the lens” to emphasise the idea that all learners need to go beyond their individual points of view: on the contrary, the learners need to be open to and discover other perspectives. Thus, this strategy is commonly understood as a “powerful learning experience” which “transforms views”, by allowing the stimulation, clarification and extension of personal framework of beliefs, values and needs (Francis, 1995, p.234). As a consequence, each member of the pair of critical friends feels accountable both for their own (personal) growth and “that of their peers” (Francis, 1995, p.234).

Moreover, this strategy allows the development of relationships with others, encouraging the reflective practice and rethinking the process of research and learning. It is, then, based

on the logic of collaborative learning rather than solitary pathways, promoting enriching moments to share different experiential contexts and perspectives. Consequently, an environment of profound feedback and reflection is stimulated. In this case, the teacher acts as a supervisor, who must initiate the process by defining and clarifying the roles of each person as well as setting the deadlines.

3. Study Design: Brief Description and Methodology

This is a case study with descriptive and qualitative nature (Yin, 1994), which was based on a document analysis (Bogdan & Biklen, 2006). As stated by Yin, it will be analysed “a contemporary event that cannot be manipulated” (Yin, 1994, p.8) and the research questions are centred on the “how” and “what” of a contemporary reality (Yin, 1994, p.9):

- (i) What are the characteristics of the students’ reflective and personal narratives?
- (ii) What are students’ perspectives about the use of the strategy of critical friendship?
- (iii) How can we measure or be sure about the success of the use of these strategies in an undergraduate course?

To answer those questions, we have analysed reflective portfolios, constituted by personal narratives and by the comments of critical friends of each participant. The sample involved in this study is composed by five nursing students of the 4th year of the Nursing undergraduate course. These were all students enrolled in a class of a Nursing Practicum in a Health Institution of Coimbra (Portugal) between December of 2008 and February of 2009. Over a period of eight weeks, it was proposed to the group of students to build their reflective portfolios, also introducing a methodology of assisted learning (critical friendship) in the preparation, analysis and self-analysis of their weekly reflections and final meta-reflection. This learning and assessment proposal was accepted by all students.

Since the beginning, it was told to the students that they needed to narrate their personal and cognitive experiences. The critical friend would be a way of introducing the vision of the other. Therefore, this would be a process of accessing the context in which the learning process occurred, in a particular time and place, always accepting the logic of development and personal transformation. Consequently, this was a way of allowing, in the context of the Nursing Practicum, each student to reflect “in-action” and “on-action” (Schön, 1990), thus describing, confronting and (re)constructing knowledge.

Therefore, each student needed to write at least one reflection/personal narrative per week regarding his/her experiences in the Nursing Practicum. At the same time, each student analysed and commented, in a logic of the above mentioned strategy of critical friendship, at least one of the weekly reflections of one colleague. It is important to highlight that the critical friend of each student was chosen among themselves in the beginning of the Nursing Practicum, and stayed the same until the end of that period as well. Finally, by the end of the Nursing Practicum, each student also needed to write a meta-reflection which would also be commented by the critical friend. All this self-reflective work and the analysis of the critical friend comments would be analysed by the teacher-supervisor and would constitute the assessment method of this Nursing Practicum.

Thus, this study is based on a close reading and content analysis of thirty-five narratives weekly commented by the critical friend, and also five meta-reflections. Throughout the

analysis of those documents there was a need to continuously review the emerging categories, adjusting them to the context and learning paths. It was, then, possible for the authors not only to describe the data gathered through those students' portfolios, but also interpret the categories and establishing connections among the written material (Bardin, 1995). As a result, it was possible to analyse and understand the dynamic relationship between (i) the conditions of discourse production (Vala, 1999); (ii) the students' involvement in a critical friendship dialogue; and (iii) each student's involvement with his/her own process of knowledge (re)creation and learning.

4. Data Analysis and Discussion: The Complex Nature of Students' Learning and Personal Narratives' Writing

4.1. Initial Remarks

Firstly, we must underline that all personal narratives revealed common aspects not only regarding theoretical, technical and practical issues, but also in terms of concerns, expectations, desire of being better human beings and good health professionals. In fact, the students considered all those concerns essential to be explored in their portfolios, because they felt this formative experience acquired a high relevance for their future professional practice, which should be engaging, enriching and holistic. Since the beginning, the students believed that they would benefit from that form of assessment by constructing their own portfolio and also contributing to the growth and development of the colleague through the critical friendship strategy.

Moreover, we can not forget that portfolios come from a writing process – an important meta-cognitive process which can influence a student's awareness regarding his/her own learning. Consequently, in this writing and progressive process, we (as readers and teachers) have been in contact with the verbalisation of theoretical, technical, practical, personal and reflective aspects that had their particular contribution (and at different levels) to a transformative process through knowledge appropriation and (re)creation. Therefore, we simultaneously observed (i) a strand of theoretical systematisation of the readings, which was essential to develop a particular chosen subject and to transform their own knowledge about a theme, and (ii) a focus on questioning, critical reflection and personal growth through that process. This latter aspect may be more related to the need of a moment to "stop and think", as students often referred. It was, therefore, a moment of intimacy when each student had the opportunity to be in contact with his/her own personal knowledge. Consequently, we observed the importance that students gave to the recognition of themselves in the study, in the practice and in that particular job, as well as the importance in sharing and helping the colleague in the process of learning and development through the strategy of critical friendship.

These considerations lead us to emphasise that there was a recognition of theoretical and technical, practical, personal and reflective aspects, and also a choice more or less conscious about (i) what they said/ wrote, (ii) what they wanted to say/write, and (iii) how they wanted to say/ write/ share their ideas. Therefore, we may conclude that everything they had shared in their portfolios was the result of emotional thinking, but also of rational and cognitive decisions, since students knew that the product they had created would be assessed by the teacher-supervisor and read by one colleague – it was, simultaneously, a private and public task.

We conclude these initial remarks by stressing that, even though we set up some perspectives through which the narratives would be analysed, we must not forget that the discourse and its “texture” was deeply intricated and complex: we had found diverse inter-related aspects of semantic nature. Indeed, this is the reflection of the complexity of human beings as well as the teaching and learning process, and personal appropriation of knowledge.

4.2. Main Semantic Dimensions that Emerged from Personal Narratives

Throughout the portfolios’ analysis we can observe that it is, indeed, a powerful tool for reflection and knowledge (re)construction, as we have already mentioned previously. When analysing students’ speech (by doing a content analysis), the following dimensions emerged: (i) intrapersonal dimension, (ii) interpersonal dimension, and (iii) academic and professional dimension. As referred above, they are closely linked and in constant interaction. Therefore, we will try to approach each dimension isolatedly, even though it is difficult to establish the semantic borders, since the dimensions are deeply interrelated with each other. As we will present the main conclusions of the content analysis regarding each dimension/main category, we will present as well some snapshots of students’ writing

4.2.1. Intrapersonal Dimension

Regarding the intrapersonal perspective, the data pointed out “the awakening of curiosity and the need to do research” (St4) to build “the personal path” (St4) throughout the various Curricular Units of the Nursing Curriculum. Indeed, it was shown that the questioning process allowed “the reflective, as well as the growing and learning process and the motivation to continue” (St4). However, there was also evidence of some “anxiety” (St1) along the path, because of (i) the “discomfort of being alone” [in the process of growing, learning and being face-to-face with knowledge] (St1) and also (ii) their own “expectations” (St5) in achieving, by the end of the process, “a set of technical skills” (St1). However, students recognised that for a successful teaching and learning process “the preparation of such reflective documents, as well daily reflection are essential” (St3) for their personal and professional development. In fact, we had observed deep personal involvement of all students in building their own personal reflective journey, even though we may find that intrapersonal engagement with knowledge and critical spheres may be considered as belonging to different levels. This aspect emphasises that each student reflective journey was diverse from one another, due to the individual and complex nature of the learning process.

4.2.2. Interpersonal Dimension

All students have emphasised in their personal narratives that the sharing and supportive environment in which the knowledge (re)construction was contextualised was very important for their learning process, where the “other” (the critical friend, the teacher, the health team) played an essential role. For us, teachers, we understand that this environment was very important for the development of their personal and professional identity.

The students considered that “it was essential the availability of the health team” (St2), the indispensable “guidance of the teacher advisor” (St4), and the moments of “analysis within the group” (St4) to answer common concerns. In fact, despite the “singular reality” and context (St1, St4), there were many situations they felt as “really important to be reflected”

(St4). Among some of these situations we can highlight the individual protective measures, the security, the human condition, the human fundamental rights, the continuity and the complexity of health care. At the same time, in this dimension it was evident students' concerns about "the passage of the status of the person under care" (St4), "the involvement of the patients in their recovery process" (St3), the "emotional component" (St5) and the social and family support throughout the lifetime of a person (St2).

Consequently, we may conclude that students' interpersonal perspective was established between the following dyads: (i) student - student (where the strategy of critical friendship acquired great centrality); (ii) student - health team; (iii) student - teacher mentor/supervisor; (iv) student - patient; and (v) student - patient family. It was, therefore, very interesting to analyse the perspectives each student expressed and simultaneously intersected: an important dialogue and interconnection of each dimension (intra and interpersonal, and academic and professional) may be established, emphasising the richness of the students' discourse.

4.2.3. Academic and Professional Dimension

According to the latter comment, it is interesting to underline the importance that the academic-professional dimension had in the construction of each student portfolio: there was, in fact, a predominance of reflections about practice and professional issues. Since the beginning, there was a reference to a "balance of experiences" (St4) lived by each student personal point of view. This showed the need of (i) justifying the subject that each student approached in the weekly reflection, and (ii) reviewing previous aspects, establishing a coherent epistemological consistency in their personal narratives. In fact, when analysing their narratives, we had detected the existence of reflections about the conceptual development of different themes by "observing differences and gaps" between theory and practice (St2). We had also identified a critical consciousness shown by students who verbalised "some aspects that are not congruent in clinical practice" (St2). Consequently, this stimulated them to question themselves and the colleagues trying (i) to find answers in scientific evidence, (ii) to critically and constructively reflect on their actions, and (iii) to improve their practice by aiming excellence.

Therefore, we recognise that their narratives were mostly focused on issues related to practice based on scientific evidence, since they felt a great necessity and awareness of doing research, and promoting discussions regarding performance criteria, indicators, standards and guidelines that could identify good practice. In fact, students' reflections consciously revealed the need of changing some practices and enhancing the quality of health care. Accordingly, we had observed that students gave a great importance to the Code of Ethics, and to the involvement and responsibility of each health professional in fulfilling their duties.

Thus, this group of students had demonstrated a strong concern with the working methods adopted, and the risk of their work. Simultaneously, they had highlighted the importance of permanently enriching their intra and interpersonal path. Also, these students had mentioned other concerns: (i) the uncertainties about their professional future, and (ii) the desire of continuing this reflective process, since "it highlights them how reality is" (St2, St4).

Finally, it is important to highlight that the discovery process (Sá-Chaves, 2007), which the students had experienced and clearly demonstrated through their words, may be observed in those three dimensions: intrapersonal, interpersonal, and academic and professional. This fact is even more essential to be stressed, due to the role that the "other" (health team, critical

friend, patients, teacher-supervisor) had in the personal learning process: the student is in the path of continuously becoming more mature. This is, in fact, a consequence of his/her exposition to others and openness to a personal critical practice and process.

4.3. Students' Perspective about the Strategy of Critical Friendship

After doing a content analysis, we may identify three emergent dimensions regarding this aspect: (i) general considerations about this strategy, (ii) some disadvantages in its use, and (iii) its advantages. Again, some snapshots from students' personal words will be presented so we better highlight the main conclusions.

4.3.1. General Considerations

Surprisingly, students were very honest and mentioned the following:

- (i) This was seen as “an opportunity to reflect about different practices [teaching and learning] in a way I was not used to” (St5);
- (ii) “Due to the novelty of this strategy, firstly I was a little bit concerned” (St3).

Therefore, generically, this strategy was considered a “challenge that became extremely healthy” (St3). Simultaneously, this experience was understood as “a kind of debate around a hot topic [teaching, learning, assessment, reflection, knowledge construction]” (St3), where the great “expectation” of growing and learning was seen as a “very stimulating factor” (St3). This was, in essence, considered a “shared experience” (St3).

4.3.2. Disadvantages

Apart from those general considerations, this process was not regarded as particularly easy. Some disadvantages were felt by the students, such as:

- (i) “A great workload that sometimes becomes difficult to manage” (St5);
- (ii) The emergence “of some criticism that may eventually generate some discussions between the colleagues... even when it is a constructive criticism” (St5).

4.3.3. Advantages

Nevertheless, students believed that the advantages were extremely positive. On the one hand, students considered that the use of this strategy increased “the level of knowledge by the emergence of a constant need to conduct research” on several topics (St2, St3). On the other hand, students pointed out that “it (re)values the knowledge already acquired” (St3, St4), it “fosters the individual sensitivity” (St3) and it “promotes critical thinking” (St2, St3, St5).

To conclude, it was admitted that the strategy was an “advantage to the learning process, requiring the search for information about the topics” (St2) that raised questions or curiosity. Therefore, it was considered that “the workload compensates” (E2), mainly because it was an ongoing process of construction of personal, social, academic and professional identity.

4.4. The Construction of the Individual Learning Journey: An Overview

After having examined the common aspects that had emerged from the discourse of the personal narratives, we believe that it is extremely interesting to briefly analyse the construction of the individual reflective and personal journey. Therefore, we will take into account each individual student so we can also better understand how each of them perceived the entire strategy and, above all, his/her personal development and relationship with knowledge. Again, we will capture some snapshots of students' words, which stress the conclusions we will present.

Firstly, student 1 (St1) showed an evolution in the choice of the themes he selected every week: this student started with more "external" themes and then continued to the discussion of more "internal" and ethic subjects. Although this student had usually justified his choices, he had revealed a growing sensitivity in the way he verbalised the relationship between theory and practice. Simultaneously, he started to progressively be involved in a more personal, critical and questioning perspective. There was, therefore, a clear desire of engaging in a personal and professional growing. The following statement, chosen from his meta-reflection (the final narrative), can demonstrate those conclusions:

“The preparation of this document also enabled this critical development in a constructive and responsible way: I tried to transmit some of the most significant aspects of my learning and to reflect about my behaviours, feelings, and technical procedures as a nursing student. So I tried to contribute to the development and improvement of new personal and professional competences.” (St1)

On the other hand, student 2 (St2) had expressed more maturity since his first personal narrative. He had always justified his motivations for choosing the weekly theme, although his reflections were greatly focused on a more theoretical perspective. However, since the first narrative, this student had demonstrated a personal touch referring to the personal driver in approaching the chosen issue. He had always manifested both personal and professional points of view. In addition, we can observe, throughout his speech, an evolution in his critical position, personal observations and questioning. In fact, St2 had the opportunity to develop his self-critical perspective, becoming more accurate every week. Therefore, allied to theoretical issues strongly discussed and supported, he highlighted a personal positioning. Once again, we stress a quotation we may find in his meta-reflection that proves those considerations:

“(…) I hope to continue to learn in order to increase my knowledge even more. And I hope this can be reflected on the provision of care to patients and on my own way of being, as a person.” (St2)

Student 3 (St3) also revealed a growing maturity. This student used to choose controversial topics that were pertinent to his practice and to himself, as a person: the themes were simultaneously based on technical aspects of the nursing practice and on human aspects, enabling deep discussions regarding the human identity. This showed, thus, a profound capacity for reflection and criticism, where a questioning perspective was always used, and a careful and attentive combination of theory and practice was developed. Consequently, we could see that this student clearly revealed a desire of changing practices and attitudes, trying to achieve

a greater quality in his daily practice. In fact, this professional awareness demonstrated a perspective based on the need of constant personal reflection about the work previously done by each member of the team, in order to always improve the quality of care and services. This student also shared that the whole experience (both of writing personal narratives for a reflective portfolio, and the critical friendship strategy) was extremely valuable, of great enrichment and insight for him as a person and professional. Once more, we highlight an excerpt we may find in his meta-reflection:

“Critical thinking is an essential feature in a nursing student. It is necessary to assume that there are flaws and mistakes, but also that many things are done in a correct way. Therefore, it is important to understand our characteristics as human beings and professionals, and always do more and better.” (St3)

Regarding the path of the student 4 (St4), we may point out that he had a similar path to St1, mainly in what concerned the evolution demonstrated in the choice of the themes: this student started with the discussion of technical topics and evolved to ethical and deontological ones. Simultaneously, there was a profound (qualitative) evolution in approaching the chosen subjects: we had observed a continuously deeper positioning, as well as critical and personal questioning, revealing a greater cognitive appropriation of various issues and practices. This student mentioned that he felt enriched by having the opportunity of developing a portfolio and practicing the strategy of critical friendship. Therefore, he considered he had developed his critical thinking, especially in what regards his own path and development. We also point out an extract from his meta-reflection:

“A great advantage of this methodology is the possibility of thinking about our doubts, also knowing how to solve them in a short period of time. (...) Reaching this stage, and being closer to the end of the course, I will be face-to-face with professional responsibilities and obligations of diverse dimensions. Consequently, I think that, at this stage of my undergraduate course, it is essential to develop these essential skills: critical thinking and the ability to analyse and reflect about what surrounds me. In fact, these are, indeed, essential skills of a professional nurse throughout his life time.” (St4)

To conclude, student 5 (St5) showed a discourse and a perspective too much focused on technical aspects, even though trying to combine theory and practice. However, his concerns were more centred on a literature review regarding a topic which had raised some particular interest to him. When approaching different issues, however, this student did not seem to show many intra and interpersonal concerns. Also, we felt an absence of a critical and questioning perspective. In fact, although this student had demonstrated some critical evolution, this was weaker compared with his colleagues' path. This may be justified by the personal perspective and engagement in approaching the potential use of the portfolio construction and the critical friendship strategy. We believe that these processes will only be truly potentiated when each person is not afraid of being involved in the “essence” of those strategies. Only then, the person will be deeply engaged in the process and will be really developing critical, flexible and cross-cutting skills.

4.5. Limitations and Implications of the Study

Before concluding this data analysis and discussion, we may highlight that this analysis (and above all, the opportunity given to students for them to construct their portfolios) shows that each student had his/her own perspective and attitude towards life, themselves, others and their profession. Also, their personal reflective narratives and discourses demonstrated to be powerful vehicles to understand a particular reality regarding a (public) piece of the knowledge (re)construction.

Even though we have presented a pedagogical experience which is new at the Portuguese Health Institution in which we have supported this study (since no other teacher has ever used this teaching, learning and assessment strategy at a Nursing Practicum), we are aware that the small number of students involved in this study do not allow us to generalise the conclusions we have presented along this paper. Nevertheless, we may consider that these strategies (the portfolio construction and the critical friendship) are extremely important to be developed in an undergraduate course, due to the potentialities they have, as already demonstrated by several international studies pointed out in the literature review (topic 2 of this paper) whose conclusions may be considered closely related to the discussion here promoted. More specifically, being an assessment task, the construction of a reflective portfolio and development of critical friendship may be seen as positive ways of observing the knowledge (re)construction through different lenses and perspectives, as well as the development of specific and general competences and skills.

Finally, we must emphasise that this study may be very important within the context of the specific Portuguese Health Institution, since the success of those strategies may stimulate other members of staff to start being engaged with (i) the promotion of other “innovative” teaching, learning and assessment strategies in their classes, (ii) the discussion of those pedagogical strategies with their colleagues, and (iii) the dissemination of their pedagogical experiences, by reflecting on positive and negative aspects, always with the purpose of enhancing the quality of the teaching and learning process. Also, this study may be considered another successful example in what concerns the development of these pedagogical strategies (portfolio and critical friendship) within the context of Higher Education in general, and the Nursing undergraduate course in particular.

5. Final Remarks about this Pedagogical Experience

In a world characterised by constant changes, even in knowledge (Barnett, 1994), we believe that the use of reflective portfolios and the critical friendship strategy will help students to develop critical skills that are not possible to be enhanced when the teaching and learning strategy chosen by the teacher is only based on passive academic practices. In fact, critical, reflective and questioning capacity, epistemologically rooted, need to be stimulated in proper pedagogical environments, and HE teachers need to promote and open themselves (and also the students) to unpredictability and consciousness regarding the intra and interpersonal mechanisms of knowledge (re)construction. In this sense, assessment in particular, as well as the diversity of teaching and learning strategies, must be directed to promote the “learner empowerment” and must be understood as a tool to stimulate “lifelong learning” (Davies & LeMahieu, 2003; Falchikov & Thomson, 2008). In fact: “Education is about the future.” (Bowden & Marton, 1998, p.11).

Thus, the pedagogical process designed by the teacher must take into account the development of generic competences which, allied with specific ones, will be extremely important for the student to enhance his/her professional and also lifelong learning competences

“Human beings are (...) both being and becoming, and these are inextricably intertwined, since growth and development in the one affects the growth and development of the other. Learning is, therefore, existential and experiential.” (Jarvis, 2007, p.2)

Accordingly, we consider that the strategy of critical friendship as horizontal assessment methodology in the process of supervision in a context of Nursing Practicum has great advantages and it is perfectly possible to be used. It allows the teacher/supervisor/reader to better understand the individual experience of each student and the intimate process of constructing his/her personal and professional identity in a social environment. It enhances, therefore, the process of intra and interpersonal growth. Nevertheless, we understand that it is very important to actively be engaged in such assessment and learning methodologies so each person can benefit from the richness of deep learning.

Taking into account the results previously presented and all the discussion throughout this paper, we may conclude that the use of portfolios and critical friendship may be powerful strategies to stimulate students to be involved in the entire and holistic process of learning. As previously referred:

“This view of learning addresses the cognitive, metacognitive, and social-emotional aspects of thinking. If teachers direct their teaching at these aspects of the learning process, they are more likely to help their students use effective learning processes and strategies.” (Chalmers & Fuller, 1996, p.19)

This quotation, as others we could choose, emphasises both teacher and student roles, particularly at a HE level, extremely demanding and challenging which asks for and requires a great implication in the learning process from different perspectives. But, from the dyad student-teacher perspective we can not forget to mention their important responsibilities:

“(...) university teachers should address four aspects in order to encourage students to adopt a deep approach: intrinsic motivation, active involvement in learning, interaction with others, and development of a well-structured knowledge base.” (Chalmers & Fuller, 1996, p.32-33)

This is, therefore, what we consider it was involved in the successful experience that we have presented in the paper. Nevertheless, our personal and professional questioning must continue to be enhanced by engaging in the development of other pedagogical experiences, hoping this will have a positive impact on students' holistic growth.

References

- Andreu, R., Canós, L., de Juana, S., Manresa, E., Rienda, L., & Tari, J.J. (2003). Critical friends: A tool for quality improvement in universities. *Quality Assurance in Education*, 11(1), 31-36.
- Apóstolo, J. (2001). Portfolio de evidências de aprendizagem como instrumento de inovação pedagógica no ensino clínico de enfermagem / Learning portfolio as an instrument of pedagogical innovation in Nursing Practicum. *Referência / Reference Journal*, 6, 15-21.

- Bardin, L. (1995). *Análise de Conteúdo / Content Analysis*. Lisboa: Edições 70.
- Barnett, R. (1994). *The limits of competence: Knowledge, higher education and society*. Buckingham: SRHE & Open University Press.
- Berbel, N., Oliveira, C., & Vasconcellos, M. (2006). Práticas Avaliativas Consideradas Positivas por Alunos do Ensino Superior: Aspectos didático-pedagógicos / Evaluative practices considered positive by HE students: Didactical and pedagogical aspects. *Estudos em Avaliação Educacional / Studies in Educational Assessment*, 17(35), 135-158.
- Biggs, J. (2007). *Teaching for quality learning at university*. Berkshire : McGraw-Hill.
- Bogdan, R., & Biklen, S. (2006). *Qualitative Research for Education: An Introduction to Theories and Methods*. United States: Allyn & Bacon.
- Bowden, J., & Marton, F. (1998). *The University of Learning: Beyond quality and competence in higher education*. London: Kogan Page.
- Buckley, S., Coleman, J., Davison, I., Khan, K.S., Zamora, J., Malick, S., Morley, D., Pollard, D., Ashcroft, T., Popovic, C., & Sayers, J. (2009). The educational effects of portfolios on undergraduate student learning. *Medical Teacher*, 31, 340-355.
- Capucha, L., Almeida, J., Pedroso, P., & Silva, J. (2006). Metodologias de avaliação: O estado da arte em Portugal / Evaluation methodology: State of the art in Portugal. *Sociologia , Problemas e Práticas / Sociology, Problems and Practices*, 22, 9-27.
- Chalmers, D., & Fuller, R. (1996). *Teaching for Learning at University: Theory and Practice*. London: Kogan Page.
- Costa, A.L., & Kallick, B. (1993). Through the lens of a critical friend. Available at: <http://imet.csus.edu/imet11/507/CriticalFriends.pdf>
- Davies, A., & LeMahieu, P. (2003). Assessment for Learning: Reconsidering Portfolios and research Evidence. In M. Segers *et al.* (eds.), *Optimising New Modes of Assessment: In Search of Qualities and Standards* (141-169). The Netherlands: Kluwer Academic Publishers.
- Falchikov, N. (2005). *Improving assessment through student involvement: practical solutions for aiding learning in higher and further education*. London: Routledge Falmer.
- Falchikov, N., & Thomson, K. (2008). Assessment: What drives innovation? *Journal of University Teaching and Learning Practice*, 5(1), 49-60.
- Francis, D. (1995). The reflective journal. A window to preservice teachers' practical knowledge. *Teaching & Teacher Education*, 11(3), 229-241.
- Franco, J. (2008). Ensino Clínico de Enfermagem: Um modelo de supervisão / Nursing Practicum: A supervisory model. *Revista de Enfermagem UFPE / Nursing Journal*, 2(1), 96-102.
- Golby, M., & Appleby, R. (1995). Reflective practice through critical friendship: Some possibilities. *Cambridge Journal of Education*, 25(2), 149-160.
- Jarvis, P. (2007). Towards a philosophy of human learning: An existentialist perspective. In P. Jarvis & S. Parker (ed.). *Human learning: An holistic approach*. (1-15). London & New York: Routledge.
- Kirk, M.F. (1997). Using Portfolios to Enhance Student Learning and Assessment. *The Journal of Physical Education, Recreation & Dance*, 68.
- Merino, M., Higarashi, I., Carvalho, M., & Pelloso, S. (2006). Instrumentos e Técnicas Avaliativas de Estudantes de Enfermagem / Instruments and techniques to evaluate Nursing students. *Ciência , Cuidado e Saúde / Science, Care and Health*, 5(2), 147-157.
- Prosser, M., & Trigwell, K. (1999). *Understanding Learning and Teaching: The experience in Higher Education*. Buckingham: SRHE & Open University Press.
- Ramsden, P. (1992). *Learning to teach in Higher Education*. London: Routledge.
- Sá-Chaves, I. (2007). *Formação , Conhecimento e Supervisão . Contributos nas áreas da formação de professores e de outros profissionais/Training, Development and Supervision. Contributes in the area of teachers' training and other professionals*. Aveiro: Universidade de Aveiro.

- Sá-Chaves, I. (2007). *Portefólios Reflexivos – Estratégias de Formação e de Supervisão / Reflective Portfolios – Training and Supervisory Strategies*. Formação de Professores, Cadernos Didáticos – Série Supervisão 1. Aveiro: Universidade de Aveiro.
- Sá-Chaves, I. (org.) (2005). *Os Portefólios reflexivos (também) trazem gente dentro. Reflexões sobre o seu uso na humanização dos processos educativos / Reflective portfolios (also) bring people inside. Reflections about its use in the humanisation of the educational process*. Porto: Porto Editora.
- Schön, D.A. (1983). *The Reflective Practitioner: How professionals think in action*. London: Temple Smith.
- Schön, D.A. (1990). *Educating the reflective practitioner*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Souza, N.A. (2005). Avaliação de Competências: O aperfeiçoamento profissional na área de enfermagem / Competences' assessment: Professional enhancement in Nursing. *Estudos em Avaliação Educacional / Studies in Educational Assessment*, 16(32), 57-80.
- Sutherland, P., & Crowther, J. (2008). Introduction: The 'lifelong learning imagination'. In P. Sutherland & J. Crowther (eds.). *Lifelong learning: Concepts and contexts*. (3-11). London & New York: Routledge.
- Vala, J. (1999). A Análise de Conteúdo/Content Analysis. In A.S. Silva & J.M. Pinto (eds.), *Metodologia das Ciências Sociais / Social Sciences Methodology*. Porto: Edições Afrontamento.
- Van Tartwijk, J., & Driessen, E.W. (2009). Portfolios for assessment and learning. *Medical Teacher*, 31, 790-801.
- Yin, R. (2007). *Case study research: Design and methods*. Thousand Oaks: Sage.

About the Authors

Rui Gonçalves

Rui Filipe Lopes Gonçalves has a degree in Nursing, Post-graduate in Medical-Surgical Nursing and Master in Addiction and Psychosocial Pathologies. He is nursing teacher at Nursing School of Coimbra (Portugal) and researcher at the Health Sciences Research Unit: Nursing Domain (UICISA-dE) and researcher at the Research Centre for Didactics and Technology in Teacher Education. Currently is a Ph.D. student at the Laboratory for the Evaluation of Educational Quality in Higher Education (Research Centre for Didactics and Technology in Teacher Education) at the University of Aveiro, Portugal. His Ph.D. in Didactics is about the nursing teachers' conceptions of assessment in practicum, one of the main research interests at the moment. Among others, his interests include new teaching and learning approaches and linking teaching and research in nursing teaching.

Ana Vitória Baptista

Ana Vitória Baptista has a Master in Education about non-traditional adult students at the University. Currently she is a PhD student at the Laboratory for the Evaluation of Educational Quality in Higher Education (Research Centre for Didactics and Technology in Teacher Education) at the University of Aveiro, Portugal. Her PhD in Education is about the quality evaluation of postgraduate research supervision in Portuguese Higher Education, one of the main research interests. Among others, her interests are focused on Higher Education issues, particularly on new teaching and learning approaches, linking teaching and research, non-traditional publics, quality assessment and assurance, teachers and research supervisors' professional development.

Catarina Lobão

Catarina Alexandra Rodrigues Faria Lobão has a degree in Nursing, Post-graduate in Medical-Surgical Nursing and Master in Family and Social Systems and currently is a Ph.D. student at the University of Extremadura, Badajoz (Spain). She is nursing teacher at School of Health Sciences in Polytechnic Institute of Leiria (Portugal) and researcher at the Health Sciences Research Unit: Nursing Domain (UICISA-dE) hosted in Nursing School of Coimbra (Portugal). Her Ph.D. in Psychology is about the impact of celiac disease on quality of life of adult celiac person, one of the main research interests at the moment. Among others, her interests include new teaching and learning approaches in nursing teaching.

António Melo

Polytechnic Institute of Guarda, Portugal



EDITORS

Mary Kalantzis, University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign, USA.

Bill Cope, University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign, USA.

EDITORIAL ADVISORY BOARD

Michael Apple, University of Wisconsin, Madison, USA.

David Barton, Lancaster University, Milton Keynes, UK.

Mario Bello, University of Science, Cuba.

Manuela du Bois-Reymond, Universiteit Leiden, Leiden, The Netherlands.

Robert Devillar, Kennesaw State University, Kennesaw, USA.

Daniel Madrid Fernandez, University of Granada, Spain.

Ruth Finnegan, Open University, Milton Keynes, UK.

James Paul Gee, University of Wisconsin, Madison, USA.

Juana M. Sancho Gil, University of Barcelona, Barcelona, Spain.

Kris Gutierrez, University of California, Los Angeles, USA.

Anne Hickling-Hudson, Queensland University of Technology, Kelvin Grove, Australia.

Roz Ivanic, Lancaster University, Lancaster, UK.

Paul James, RMIT University, Melbourne, Australia.

Carey Jewitt, Institute of Education, University of London, London, UK.

Andreas Kazamias, University of Wisconsin, Madison, USA.

Peter Kell, University of Wollongong, Wollongong, Australia.

Michele Knobel, Montclair State University, Montclair, USA.

Gunther Kress, Institute of Education, University of London, London, UK.

Colin Lankshear, James Cook University, Cairns, Australia.

Kimberly Lawless, University of Illinois, Chicago, USA.

Sarah Michaels, Clark University, Worcester, USA.

Jeffrey Mok, Miyazaki International College, Miyazaki, Japan.

Denise Newfield, University of Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, South Africa.

Ernest O'Neil, Ministry of Education, Sana'a, Yemen.

José-Luis Ortega, University of Granada, Granada, Spain.

Francisco Fernandez Palomares, University of Granada, Granada, Spain.

Ambigapathy Pandian, Universiti Sains Malaysia, Penang, Malaysia.

Miguel A. Pereyra, University of Granada, Granada, Spain.

Scott Poynting, Manchester Metropolitan University, Manchester, UK.

Angela Samuels, Montego Bay Community College, Montego Bay, Jamaica.

Michel Singh, University of Western Sydney, Sydney, Australia.

Helen Smith, RMIT University, Melbourne, Australia.

Richard Sohmer, Clark University, Worcester, USA.

Brian Street, University of London, London, UK.

Giorgos Tsiakalos, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, Thessaloniki, Greece.

Salim Vally, University of Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, South Africa.

Gella Varnava-Skoura, National and Kapodistrian University of Athens, Athens, Greece.

Cecile Walden, Sam Sharpe Teachers College, Montego Bay, Jamaica.

Nicola Yelland, Victoria University, Melbourne, Australia.

Wang Yingjie, Beijing Normal University, Beijing, China.

Zhou Zuoyu, Beijing Normal University, Beijing, China.

THE UNIVERSITY PRESS JOURNALS



www.Arts-Journal.com



www.Book-Journal.com



www.Climate-Journal.com



www.ConstructedEnvironment.com



www.Design-Journal.com



www.Diversity-Journal.com



www.GlobalStudiesJournal.com



www.Humanities-Journal.com



www.OnTheImage.com



www.Learning-Journal.com



www.Management-Journal.com



www.Museum-Journal.com



www.ReligionInSociety.com



www.Science-Society.com



<http://www.SocialSciences-Journal.com>



www.SpacesAndFlows.com



www.SportAndSociety.com



www.Sustainability-Journal.com



www.Technology-Journal.com



www.UlJournal.com



www.Universities-Journal.com

FOR SUBSCRIPTION INFORMATION, PLEASE CONTACT
subscriptions@commongroundpublishing.com