



# An exploration of a restorative space: A creative approach to reflection for nurse lecturer's focused on experiences of compassion in the workplace



Stephen Smith <sup>a,\*</sup>, Mandy Gentleman <sup>a,1</sup>, Daphne Loads <sup>b,2</sup>, Simon Pullin <sup>c</sup>

<sup>a</sup> Edinburgh Napier University, Sighthill Campus, Room 4B29, Sighthill Court, Edinburgh EH11 4BN, United Kingdom

<sup>b</sup> Edinburgh University, Teviot Place, Edinburgh EH8 9AG, United Kingdom

<sup>c</sup> NHS Lothian, United Kingdom

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## ABSTRACT

This study was undertaken as part of a larger programme of research; the Leadership in Compassionate Care Programme. The aim of this study was to explore and respond to the perceptions of nurse lecturers in regard to experiences of compassion in the workplace. A participatory action research approach was adopted. The study took place in a large school of nursing and midwifery in the United Kingdom, eight lecturers participated in this study. A series of four facilitated reflective workshops titled a restorative space were provided and participants used the medium of collage as a process for reflection. Data was gathered in the form of collages, field and reflective notes. Data analysis involved an iterative process between facilitators and participants during the workshops and resulting actions were implemented. Findings from this study identified three key themes related to compassion in the workplace; leadership, culture, professional and personal development. Actions identified and implemented as a consequence of these findings included opportunities for lecturers to participate in a leadership development programme and implementing rapid feedback processes between lecturers and the senior management team. The restorative space workshops and utilisation of the creative medium of collage provided a valuable process for practitioners to collaboratively reflect on their workplace experiences.

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## Introduction

The aim of this research was to explore the perceptions and experiences of nurse lecturers through an intervention entitled a restorative space. This adopted the format of four facilitated workshops utilising creative approaches to facilitate reflective discussions about compassion in the workplace (university).

This research was conducted in a large school of nursing and midwifery that has 129 staff and 30 joint appointments. There are approximately 2200 undergraduate and 300 postgraduate students. The school provides nursing programmes across the four fields of practice and midwifery at undergraduate and postgraduate level and delivers programmes internationally.

This study focused on developing research originally undertaken as part of a larger research programme known as the Leadership in Compassionate Care Programme (LCCP) (Edinburgh Napier University and NHS Lothian, 2012). The aims of the LCCP were to embed compassionate care in clinical and educational practice within NHS Lothian and

Edinburgh Napier University. The LCCP encompassed four key strands of work: developing compassionate clinical practice; supporting newly qualified practitioners; leadership development and undergraduate nurse education. This paper focuses on the undergraduate strand of the programme, which commenced with a series of focus groups with lecturers and student nurses exploring teaching and learning about compassionate care and experiences of compassionate ways of working in the university and clinical practice. A key outcome from the initial research highlighted a need for lecturers to have opportunities to reflect, this paper explores the processes and outcomes of this activity which took the form of a restorative space.

## Background to This Study

In recent years there has been an increased local, national and international focus on the perceived lack of care and compassion within health services. Increasing emphasis being placed on the human dimension of caring in healthcare and the provision of compassionate care features significantly in many recent policy documents and has ignited the debate about the teaching and measuring of compassionate care in education and practice (Scottish Government Health Department [SGHD], 2010a; Darzi, 2008; Iles and Vaughan Smith, 2009). In England in 2012, the Department of Health published a paper titled; Compassion

\* Corresponding author.

E-mail addresses: [ste.smith@napier.ac.uk](mailto:ste.smith@napier.ac.uk) (S. Smith), [M.Gentleman@napier.ac.uk](mailto:M.Gentleman@napier.ac.uk) (M. Gentleman), [daphne.loads@ed.ac.uk](mailto:daphne.loads@ed.ac.uk) (D. Loads).

<sup>1</sup> Tel.: +44 131 455 5675; fax: +44 131 455 5631.

<sup>2</sup> Tel.: +44 131 651 4519; fax: +44 131 650 6909.

in practice Nursing, Midwifery and Care Staff, our vision and strategy (Department of Health, 2012). This strategy document drew on the views of thousands of staff and identified compassion as one of six core values and behaviours; the others being care, competence, communication, courage and commitment. It is evident that the issue of providing compassionate practice has received prominence and the focus persists on how to consistently deliver this across services.

Compassionate care can be difficult to define; it varies in context and is often viewed as being individual and subjective and therefore difficult to articulate and specifically to measure. One of the more simple definitions of compassion is: “a deep awareness of the suffering of another coupled with the wish to relieve it” (Chochinov, 2007, p187) and the giving of compassionate care involves an emotional connection on the part of those giving and receiving such care (Frank, 2004). The current healthcare culture focuses, and measures quality, safety and reliability of care on the more easily measured outcomes, such as recording the number of patients who fall within a hospital setting (Scottish Government Health Department 2008) and recording and reducing the number of hospital acquired infections (Scottish Government Health Department, 2010a) both of which go some way to demonstrating the quality of care with easily identifiable and measurable outcomes. In contrast, the identification and measurement of softer caring skills are more difficult to quantify and measure (Smith, 2008) but increasingly it is being recognised that alongside clinical competence, it is the small acts of kindness and human connection demonstrated by health care professionals that is often remembered and appreciated by patients and relatives (King's Fund, 2009). It is within this important context that nurse lecturers require to develop and foster the compassionate attributes of students.

University faculty development is not considered to be a single activity but one which is a continuous process that includes opportunities for reflection, review of assumptions and active participation by individuals within the faculty in these processes (Alteen and Didham, 2009). Role expectations for nursing faculty lecturers can be varied and challenging, multiple demands can result in tensions arising between priorities. Faculty structures and expectations in workload can restrict creative thinking in relation to faculty organisation and output (Bartels, 2007). It has been identified that lecturers require support in their roles to ensure they are productive and wish to develop and sustain their academic practice. Bartels (2007) proposes that academic cultures need to ensure opportunities for staff mentoring and discussion.

Balmer and Richards' (2012) study explored how supporting lecturers in a medical faculty to develop their personal reflection and form supportive interpersonal relationships fostered positive change at an individual level and influenced relationships across the faculty. As a consequence this enabled individuals to consider implementation of change and constructively challenge established “ways of working”. Changes in teaching were also observed as a result of a greater understanding of what was important to lecturers.

Loads (2009) suggests that providing a space where lecturers are able to create images, facilitated alternative methods of communication and reflection and supported open and transparent communication. This space also creates an opportunity for lecturers to take some time for themselves; reflecting and discussing with colleagues.

As part of focus groups undertaken during the initial phases of the LCCP, lecturers voiced perceptions that they were expected to provide, and nurture the compassionate and caring attributes of student nurses but, they had little time and limited opportunities to take time to reflect and prepare for this role (Edinburgh Napier University and NHS Lothian, 2012). Loads (2009) acknowledged artistry in relation to academic development but recognised that personal development and wellbeing of staff are not entirely mainstream in the world of academia.

From this literature it is evident that increasing, varied workloads and multiple priorities highlight a need to pragmatically support lecturers in reflection. McElroy (1997) identified that having the opportunity to reflect was considered to be fundamental in academic practice however it can be perceived as unattainable. This research will explore a

creative opportunity for nurse lecturer's to reflect on their practice and workplace (a restorative space), their reflections and responsive actions will be presented.

Although reflective activities have been present for several decades (Boud, 1985; Schon, 1983) implementing these into practice remains challenging. Somerville and Keeling (2004) identified that motivation, time, career commitment and commitment to patients and families are important factors as well as a practical working knowledge of reflective processes. Despite such challenges reflection has been utilised as a key learning process for students, an important example being the reflective resource developed by the Royal College of Nursing where students learn and demonstrate understanding of the Principles of Nursing Practice (Royal College of Nursing, 2013).

Recent educational research focused on supporting students with reflection and developing competencies of teachers identified; ‘Consensus about what is good education in developing nursing students’ reflection skills lead to the development of a validated framework of teacher competences. In developing reflection skills, nursing students need guidance of a teacher and tailor-made coaching is especially important to support students to grow... teachers have to see to it that students also formulate intentions for future practice (Dekker-Groen et al., 2011). It is evident from this recent research that an understanding of the processes and function of reflection and how lecturers develop their competence, is an area which continues to develop.

#### *Utilising an Action Research Approach*

This research adopted principles of Action Research (AR). The rationale for this approach was to allow a participatory exploration of educational practice and organisational experience of compassionate care leading to practice developments. AR has contributed to educational and social science and it has been identified that the knowledge produced as a consequence of AR is “different”, more directly meaningful to practitioners (Meyer, 2006). Developments are more likely to become embedded and sustained in practice as AR facilitates the development of both practitioners and practice (Binnie and Titchen, 1999). Coghlan (2001) suggests that nurse lecturers are becoming increasingly engaged with AR as they can see benefits of the process and the impact on educational practice.

Richardson (1994) proposed that nurse lecturers need to actively contribute to educational research in order for it to be real and meaningful to practice. Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1993) highlighted that nurse lecturers are in a unique position to provide insight into the educational requirements of students because of the relationships they form with their students, and Kemmis & McTaggart (1988) proposed that if nurse lecturers conduct the research themselves then the findings were more likely to be considered relevant and directly applicable. Diagram 1 outlines the cyclical nature of action research in regard to the restorative space process, taking into account reflecting, planning action, taking and evaluating action. Following the four restorative space workshops, a variety of processes and activities were used to engage with staff in the development and evaluation of resulting actions, for example establishing a small working group to take forward rapid feedback process within the school and using school meetings/forums to debate and review with staff. To practically support staff engagement email information, posters and presentations were used during the implementation and evaluation phase.

#### *Ethical Issues*

The authors of this paper proposed an intervention where lecturers could reflect on their practice in facilitated group sessions in the form of a ‘restorative space’. This intervention was supported by the Head of School. Ethical approval for the undergraduate strand of the LCCP was granted by Edinburgh Napier University.

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