

**INTERNAL REPRESENTATION IN NURSE EDUCATION:  
IMAGERY AND IDENTITY**

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## **ABSTRACT**

The main aim of this thesis was to examine internal representation in the context of nurse education using two main output variables – namely imagery and identity. The initial basic argument for the thesis was that procedures to facilitate the acquisition of psychomotor skills that have been developed in sports science could fruitfully be applied to the development of skills in other areas, such as nurse education. Study one approached this through the use of an imagery training programme – PETTLEP (Holmes & Collins, 2001) on an undergraduate nursing curriculum. PETTLEP served as the independent variable with the dependent variable – performance - being measured through Objective Structured Clinical Examinations (OSCEs). Unexpected results revealed no significant differences between the control and experimental groups, with the control group actually performing better overall. Given this, the explicit choice was made to pursue investigation into the other plausible factors affecting behaviour, in order to explicate and underpin the results obtained. Study two investigated students' perceptions of and preparation for the OSCEs using a skills training questionnaire. Results revealed common concerns, specifically related to skills practice. Furthermore these concerned the amount of practice time provided; the practice environment; and the amount of support and training during teaching. In light of these findings, study three pursued a contrasting and comparative investigation from the professionals' perspective on the curriculum. This specifically examined perceptions of the assessment structure and expectations within the curriculum; the content of the curriculum; levels of support and provision for training; and the application of theory and practice. This aimed to identify any coherent or conflicting views between the students' receiving the curriculum and the staff delivering the curriculum. Results revealed coherency in the professional view that theory and practice were equally as important for nurse education. However, students commonly perceived practice as the most important aspect. Also, some students often struggled to apply theory to practice and vice versa. In light of this it became apparent that students may in fact identify differently with the content of the curriculum. Therefore, appraisal of the content may have different significance for students and affect behaviour differently both internally and/or externally. Study four investigated this using Identity Structure Analysis (ISA)/Ipseus (Weinreich & Saunderson, 2003). This explored how students applied themselves to the various aspects of nursing in the contexts of healthcare and broader affiliations, and how these fitted into students' broader sense of identity. It also looked at typologies within nursing and whether identity fitted into three distinct categories depending on construals. Study five followed this up using two individual case studies. The purpose of this was to encapsulate meaning behind individual construals and typologies and explicate the findings of ISA/Ipseus and the implications for nurse education. Results found that construals are grounded in experiences which can affect development, behaviour and identity towards nursing and the broader affiliations in individuals' lives. In conclusion identity in nursing should be investigated further in order to provide stronger evidence in regards to typologies and how these may be influencing students' behaviour and development in nurse education. Such research could have important implications for the future of nurse education and be a positive step towards future curriculum revisions.

## **DEDICATION**

To Emma for her positive outlook even during challenging times - wherever you go, whatever the weather, you always bring your own sunshine ☺

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