EXPLORING THE USE OF THE PERSONAL AND ACADEMIC DEVELOPMENT PORTFOLIO IN A SCHOOL OF NURSING IN KWAZULU-NATAL: THE MASTERS STUDENTS' PERSPECTIVE

A Dissertation submitted to College of Health Science, School of Nursing and Public health, University of KwaZulu-Natal in partial fulfilment for a Master's Degree in Nursing (Education)

BY

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my mom and dad, who have been there since my first day of school, encouraging, supporting and praying for my success in education. To my husband, Siphiwe, for your love that strengthens me. My children Siphesihle; Loluthando; Nakokonke and Sisekelo. You are my future. Trust in God.

DECLARATION

I Mary Patience Nkomo declare that this dissertation titled "Exploring the use of Personal and Academic Development Portfolio [PADP] as a learning tool in a school of Nursing in Kwazulu Natal: The masters' students perspective" is my original work and has not been submitted for a degree in this or any other University. All sources used or quoted have been acknowledged by means of referencing

SIGNED

Student……………………………….Date:…………………Signature………………

Supervisor…………………………….Date:…………………Signature……………….

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

ABSTRACT

Background: The use of portfolios for learning and assessment purposes is becoming a common trend globally. The school investigated in this study started using Personal and Academic Development Portfolios (PADP) in 1997, but there is limited research done in this area.

Purpose: The purpose of this study was to explore the use of the Personal and Academic Development Portfolio (PADP) as a learning tool in a school of nursing in a selected university in Kwazulu-Natal from the perspective of masters students.

Methodology: A qualitative exploratory approach guided by the constructivists' paradigm was adopted in this study. The population was formed by two cohorts of masters' students and data was collected using a focus group and individual interviews. The total sample size was 11. Data was analysed qualitatively and a number of themes and subthemes emerged. Ethical clearance was obtained from the university ethics board and ethical principles were observed throughout the study.

Findings: Main themes in this study included conceptualisation of the PADP as a learning tool; perceived contributions of the different elements of the PADP; participants' perceptions of characteristics of the teaching and learning process; participants' perceptions on available support in using the PADP as a learning tool; nature of the student; perceived outcomes of using the PADP as a learning tool; and challenges. PADP was conceptualised as an unfamiliar educational tool, but a tool that promotes competency-oriented learning, self-directed learning and self-regulated learning. Data revealed that elements of the PADP

facilitated development of a number of skills. Although support was available to the students, this study highlighted the need to strengthen student support. Data revealed a number of challenges as well as positive outcomes associated with using the PADP as a learning tool.

Recommendations: Recommendations included the integration of the portfolio activities in the educational plans of the program so that there is time allocated for portfolio activities especially for facilitator support and collection of evidence which challenged the participants. Another recommendation is the use of the e-portfolio and online support as the program attracts mainly adult learners who are studying part-time.

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INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

1.1 Introduction

Globally, higher education institutions have increasingly been using portfolios as a tool for both learning and assessment since the late 1980s (Gordon, 2003b). Literature affirms an increased interest in portfolios, especially within professional education departments and schools (McMullan, 2006). The use of portfolios has been introduced into schools which follow self-directed learning principles, as well as those following the principles of adult learning (McMullan, 2006): (Buyukduman and Sirin, 2010). The English National Board for Nursing, Midwifery and Health Visiting in the United Kingdom has made it compulsory for their students to keep a portfolio throughout their training to provide evidence of their achievements and progress (McMullan, 2006). In Australia, portfolios are used to show continued competence of nurses and midwives and are submitted to the regulatory bodies as well as employers for relicensing and to continue practising (Mills, 2009). There is also increased evidence in literature showing that professionals are required to keep portfolios when they start practicing in other health professions, such as medicine, pharmacy and dietetics to show evidence of continuing professional development (Pearson and Heywood, 2004); (Austin et al., 2005) ; (Brennan and Lennie, 2010).

Portfolios are based on the theory of adult learning (Knowles, 1975) and governed by the principles of self-directed learning (McMullan et al., 2003). The learning approach in portfolios is based on experiential learning where the students are actively involved in their own learning. According to (Lekamge and Karunanayake, 2007), one of the benefits of experiential learning is that " the prior experience of learners, and particularly adult learners,

is valued and used as resource for further learning; and that learning is active, meaningful and relevant to real life agendas".

(McMullan et al., 2003) define a portfolio as "a collection of evidence, usually in a written form, of both the products and process of learning. It attests to achievements and personal and professional development, by providing critical analysis of its content". After a review of literature on portfolios, (McCready, 2007) defined an effective portfolio as "a visual representation of the individual, their experience, strengths, abilities and skills. The portfolio can provide a practitioner with evidence of reflection on academic and clinical experiences, continuing professional development and lifelong learning, decisions about the quality of work, effective critical thinking skills, reflection on professional and personal growth". This implies that portfolios can be assessed to see how much learning has taken place. When used as a learning tool, a student's portfolio is formatively assessed at intervals by the facilitator and the contents discussed with the student, which results in learning. Higher education institutions using portfolios demand that the students reflect on their experiences and record these in their portfolios. This results in critical reflection, which leads to learning and professional development (FitzPatrick and Spiller, 2010); (Head and Johnston, 2012).

There is mixed evidence in literature concerning the reflections that students submit with their portfolios. The results of some studies suggest that the formative review of portfolios opens communication lines between the student and the facilitator, thus achieving deeper learning (Williams et al., 2009); (McMullan, 2006). However some studies have suggested that if the student knows that the reflection will be assessed, the entries on those reflections will be what the student feels the facilitator expects or wants to hear. This will result in them not being true reflections of what the student has actually learned (Ross et al., 2009); (Jones,

2010). However, "portfolios that are not assessed, on the other hand, do not 'reward' learners for the time and energy they invest in them" (Van Tartwijk and Driessen, 2009).

The compiling of portfolios is in line with self-directed learning principles and these are therefore one of the most ideal tools to use for assessment (Head and Johnston, 2012). Portfolios focus on individual achievements and the student has the benefit of choosing what to include as evidence on their portfolios. Studies have shown, however, that reliability of the results is an issue in portfolio assessment. This is because each portfolio by nature is an individual journey and is not easily comparable with another. Therefore, studies on using the portfolio as an assessment tool have focused on interrater reliability (McCready, 2007); (Michels et al., 2009); (Buyukduman and Sirin, 2010).

Studies done on portfolios do not maintain that it was the portfolio alone that led to reflection, critical thinking and learning, as students also acknowledged the support they had received as important in their development (Head and Johnston, 2012). Support has been identified as a key factor in students' understanding of what is expected from the portfolio. Some studies have advocated for mentoring groups to promote portfolio use (Creasap et al., 2005); (Schaub-de Jong et al., 2009).

Other issues that have consistently come up in most literature concerning portfolios is that they are time consuming and difficult to understand. Furthermore, many students tend to leave their portfolio work until the last minute, which contributes little to either professional or personal development (Tiwari and Tang, 2003, Jones, 2010).

The literature search revealed that few studies have been carried out on portfolios in health professional education in South Africa. A study done by (Gwele, 2001a) examining students reflections on their experiences on compiling a Personal and Academic Development Portfolio (PADP) revealed that the students were anxious about the portfolio and what was

expected of them. They did acknowledge, however, that their portfolios had helped them develop professionally as well as personally. This study by Gwele, however, used reflective essays as the data collection method and the researcher could therefore not probe further to find out more about the factors raised by the students that hindered and facilitated portfolio development. A different data collection method that allows for further exploration of the issues raised in the previous study will increase knowledge on the issues that influence portfolio use in the South African context.

A study by (Chabeli and Muller, 2004) on nurse educators' perceptions on facilitating reflective thinking in clinical nursing education is one example of research that has been done in South Africa. The results of this study indicated that although nurse educators recognised the importance of utilising portfolios in nursing education, they admitted that they had not yet become experienced in using them. These authors reported that "participants acknowledge the fact that portfolio assessment is a new strategy that emerged with the outcomes-based education and therefore it is not yet popular in clinical nursing education. Those who were familiar with the method gained the knowledge from the theoretical aspects" (Chabeli and Muller, 2004:72). A more recent study by (Le Roux and Khanyile, 2012) revealed that in their institution based in South Africa, second year learners underwent clinical assessments by means of practice portfolio, which showed evidence of outcomes attained. The study assessed competence of learners registered for the Baccalaureus Curationis program by using Benner's model of skills acquisition and comparing the competencies from first year to fourth year levels. Referring to portfolio use at second year level, the authors commented that "portfolios were only included as a product aimed at scoring performance rather than development and improving weaknesses through continuous feedback and reflective practice" ((Le Roux and Khanyile, 2012) 5). While there is therefore evidence of the use of

portfolios in nursing education, very little research has been done specifically on the use of the portfolio in nursing education in South Africa.

1.2 Study Context

The school of nursing where this research was conducted introduced a Masters in Nursing Education in 1996, which included two modules of Progressive Education. The intention was to prepare nurse educators in innovative ways of teaching, learning and assessment and to equip them with a better understanding of the educational philosophies underpinning these approaches. In this master's program, students are expected to master adult and self-directed learning principles, as well as a number of transferrable core skills. The students develop two portfolios; the first of which is the Personal and Academic Development Portfolio, where students reflect on their journey of development in order to achieve the expected competencies in this course, and the second portfolio records their development as innovative nurse educators and innovative approaches to teaching and learning that promote active learning. These portfolios are used as learning tools as well as forming part of continuous assessment.

The Personal and Academic Development Portfolio (PADP), which is the focus in this study, is made up of four sections. The first requires the students to compile an extended curriculum vitae, where they reflect on their previous formal learning and work experiences, the skills they acquired during those processes, and their strengths and weaknesses, or developmental areas. The second is a self-assessment section, where students reflect on their self-directed and adult learning skills, as well as transferrable core skills, such as communication skills, scientific writing skills, problem solving skills, information technology skills, statistical skills and many more. They rate themselves on these skills, with 4 and 3 indicating strength and 2 and below indicating weakness and a need to work on developing those skills. This section

culminates with two lists, one showing the students' strengths and the second prioritising areas of weakness. The third section is a section with individualized learning contracts targeting prioritized areas of weakness and how these will be addressed and measured, and timelines. The last section is a reflective diary, in which students reflect on significant learning experiences during the course of doing their master's degree. In writing about their significant learning experiences, students reflect on how they managed those significant experiences, education theories used in managing those situations, the gaps in managing such situations and how they may be addressed in future as determined by education theories.

The school of nursing offers support to students in the form of an orientation week, which includes an overview of innovative teaching methods at postgraduate level and a day dedicated to guidance on how to compile a portfolio. The students are provided with examples of completed portfolios and guidelines for developing portfolios, with examples on each aspect of the portfolio. While structured consultations with the facilitator (on appointment) are available to the students as they work on these portfolios, they are also expected to identify other human or material resources to assist them in achieving their set learning outcomes. The assessment tool forms part of the guidelines for developing a teaching portfolio for transparency of the assessment process. The portfolios are assessed internally, moderated by the internal moderator and then sent to the external examiner as part of quality monitoring and assurance. The feedback from the external examiner and internal moderator is used as part of yearly course evaluation adding to the feedback provided by the students on the course.

1.3 Problem Statement

Several studies (Gordon, 2003b); (Head and Johnston, 2012); (Schaub-de Jong et al., 2009) have shown that support is a significant factor for successful use of the portfolio as a learning

tool as it not only enables the students to start using the portfolio, but also encourages continuous use of the portfolio throughout the course. This allows for deeper learning and critical reflection, which results in both professional and personal development (Lincoln and Guba, 1985);(Austin et al., 2005); (Schaub-de Jong et al., 2009). The studies have suggested different methods of support to help the students to use and benefit from their portfolios. These include workshops at the beginning of the portfolio use, showing students a completed portfolio so that they understand what is expected of them, mentoring groups and planned formative evaluation sessions with the facilitator for continuous feedback (Lincoln and Guba, 1985, Austin et al., 2005); (Jones, 2010).

However, results from studies have found that even with such support, some students do not dedicate the necessary time to developing their portfolios and therefore do not reap the full benefit from them. Studies on students' perceptions regarding the portfolio (Snadden and Thomas, 1998); (Kean and Embi, 2010) have shown that although students claim to benefit from their portfolios, they do not necessarily work on them as consistently as they are expected to, sometimes leaving it until the last minute if they have other activities which they feel are more pressing, such as exams (Elango et al., 2005); (Kean and Embi, 2010). The findings suggest that students find portfolios stressful and time consuming. They also suggest that students find it difficult to link their portfolio with learning outcomes and therefore do not see it as a skill for lifelong learning (Lincoln and Guba, 1985); (Austin et al., 2005); (Williams et al., 2009). Some of the studies also suggest that students do receive enough feedback from the facilitators (Imhof and Picard, 2009); (Brennan and Lennie, 2010).

Reflection is a key aspect of portfolio learning. The theoretical underpinnings of portfolio learning assume that reflection does take place in portfolio development. However, studies on portfolios are not conclusive as to whether portfolio construction leads to reflection (Pearson

and Heywood, 2004); (Head and Johnston, 2012); (Ross et al., 2009) and there is suggestion in the literature that it is not the construction of the portfolio that results in reflection, but rather the mentoring process in the form of groups and continuous assessments that help (Snadden and Thomas, 1998). Studies have shown that some students find portfolios very stressful because they have not developed the skill of reflection (Kean and Embi, 2010). (Gwele, 2001a) conducted a mini study on the use of portfolios at master's level and collected data through reflective essays. This researcher recommended further research in this area because the data collection method used could not probe further on factors cited by participants as facilitating or hindering the learning process, hence the need for this study. The study intends to explore the students' perceptions on the use of a personal and academic portfolio as a learning tool since little is known and scientifically documented about this learning tool in the selected school of nursing.

1.4 Purpose of the study

The purpose of the study was to explore the perceptions of nursing education students about using a Personal and Academic Development Portfolio as a learning tool in a selected school of nursing in one of the universities in KwaZulu-Natal.

1.5 Research Objectives

The objectives of the research were:

a) To explore the views of nursing education students about the use of the Personal and Academic Development Portfolio as a learning tool;

b) To explore the perceptions of nursing education students on how the different sections of the Personal and Academic Development Portfolio contribute to the learning process;

c) To describe the views of students about the support provided during the learning process using the Personal and Academic Development Portfolio.

1.6 Research Questions

The following research questions were developed in conjunction with the objectives:

a) How do nursing education students perceive the Personal and Academic Development Portfolio as a learning tool in the nursing education program?

b) How do students view the process of learning through the use of the portfolio?

c) How do different components of the portfolio (extended CV, self-assessment, learning contract and reflective learning diary) contribute to students' personal and academic development?

d) What are the views of the students about the nature of support they receive during the process of learning through portfolios?

e) How can the process of learning through the Personal and Academic Development Portfolio be enhanced?

1.7 Conceptual Framework

This study adopted a qualitative approach, using a conceptual framework. There are different views about the use of conceptual frameworks in qualitative studies. Some researchers advocate for an atheoretical stance in order to avoid a prior conceptualisation that may prejudice data collection and analysis. Morse, in (Polit and Beck, 2008), however, suggests that if the boundaries of the concept of interest can be identified through a conceptual framework, a researcher can use these boundaries as a scaffold to inductively explore attributes of the phenomenon of interest. Polit and Beck also state that conceptual frameworks may be used as interpretive frameworks. In this study the conceptual framework is based on adult learning principles. The main concepts are: (a) adult learning principles; (b) critical reflection and planning phase; (c) active engagement and continuous reflection; (d) evidence-based outcomes; and (e) continuous facilitator support.

It is assumed that learning using a PADP is underpinned by Knowles's adult learning principles because students are expected to critically reflect on their skills as self-directed learners and the transferable core skills (presentation skills, analytical skills, report writing, team work, communication, time management and leadership) they have developed from their previous learning, work and life experiences. The term 'skill' refers to more than the traditional meaning of manual dexterity or expertise in carrying out a manual activity and encompasses those capabilities and qualities which are indicative of effective use of knowledge. Knowing something is not enough. How the knowledge is used is a learned skill (UKZN PADP Guidelines, 2012).

Based on their critical self-assessment, the students identify their own learning needs, generate learning plans and take responsibility for their own learning. The facilitator has a responsibility of providing continuous support, as indicated in Figure 1 below.
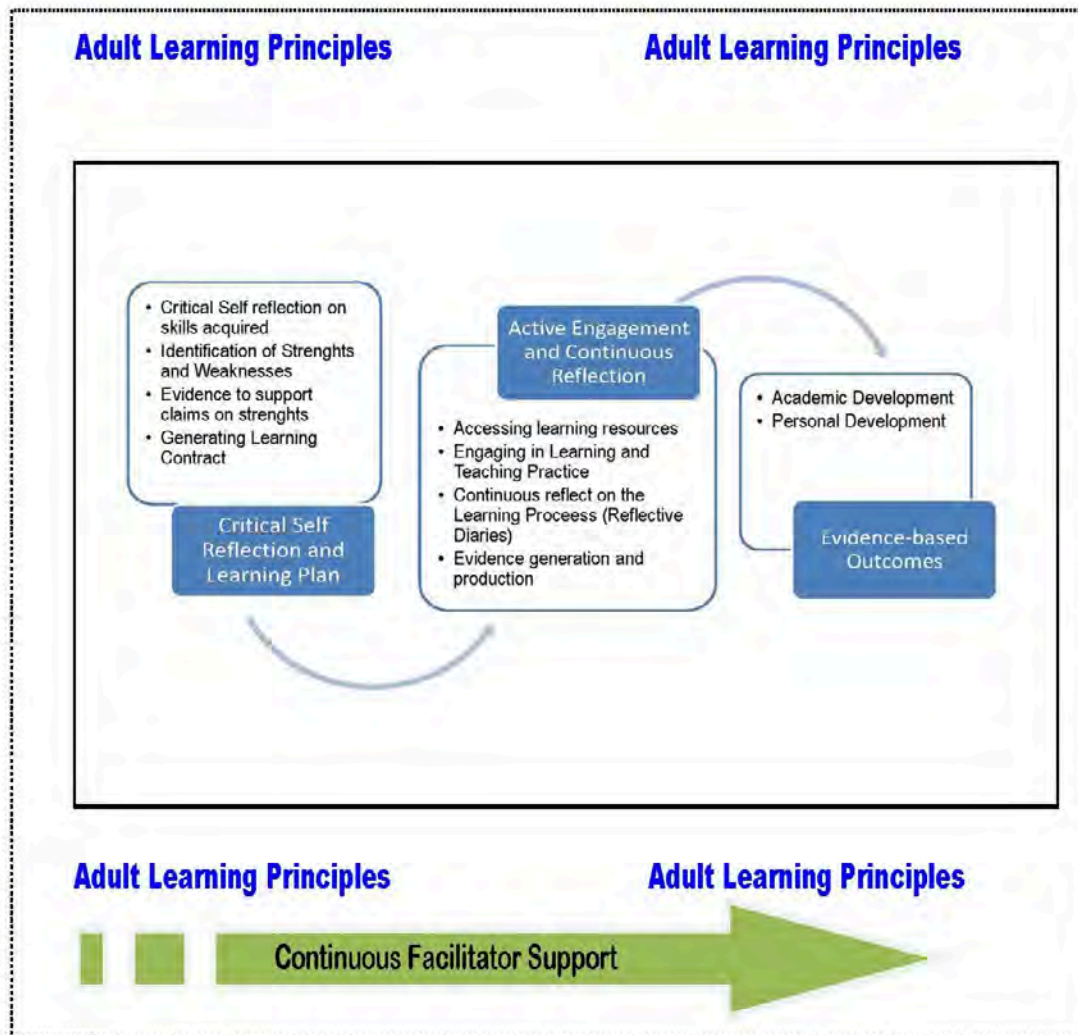
Figure 1: Conceptual framework based on Knowles's (1975) Theory of Adult Learning

As self-directed learners, students are expected to "take the initiative, with or without the help of the facilitator in diagnosing their learning needs, formulating learning goals, identifying human and material resources for learning, choosing and implementing appropriate learning strategies, and evaluating learning outcomes" (Knowles, 1975) 18).

The conceptual framework reflects that at the beginning of the course, students, as self-directed learners, have to engage in a *critical self-assessment* process, assessing their skills and transferrable core skills. This process involves compiling an extended curriculum vitae (CV) or personal profile. "Profiling is a process which enables students to plan learning development and, where appropriate, act upon what they have learned to review and *continuously reflect* upon this learning, to record their achievements and to communicate these to others" (UKZN PADP Guidelines, 2012). A profile is thus a record that depicts the process of learning as well as the outcomes of that learning. In the extended CV section of the personal profile, the students present a "critical review" of their education background; their prior knowledge; experience; and skills in order to diagnose their areas of competence and gaps in relation to the requirements of the program.

The extended CV involves a process of critical self-reflection as the students focus on previous learning experiences, the skills acquired during those learning experiences and the aspects they enjoyed most and least. The students then identify their strengths and weaknesses. They generate the learning contract based on the weaknesses they have identified and are expected to establish evidence in support of all strengths identified.

During the *active engagement phase,* the students, with the help of the facilitator, decide on relevant learning activities and learning resources (which may be human or material) essential to achieve what is set out in the learning contract. The students, as adult learners, then engage actively in their learning activities and in the process of *continuously reflecting* on their experiences so as to improve. A facilitator is available to offer continuous support. The role of the facilitator is to ensure that the student reaches the level of competence in the identified gaps and this requires them to be critical and be guided by the set criteria to measure competence.

Once the plans in the learning contract have been implemented, the students are expected to generate evidence that learning has taken place. (Jones, 2010) maintains that "Through active engagement in the process of deciding what will stand as evidence of their learning, portfolio compilers are developing skills of self-assessment that should persist beyond the course". The students should develop certain skills through each of the phases and the expected outcome of the process is both personal and academic development. All claims of development having taken place should be *evidence-based.*

In this study, the students' perceptions will be analysed in relation to each element of this conceptual framework as the elements form the building blocks to the concepts found in the conceptual framework and are part of the different components of the PADP and therefore elements link the conceptual framework directly to the PADP. Annexure 8 shows the relationship that the different elements have with the research objectives.

1.8 Significance of the study

The findings from the study have the potential to benefit a number of areas in the field of nursing. These areas include;

Research: The study may increase the body of knowledge on the use of the portfolio as a learning tool in nursing education. (Buckley et al., 2009) highlighted the fact that although international research has identified learner portfolios as valuable tools, very little research has been done on this subject in South Africa. Only a few studies in South Africa (Le Roux and Khanyile, 2012; van Wyk and Carl, 2010; (Gwele, 2001b); Chabeli, 1999) were identified in this area. Furthermore, although there is evidence that a few nursing education institutions are using portfolios (Austin et al., 2005); (Le Roux and Khanyile, 2012), there is minimal research, if any, that unpacks the actual contribution the different elements of the portfolio add to the academic and professional development of the students. The findings

from this study will focus on the contribution of each element of the portfolio to the learning process. Furthermore, the study will add to the body of knowledge about using portfolios in general education because literature in general education revealed that there is a gap in research concerning the use of portfolios. The study by (Driessen et al., 2007) argued that "many questions regarding portfolio use are still unanswered and this has important implications for both research and practice"

Educators: The findings of this study may assist educators in understanding the needs of students when they are developing their academic and development portfolio (PADP). The focus of this study will bring forth the perspectives of the students and recommendations from the students on how to enhance the use of PADPs as a learning tool. Studies on portfolios show that students' perceptions on portfolios as learning tool differ from those of facilitators, in that the students' experiences of using portfolios are not always as beneficial as facilitators expect them to be. As stated in (Williams et al., 2009), "educational supervisors recognise educational benefits more often than trainees, possible suggesting a difference in perception as to the purpose of portfolio learning as has been observed in other educational context". The findings from this study may also suggest critical areas for facilitators to focus on when supporting students. Disseminating the findings from this study highlighting how PADPs enhance the learning process may inspire other nursing institutions to adopt this learning tool.

Students: The findings from this study will provide some insight into how students perceive the support they obtain during the learning process and what type of support would work better for them. Student support is core to the learning process to ensure that they develop professionally and academically, as stated in (Gwele, 2001a).

1.9 Operational definition of terms

In the context of this study, the following terms will be defined as follows;

A Personal and Academic Development Portfolio [PADP] is a purposeful collection of students' work that exhibits their efforts, progress and achievements in one or more areas (Paulson et al., 1991)**.** PADPs contain material produced by nursing education students at a master's level that records and reflects on key events and processes in their professional career as nurse educators. A PADP consists of the following components: an extended CV; self-assessment for competencies as a self-directed learner; a learning contract; a reflective learning diary; and evidence of all achievements **(UKZN PADP Guidelines, 2012).**

Master of Nursing (Nursing Education): In this study, Master of Nursing (Nursing Education) is a level 9 qualification in the Higher Education sub-qualification Framework (HEQSF) in the National Qualifications Framework (NQF). The students in this program specialize in nursing education, with the focus on progressive education in health professional education, where students are prepared to teach and facilitate learning using innovative methods of teaching, learning and assessment.

School of Nursing: In this study, the school of nursing is constituent within a university or higher education institution accredited by the South African Nursing Council in terms of the Nursing Act No. 33 of 2005 to offer nursing education and training. The school has undergraduate and postgraduate programs, with a Master of Nursing (Nursing Education) forming part of postgraduate studies.

Learning tool: In this study, a learning tool is defined as a tool that allows for learning to take place. Learning is defined according to experiential learning theory as "the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience" (Kolb, 1984) 38).

Perceptions: In this study, perceptions relate to the way in which nursing education students understand, experience and interpret the Personal and Academic Development Portfolio as a learning tool.

Learning process: For the purposes of this study, a learning process is a student centred, goal directed and evidence based course of development in acquiring and constructing new knowledge and skills, building on previous experiences. This process is based on adult learning principles, with the students playing an active role in their professional and academic development.

*An extended CV i*s a detailed report of one's latest education experience, and includes learning that has taken place, the least learning that has taken place, aspects of the education program that were enjoyed the most and aspects of the program that were least enjoyed. It concludes with the strengths and weaknesses identified from that education experience.

*A Learning Contract i*s a collaboratively written agreement between the student and the facilitator which is based on the weaknesses identified during the critical self-assessment process in order to facilitate personal and academic development in nursing education students.

A reflective learning diary is a tool where, taking existing education theories into consideration, a nursing education student records his/her reflections on significant occurrences during the learning process or teaching practice, how those significance occurrences were handled and how they could be improved in future. It promotes thinking in a critical and analytical manner while applying theoretical knowledge to practice (UKZN PADP Guidelines, 2012).

1.10 Conclusion

This chapter introduced the topic of using the Personal and Academic Development Portfolio as a learning tool, with emphasis to the use of portfolios internationally and locally as tools of learning. The study context was described in detail to give a comprehensive understanding of the study. The purpose and objectives of the study were outlined and the research questions presented. The conceptual framework was introduced and terms used in the study were defined.

1.11 Dissertation Outline

Chapter one presented an overview of the study. It oriented the reader to the background of the study, the study context, the problem statement, the purpose of the study, the research objectives, the research questions, the conceptual framework, the significance of the study and the operational definitions

Chapter two presents the empirical literature reviewed for the study. It gives a description of the term portfolio and the types found in literature. It describes educational philosophies underpinning the use of the PADP, the portfolio as a learning tool, use of reflective learning diaries, use of learning contracts, facilitator support in portfolio learning and the portfolio as an assessment tool.

Chapter three outlines the research methodology of the study. A qualitative research approach was used in this study for its exploratory and descriptive nature and this was guided by a constructivist paradigm. Data collection and data analysis procedures are described in the chapter. The rigour of the study is described, as well as ethical considerations and dissemination of findings.

Chapter four presents the research findings. The themes that emerged from the data are presented together with supporting extracts.

Chapter five presents the interpretation and discussion of the research findings, recommendations, limitations of the study and the conclusion.

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

Literature review forms the theoretical and analytical framework that serves as the foundation for the research study (Polit and Beck, 2008). The literature review not only helps the researcher to identify the existing research in the area of study, but also establishes the methodological techniques used to research similar phenomena and the conceptual frameworks commonly used in analysing the phenomenon of interest (Polit and Beck, 2008).

In this chapter, the researcher presents selected empirical literature and theoretical frameworks underpinning the use of the portfolio as a teaching and learning tool. What was observed during the process of reviewing literature was that literature on portfolios is widespread and varies across disciplines. The literature that was selected for this study focuses mainly on nursing education, with some on medical education and teacher education studies. Academic databases such as CINAHL; EBSCOHOST; ERIC; Science Direct and Google scholar were used in the literature search, using the key words of portfolio, portfolio learning, portfolio assessment and portfolio development tool. The chapter presents an understanding of the concept Personal and Academic Development Portfolio (PADP); the educational philosophies underpinning the use of the Personal and Academic Development Portfolio; using the portfolio as a learning tool; use of the reflective diary; use of the learning contract; facilitator support; and assessment of learning using the portfolio.

2.2 The concept Personal and Academic Development Portfolio (PADP)

Embedded within the concept PADP is the term portfolio, which is defined as "a collection of evidence documenting progress, accomplishment and achievements over time" (Tekian and

Yudkowky, 2009). They further explain that "a portfolio in the health professions is not simply a collection of work samples or records of activities, the distinctive aspect of a portfolio is the reflective component, an opportunity for the learner to provide a commentary on the included items and explicate their meaning to the reader. As such it is a unique and individual creation and a dynamic record of personal and professional growth". (Driessen et al., 2007) conducted a literature review on the use of portfolios in medical education and discovered that the label 'portfolio' referred to a whole range of instruments, which differed in purpose, structure, content and context. They however concluded that "despite variations in content and format, a portfolio basically reports on work done, feedback received, progress made and plans for improving competence. Additionally, a portfolio may stimulate reflection, because collecting evidence for inclusion in a portfolio requires looking back and analysing what one has accomplished" (Driessen et al., 2007) 1225).

(Klenowski et al., 2006) conducted a study in the UK on the use of portfolios for learning, assessment and professional development in teacher education in the UK. Using case studies as the method of data collection, they found that participants in their study used various labels to describe portfolios, such as professional development records, learning portfolios and learning records. This author categorised all these activities as portfolio learning and concluded that there is "a shift from traditional view of a portfolio (a collection of 'work' selected and organized by the student, with the written justification and self-assessment) to a learning portfolio that focuses attention on the subject of learning and how the course participant is learning, the purpose, effects of context and emotional and social elements"(Klenowski et al., 2006) 283)

(Van Tartwijk and Driessen, 2009) describe a portfolio as a multipurpose instrument which can include various types of portfolios, such as personal development plans or reflective

essays. They explain that a portfolio used for assessment "will remain organised around all kinds of materials that provide 'evidence' of competencies", "overviews will take centre stage" in a second type of portfolio that is used to monitor and plan learners' development and a third type is a portfolio "whose primary objective is to foster learning by stimulating learners to reflect on and discuss their development will be organised around learners' reflections" (Van Tartwijk and Driessen, 2009). They advise that the purpose of the portfolio should guide the type of portfolio to be used.

Examples in literature are the use of the portfolio as a requirement for certification in basic professional education (Head and Johnston, 2012); (Casey and Egan, 2010) and the use of portfolio for continued professional development (Pearson and Heywood, 2004); (Van Tartwijk and Driessen, 2009)). (Klenowski et al., 2006) confirm that "portfolios are found in all phases of education and professional development for learning, assessment, promotion and appraisal".

2.3 Educational philosophies underpinning the use of PADP

As with the types of portfolio available, the range of educational philosophies underpinning the use of portfolio varies. There is, however, a common understanding in the literature that experiential learning is the foundation of portfolio development as the activities of the portfolio are based on the learners' experiences (Mcmullan, 2003); (Tekian and Yudkowky, 2009). (Knowles, 1975) theory of adult learning is also the main theory influencing the use of the portfolio in professional education as its principles highlight the significance of experience and self-directedness in adult learners (Elango et al., 2005).

According to (Knowles, 1975), self-directed learning is "a process in which individuals take the initiative, with or without the help of others, in diagnosing their learning needs, formulating learning goals, identifying human and material resources for learning, choosing

and implementing appropriate learning strategies, and evaluating learning outcomes". The understanding from (Knowles, 1975) is that adult learners are self-directed even although not all of them are aware of it or are at the same level of self-directedness. This understanding is based on specific assumptions which align this theory with how portfolios are used as learning and assessment tools.

The first of these assumption states that "self-directed learning assumes that the human grows in capacity (and need) to be self-directing as an essential component of maturing, and that this capacity should be nurtured to develop as rapidly as possible" (Knowles, 1975):20). This suggests that all human beings have the potential to be self-directing. However the difference lies in whether this skill has been nurtured or not. Therefore, students lacking self-direction should be identified and given support to help them develop this skill. This was important to Knowles because of his understanding that people are learning in times of change, meaning that since knowledge is changing so rapidly, people need to develop skills to learn by themselves to keep abreast with what is happening around them as well as to be able to solve their problems as they encounter them.

The second assumption is that "the learners' experiences become an increasingly rich resource for learning which should be exploited along with the resources of experts" (Knowles, 1975) 20). With respect to (Weil and McGill, 1989b) four villages of experiential learning, village two encompasses the basis of this type of learning, where the emphasis is on the experience of the adult learner being used as the starting point to the learning experience. According to these authors, " the prior experience of learners, and particularly adult learners, is valued and used as resource for further learning; and that learning is active, meaningful and relevant to real life agendas" (Weil and McGill, 1989b). They emphasise that what one has already experienced in life will have an impact on one's learning as well as how one does

things after the course. (Kolb, 1984) is cited in the discussion of this village as explaining that experiential learning is "the process that links education, work, and personal development" (Weil et al., 1989)(9).

Describing experiential learning theory, (Kolb, 1984) explains that the characteristics that define the nature of experiential learning are based on the learning models of Lewin, Dewey and Piaget, who collectively agree that "ideas are not fixed and immutable elements of thought but are formed and reformed through experience… learning is described as a process whereby concepts are derived from and continuously modified by experience. No two thoughts are ever the same since experience always intervene" (Kolb, 1984).

Another significant assumption of Knowles is that 'self-directedness assumes that individuals become ready to learn what is required to perform their evolving life tasks or to cope more adequately with their life problems, and that each individual therefore has a somewhat different pattern of readiness from other individuals". This characteristic of adults sets them apart from children learners as the need to learn becomes immediate to solve problems. Solution to problems motivates " self-directed learning assumes that learners are motivated by internal incentives, such as the need for esteem (especially self-esteem), the desire to achieve, the urge to grow, the satisfaction of accomplishment, the need to know something specific, and curiosity" (Knowles, 1975) 20-21).

This assumption leads us directly to Kolb's cycle of experiential learning (1984), where Kolb looks at the experience as the trigger for the learning cycle. The experience leads to the individual reflecting on the experience and then trying to make sense of the experience by thinking about it, which is, putting it into perspective. This abstract conceptualisation will lead to formation of generalizations and theories around the experience. The individual will then want to test these generalisations or theories, which is the next stage of the cycle called

active experimentation. The person starts the cycle again by going back or experiencing something new and different. Kolb does, however, emphasise the fact that the individual can start the cycle on any step, depending on the nature of the issue. An example is the individual encountering a theory relating to their work environment. The individual can start the cycle at abstract conceptualisation than move to active experimentation to see if the theory works and move to the next steps until the theory is accepted or modified to suit their own environment.

Kolb's cycle is important in adult education since it emphasises experiences as well as reflecting on those experiences. Kolb's learning cycle became popular as a framework to promote learning with portfolios as it brings together theory (reflection/conceptualisation) and practice (experience/testing out) (Mcmullan, 2003) 289). This is reinforced by (Karlowicz, 2010) 79), who stated, "Experiential learning and transformation learning are considered integral to the development of nursing expertise. To move from one level of proficiency to the next, a student must be willing to engage in concrete clinical practice experiences that provide professional socialization and development. Critical reflection through the creation of a portfolio enables the student to analyse the actions and skills used in clinical situations, cope with the emotional responses that arise from specific experiences, feel a sense of achievement".

Experiential learning acknowledges the significance of reflection in learning, as identified in Kolb's experiential learning cycle with reflective observation. It is important, however, to mention that (Kolb, 1984) suggests that for learners to be effective, they need all four abilities mentioned in his experiential learning cycle, namely: concrete experience; reflective observation; abstract conceptualisation; and active experimentation. (Tekian and Yudkowky, 2009) identified (Kolb, 1984) experiential learning and (Schon, 1987) reflective learning model as models that are relevant to portfolio learning as both are based on reflection.

According to these authors, "A portfolio can serve as both a vehicle to promote reflective learning and as evidence of that reflection and of other learning…these models emphasize the need to reflect on experience, often together with a coach or mentor, in order for the experience to be incorporated effectively as new learning" (Tekian and Yudkowky, 2009) 288). Other recent studies on portfolios have based their understanding on other theories of learning, such as transformative learning (Cangelosi, 2008); constructivist learning (Klenowski et al., 2006) and co-constructivist and dialogic learning (Klenowski et al., 2006). All have the emphasis of student centred learning practices which allow students to define their own learning.

2.4 Portfolios as learning tools

(Klenowski et al., 2006) conducted a study on the use of portfolios in pharmacy education in US and concluded that the type of portfolio will influence its effect on the learner. The study highlighted the difference between constructivist and positivist portfolios as follows: "whereas a positivist portfolio assesses learning outcomes defined externally (e.g. accreditation standards, institutional mission/goals) that are constant across users, context, and purposes, the constructivist portfolio is more a learning tool in which the student constructs meaning, and that will vary by individuals, time, and purpose…the choice will result in the development of entirely different portfolio activities" (Klenowski et al., 2006) 2). Therefore for a portfolio to be a learning tool, the understanding is that it must promote learning.

Various researchers in medical education studies have referred to portfolio based learning, indicating that portfolios are used as a learning tool in this field (Newman and Peile, 2002); (Gordon, 2003b); (Elango, 2005); (Van Tartwijk and Driessen, 2009). In all health fields where portfolios are used, the understanding is that portfolio learning is based on the

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principles of adult learning. Portfolios have been recommended and adopted in situations where changes in curriculum have dictated a need to foster self-directed learning (Gordon, 2003a); (Mcmullan, 2003); (Buckley et al., 2009). Nursing studies, however, have put emphasis on the reflection that takes place in the development of portfolios, thus identifying reflection as the part that leads to learning (Mcmullan, 2003); (Joyce, 2005); (Jones, 2010). The agreement is that the students are learning from the experiences they are exposed to and that learning is enhanced when the students reflect on their own experiences.

Studies done on general practitioners and registrars in the UK have, however, queried whether portfolios promote reflection or not. A study on portfolio based learning by (Pearson and Heywood, 2004) used postal questionnaires as well as in-depth interviews to investigate the use of portfolios by registrars in their ongoing professional development. The findings of the study suggest that although the registrars were keeping records of their interactions with patients and discussing issues with their colleagues, these did not form part of their portfolios. This suggests that people do reflect on their experiences without keeping a portfolio. The study did find that students who had a supportive trainer or facilitator tended to keep an up-to-date portfolio reflecting their experiences, which led to learning. The study concluded by mentioning that it is not clear whether it is the portfolio or the support from a supportive trainer or facilitator that leads to reflection and learning (Pearson and Heywood, 2004). (Mann et al., 2009) had similar findings in their systematic review of reflection and reflective practice in health profession education. These authors concluded that "Portfolios may not be the key factor in promoting reflective learning; the mentoring relationship, which can be expressed in a number of different ways, may be more important than the portfolio itself in stimulating and guiding reflection"

It cannot be disputed, however, that some qualitative studies done on portfolios have shown that portfolios help the students reflect on their learning and work experiences. A study by (Cangelosi, 2008) highlights this aspect of portfolio development and one of the student participants is quoted as saying "reflecting on my graduate work made me tie together all the academic content I learned with the teaching we did in practicum" (Cangelosi, 2008) 4). In a study by (Nairn et al., 2006), even pre-registration students expressed that portfolios acted as an outlet for expressing feelings and helped them develop coping skills. This is in line with reflective learning where an experience triggers reflection and learning, which results in personal and professional development.

Another issue identified by research concerning the portfolio as a learning tool is that since learners have different learning styles, as advocated by Kolb's styles of learning, not all learning styles are compatible with the use of the portfolio. Participants in studies on portfolios always include students who state that the portfolio was not useful to them or was a waste of time. (Mann et al., 2009) mentioned this aspect, reporting that "the main philosophical barrier to using the portfolio appeared to be its lack of congruence with the users' learning styles". During implementation, it is important, therefore, that it should be kept in mind that the portfolio may not yield the same benefits for all students.

In a study by (Kamel and Attia, 2010) on the perceptions of student nurses regarding the use of portfolios, the majority of students found the portfolio to be more useful to them than other methods of teaching and learning. This study was however limited in that it could not be generalised since it used only students from one university at first year and second year levels. More studies are needed to grow the evidence that as learning tools, portfolios are more effective than other methods of teaching and learning. (Buckley et al., 2009) suggested comparative studies be conducted to build evidence of the effectiveness of the portfolio.

2.5 Use of the reflective learning diary

The reflective learning diary forms part of the PADP and it has already been mentioned in the previous discussion that reflection is an integral part of portfolio learning. In a systematic review of portfolio use in education institutions, (Mcmullan, 2003) reported that the literature shows that reflection sets the portfolio apart from other assessment methods, allowing it to be a holistic method of assessment. This finding was reiterated by (Endacott et al., 2004) whose systematic review discovered that portfolios used in education institutions were evolving towards what was labelled 'cake mix portfolios', which is when students reflect on their experiences as well as providing evidence for their portfolio, thus integrating theory and practice. Literature on portfolios confirms that reflections form an integral part of the portfolio (McMullan, 2006); (Elango et al., 2005); (McCready, 2007); (Imhof and Picard, 2009). (Van Tartwijk and Driessen, 2009) assert that "reflections and overviews of personal development have secured a prominent place in many portfolios".

Studies on students' perceptions on portfolio use show that students value the reflection aspect of learning through the portfolio (Gordon, 2003b); (Creasap et al., 2005); (Brennan and Lennie, 2010). In a study by (Gordon, 2003b) on medical students' use of portfolios in the personal and professional development modules, the findings show that the students felt the portfolios helped them to reflect on their studies, which allowed them to gain more insight to their learning and an overall understanding of their values, which were some of the objectives for the module. Overall, the students were amazed at the impact the portfolio had on their thinking. (Van Tartwijk and Driessen, 2009) also found that "a portfolio can also stimulate reflection, because collecting and selecting work samples, evaluations and other types of materials that are illustrative of the work done, compels learners to look back on what they have done and analyse what they have and have not yet accomplished".

Some studies, however, raised the question of whether it is the portfolio that leads to reflection or not. A study conducted by (Pearson and Heywood, 2004) specifically looked at this issue by investigating the use of portfolios on reflective learning. While their findings showed that the participants who used the portfolio for reflections had found it useful, the study could not conclude on whether reflections influenced portfolio use or the development of the portfolio influenced reflective learning. Evidence in literature also suggests that the support that the students received during portfolio development helped them reflect on their work and made the portfolio beneficial (Creasap et al., 2005); (Schaub-de Jong et al., 2009); (Imhof and Picard, 2009).

2.6 Support in portfolio development

Numerous studies have identified the value of support in the success of the portfolio experience (Mcmullan, 2003); (McCready, 2007). After their systematic literature review on the use of portfolios, (McCready, 2007) described the type of support that students found valuable was in the form of clear guidelines before portfolio construction and assessment and support during portfolio development. (Austin et al., 2005) conducted a study in Canada on pharmacists who were required to keep a portfolio for continuous professional development. The study findings show that the participants expressed that they had not initially understood the role of the portfolio and the ways of documenting. However, with the addition of support in the form of facilitators and peer groups, there was a shift in perception towards acceptance of the portfolio. The same findings are described by (Brennan and Lennie, 2010) where the students' understanding of the portfolio was positively correlated with the portfolio guidance received.

Various other studies on the perceptions of students on portfolio development mention that the participants in the studies valued the support received with portfolio development. Such

support mentioned in literature includes mentoring, support groups, peer interactions and peer meetings. The studies show that the participants gave credit to the support structures available to them, saying that these structures helped them to develop their portfolios, which led to better learning and professional development (Creasap et al., 2005); (Imhof and Picard, 2009); (Schaub-de Jong et al., 2009).

2.7 The learning contract

(McMullan, 2006) 71) defines a learning contract as "a strategy used to motivate adult students in identifying their needs and their desired outcomes for the course. As self-directed learners, students have the opportunity to choose activities, assignments, responsibilities and resources to support their learning process". Adult learners, according to (Knowles, 1975), are self-directed and naturally desire a chance to plan their own learning, particularly when they have been involved in diagnosing their learning needs. In the word of this author, "There seems to be a law (or at least, a tendency) of human nature that goes like this: human beings tend to feel committed to a decision (or an activity) to the extent that they have participated in making it (or planning it)" (Knowles, 1975: 48)

Although there appears to be no research specific to learning contracts and portfolio development, the literature shows evidence of a learning contract being part of a portfolio with references such as "students enjoyed being responsible for their own learning and achieving their own learning goals" (Brennan and Lennie, 2010). In a study by (Scholes, 2004) looking at how assessors and nursing students match learning outcomes and competencies to their practice and use these in portfolio documentation, the participants agreed that they had made naïve statements in their learning contracts and found the activities were more complicated than anticipated and sometimes not achievable. One of the recommendations of that study was that mentors should play a role in assessing outcomes and

competencies to see if they match the students' academic progression to make the portfolio more effective.

Medical education literature refers to a personal development plan which is described as "an agreement about what should be done differently and which goals should be achieved are written down in a document that is referred to as a personal development plan" (Van Tartwijk and Driessen, 2009). They further suggest that mentors should assist learners to make the goals in the plan more concrete, as they are usually vague. According to these authors, the role of these plans is for creation or identification of alternative methods of action and the reason is that "analysing previous actions may trigger a search for alternative strategies or abandonment of original goals. It is important to explicate (new) goals and alternative strategies" (Van Tartwijk and Driessen, 2009) 796).

2.8 Assessment of learning using portfolios

Student-centred learning required institutions of learning to revisit their assessment tools to ensure that self-directed learning is promoted and evaluated accordingly. This resulted in portfolios being introduced in many professional education courses (McMullan et al., 2003); (Scholes, 2004); (Elango et al., 2005); (McCready, 2007); (Michels et al., 2009); (Karlowicz, 2010). The portfolio is most appropriate in the assessment of student-centred self-directed learning since it is based on those principles and allows a holistic view of the students' accomplishments. (Karlowicz, 2010) explains how other methods of assessment in nursing "focuses only on demonstration of knowledge and does not provide faculty with evidence of the critical thinking processes and resources used by the students to solve clinical problems". The portfolio, on the other hand, is evidence of what knowledge has been acquired and how the knowledge has been acquired. The portfolio has been acknowledged to be ideal in formative assessment because it makes provision for the student and the facilitator to meet

and discuss the progress of learning based on the evidence that the student has already compiled in their portfolio. This has been found to open up communication lines between the students and their facilitators and/or mentors. Where portfolio focus groups are used, students support and assist one another (Williams et al., 2009); (Jones, 2010). These studies referred to findings on previous studies on portfolios, which found that students valued the constructive criticism of formative assessment and were motivated to keep their portfolios current by the knowledge that they would be summatively assessed (Klenowski et al., 2006);(Coffey, 2005). (Van Tartwijk and Driessen, 2009) suggest that portfolios should be viewed frequently during an education program, and give the following explanation of formative assessment, "In fact, every time a mentor and a learner meet to discuss the learner's progress using information from the learner's portfolio, it can be qualified as diagnostic/ formative assessment".

Studies conducted on portfolios as a summative assessment tool have questioned their reliability in evaluating the accomplishments of the students. The reason for this stems from the very nature of the portfolio since it is so individualised that it is almost impossible to compare what different students have collected as evidence. Also, the assessors themselves will be subjective in their assessments of the portfolios since portfolios by their nature cannot be prescriptive. (Karlowicz, 2010) undertook a study to develop an evaluation tool for the portfolio since previous literature had shown that there was a gap in studies that actually proved portfolios to be a reliable form of evaluating competency against the course outcomes (McCready, 2007); (Michels et al., 2009);(Buckley et al., 2009). The findings of the study suggest that interrater reliability is achievable in portfolio assessment if the assessors have been trained and if the portfolio evaluation tool is based on curricular concepts which are well defined and understood by the raters of the portfolio. The findings did emphasise, however, that portfolio evaluation tools cannot be standardised like other tools used in nursing evaluations. (McCready, 2007) concluded by reminding all those who use the

portfolio for assessment that "a holistic approach can be taken and rather than focusing on reliability and validity in a quantitative way, credibility, transferability, dependability and confirm ability can be looked at, therefore assessing what is a very qualitative form of assessment in an holistic and qualitative way, also, taking into account the subjectivity of the assessor"

2.9 Conclusion

This chapter discussed the literature review for the study on the use of the Personal and Academic Development Portfolio (PADP) as a learning tool, from the perspective of master's students. The discussions focused on the concept portfolio; the educational philosophies underpinning the PADP; the use of the portfolio as a learning tool; the use of the reflective diary; support in portfolio development; the learning contract in the portfolio; and assessment of learning using portfolios.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the research approach that was selected and used in this study which aimed to explore the use of the Personal and Academic Development Portfolio (PADP) as a learning tool from the perspective of master's students. The purpose of the study was to explore the perceptions of nursing education students about the use of PADPs in a selected school of nursing at one of the universities in KwaZulu-Natal. The objectives of the study were: (a) to explore the views of nursing education students about the use of PADPs as a learning tool; (b) to explore the perceptions of nursing education students on how the different sections of the PADP contribute to their learning; and (c) to describe the views of students about the support provided during the learning process using the academic development portfolios.

This chapter presents the research paradigm, research approach and design that were adopted in this study. It also provides a detailed description of the research setting, target population, sampling procedure, data collection tools and process adopted in this study. The data analysis technique, ethical considerations, data management and method of dissemination of findings are also described.

3.2 Research Paradigm

A research *paradigm* is the world view held by the researcher. It is a way of looking at the world. It is composed of certain philosophical assumptions, beliefs and values that guide and direct thinking and action in the process of conducting research (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). A constructivist paradigm was adopted in this study. "The central assumption of this paradigm

is that reality is socially constructed, that individuals develop subjective meanings of their own personal experience, and that this gives way to multiple meanings" (Bloomberg and Volpe, 2008: 9) and researchers should attempt to understand the complex world of lived experience from the point of view of those who live it. In this study, the researcher intended to explore the views of master's students regarding the PADP as a learning tool for better understanding of their perspective towards this phenomenon of interest.

3.3 Research Approach

A qualitative approach was adopted for this study. (Hesse-Biber and Leavy, 2006) 5) explain that "Qualitative research produces both exploratory and highly descriptive knowledge". The aim of this study was to explore perceptions on an issue where very little is known, especially in the setting of this study. According to (Polit and Beck, 2008), "Qualitative methods are especially useful for exploring the full nature of a little understood phenomenon", which was the case in this study.

3.4 Research Design

An exploratory research design was used in this study. According to (Polit and Beck, 2008), "Exploratory qualitative research is designed to shed light on the various ways in which a phenomenon is manifested and on underlying processes". More importantly, the exploratory component is critically important for acquiring knowledge in an area in which little research has been conducted (Burns and Grove, 2009). This design is therefore appropriate for this study since the information on the PADP will be gathered from students who have had experience of compiling a portfolio.

3.5 Research Setting

Studies that adopt a constructivism paradigm use natural settings as research settings(Burns and Grove, 2009). The setting for this study is school of nursing in a higher education institution in KwaZulu-Natal which offers a master's degree in nursing education. This course involves the use of a PADP as one of the learning tools. The participants in this study had therefore had experience of PADPs. The phenomenon of interest in this study was explored from the perspective of the participants from this research setting.

3.6 Population

A population is the entire aggregation of cases in which a researcher is interested (Polit and Beck, 2008) 337). The population for this study were past intakes of students who had registered for the masters' degree progressive education for health professionals and had finished their coursework. The intake for this course is every two (2) years and for the purpose of this study, the population consisted of two cohorts of students. This assisted in data collection because the assumption was that these students have had recent experience of the PADP and would therefore be able to provide the information the researcher was interested in. The two cohorts together gave a total population of 25, which excluded the researcher who was part of the second cohort.

3.7 Sampling

Qualitative researchers use non-probability samples, taking advantage of those who are available and accessible to the researcher (Cottrell and McKenzie, 2011). These authors explain that "purposive sampling is used when subjects are intentionally selected to represent a predefined characteristic or trait" (Cottrell and McKenzie, 2011) 235). The sampling technique used in this study, therefore, was that of non-probability purposive sampling. The above reasoning applies to both the first and second cohorts of students in that they were

intentionally selected for this research since they represented what was currently perceived about the PADP. Participants were recruited telephonically and the purpose of the study was explained to them. Once they had agreed to participate, they were sent a letter via email to confirm their agreement to participate and to inform them of the details of the study, such as how the study was to be conducted, the use of the audiotape recorder and the focus group interview for those that were to be part of the focus group interview. The participants that formed the focus group were contacted a day before the agreed date and time as a reminder and confirmation that the focus group interview would be taking place as planned. The final sample consisted of 11 participants, five (5) of whom participated in the focus group and six (6) who were interviewed individually.

3.8 Data Collection Procedure

Focus group interviews and individual interviews were the data collection methods chosen for this study using an interview guide (annexure 6). The focus group consisted of participants from the first cohort of students. This allowed for a homogeneous group which is advocated for in literature. "Homogeneous groups have an important built-in advantage, which is that they are typically helpful in creating a comfort level within the group that fosters fluid conversation. People tend to feel more comfortable speaking in a group when they have things in common with the other group members right from the start" (Hesse-Biber and Leavy, 2006) 213).

The group interview was held at a convenient and central venue for the participants. A date in August 2012 was agreed upon which suited all the participants. A classroom, which was free at the time and away from any disturbances, was used as space for data collection. The interview was conducted by the researcher, who was acting as a moderator for the group. According to (Hesse-Biber and Leavy, 2006), the researcher takes the role of the moderator

in focus groups, which greatly influences group dynamics as well as the flow of the discussion that ensues. The interview was audiotape recorded to facilitate the data collection process. An assistant moderator, a fellow master's student who was not a member of the population under study, assisted in collecting data related to environmental factors as well as assisting with other issues that could influence the group dynamics. The summary of the discussion was given to the participants at the end of the focus group interview. This is advocated by (Krueger, 1998) as the first step of focus group analysis.

Following the focus group interview, individual interviews were conducted with participants from the second cohort of master's students. These interviews took place over a period of four months. The dates of the interviews were dependant on the availability of the participants, who were all conducting their studies and working, which limited their availability. Individual interviews were held in different venues at the university based on whether they were available and free from disruptions. Some were held in the participant's preferred venue based on time availability. Each individual interview lasted approximately 45 minute to an hour. The individual interviews were also audiotape recorded with permission from the participants. This contributed to the validity and trustworthiness of the study since after each individual interview, the researcher went back to analysis and compared the findings with those from previous interviews. The whole process of data collection from the time of the focus group interview until the last individual interview lasted approximately eight months as it was intertwined with data analysis and was also dependant on the availability of participants.

3.9 Data Analysis

The data from the audiotape recorder as well as the notes from the moderator and assistant moderator were used for data analysis of the focus group interview. The tape recorded data

was transcribed and analysed at both group and individual level. This method is advocated by (Hesse-Biber and Leavy, 2006) and (Polit and Beck, 2008). (Hesse-Biber and Leavy, 2006) explain that, "Focus group transcripts can be analysed, in part, as a conglomeration of individual responses…what makes focus group analysis unique is that the transcript can also be analysed at the group level. While individual accounts comprise the transcript, there is also a 'group narrative' that emerges which is larger than the sum of its parts. In other words the group dynamic and group interaction influences the data and become part of the data" (page 223).

At the end of the group session, the key points that had been discussed were summarized and presented to the group members to confirm that they agreed with the understanding of the moderator concerning what had been discussed. This is advocated by (Krueger, 1998) as the first step in quality data analysis on focus groups. Debriefing sessions were held between the moderator and assistant moderator immediately after the group interview so that those factors which are specific to the group were recorded and not lost with time. (Krueger, 1998) explains this issue and says "delay erodes the quality of analysis…delay is a concern for several reasons. While comments may have been captured electronically, there are other types of input that affect analysis quality that cannot be captured by electronic means. The sense of the group, the mood of the discussion, and the eagerness with which the participants talk to each other are not elements that are included in the transcript". Data from the audiotape recorder was changed by transcript into notes.

Constant comparison analysis was used for this study. "To perform constant comparison analysis, the researcher first reads through the entire set of data (this could be a subset of the data). The researcher then chunks the data into smaller meaningful parts and labels each chunk with a descriptive title or a code. The researcher takes pains to compare each new

chunk of data with previous codes so that similar chunks will be labelled with the same code. After all the data had been coded, the codes were grouped by similarity and a theme was identified and documented based on each grouping" (Leech and Onwuegbuzie, 2007) 565). Line by line analysis was conducted to identify the meaningful parts. The coding process began with the aim of generating categories. From the categories, the themes emerged and these were interpreted using literature. Therefore the analysis was undertaken inductively. The transcripts were also forwarded to the research supervisor for independent cross-checking of data-coding and themes were compared and discussed with the researcher for agreement.

The same process was followed with the individual interviews where the researcher transcribed the interview audiotape recording immediately after each interview and started the analysis, comparing the concepts identified with those that had already been identified from the focus group interview. This continued until data saturation, which was when no new information was derived from the interviews.

3.10 Trustworthiness of the study

The researcher ensured the trustworthiness of the study by taking into account credibility, confirmability, transferability and dependability, as described by Polit and Beck (2008).

(Polit and Beck, 2008) 539) explain *credibility* as "the confidence in the truth of the data and in the interpretations of them". The group interview was audiotape recorded and the researcher and an assistant moderator took notes during the group interviews. At the end of the group interview, the discussion was summarized and presented to the group members to validate their responses with the researcher. A debriefing session then followed between the researcher and the assistant moderator to validate the data collected. The same process was followed for the personal interviews. The data analysis process was verified with the

supervisor at all levels and the findings of the study will be made available to the participants for comments. The data collected will be kept by the department for a minimum of five years.

"*Confirmability* refers to objectivity, that is, the potential for congruence between two or more independent people about the data's accuracy, relevance or meaning" (Polit and Beck, 2008) 539). The use of the audiotape recorder as well as that of the assistant moderator assists to achieve confirmability in this study. Furthermore, all data collected was transcribed and reviewed by the supervisor and confirmed to be accurate and relevant.

(Polit and Beck, 2008) 539) describe t*ransferability* as "the generalizability of the data, that is, the extent to which the findings can be transferred to or have applicability in other settings or groups". The findings of this study are not generalized, but are applicable only to the setting of the study. However, enough descriptive data has been provided in the research report, as advised by (Polit and Beck, 2008), to allow the reader to decide whether the data would be applicable in their own context.

Dependability is a method used to show consistency in findings, described by (Polit and Beck, 2008) as "the stability of data over time and over conditions". The researcher achieved dependability by providing in-depth descriptions of the exact methods of data collection, data analysis and interpretation of findings (Polit and Beck, 2008). Dependability was also ensured through providing direct quotations of the participants to support the findings and the themes that emerged from this study.

3.11 Ethical considerations

The research proposal was submitted to the Ethics Committee of the higher education institution of the study setting and ethical approval was granted (see Annexure 1). Permission was requested from the Dean and Head of the School of Nursing and Public Health (see

Annexure 2) and permission was granted to conduct the study (see Annexure 3). The students that participated in this study were provided with an information sheet (see Annexure 4) that explained the purpose of the study, the rights of the participants and contact details of the researcher in case of need. This information sheet was accompanied by an Informed Consent form (see Annexure 5) to be signed by the participants who were willing to participate in this study.

The principle of justice was adhered to by ensuring the participants' confidentiality. During the data collection processes, the researcher ensured that the names of the participants were not used on the transcribed data scripts by using codes instead. Codes were also assigned to transcripts instead of participants' names for anonymity and confidentiality. It was explained to the participants that no sensitive information would be divulged during the process of reporting on the findings, even during the process of publication of the study findings. The principle of respect was adhered to by allowing the participants to decide whether or not to participate in the study without any risk of penalty or prejudicial treatment. The principle of beneficence was maintained because the researcher ensured that no discomfort or inconvenience occurred during the data collection.

Permission was obtained from the participants to use the audiotape recorder as well as the services of the assistant moderator before they signed consent to participate in the focus group interview or individual interview.

3.12 Data Management

The data was stored by the researcher in a locked cupboard in a secured room, accessible only to herself and the researcher supervisor. The data sheets were scanned and stored and researcher's computer, which can only be accessed by means of a special password, and on a memory stick, which is only accessible to the researcher and research supervisor. The data

sheets will be shredded once the outcome of the dissertation indicates that there is no further need to go back to the transcribed data. The data sheets will be shredded because of the limited space to store data sheets.

3.13 Dissemination of findings

Research findings will be presented in the form of a hard copy dissertation that will be submitted to the School of Nursing and Public Health. Two copies will be sent to the university library for public use and a CD with a copy to the school's postgraduate office. The researcher is also planning to publish the results in journals and to present them at conferences.

3.14 Conclusion

This chapter described the research methodology adopted in this study. A qualitative approach was used as the aim of the study was to explore participants' views on the PADP. The constructivist paradigm was selected to guide the study as it supports the individual's meaning of their own experiences and allows for multiple meanings. The research design was exploratory and data was collected using a focus group as well as personal interviews on a purposively selected sample in the research study setting. Data analysis was done using constant comparison analysis and themes were generated. The findings will be discussed in the next chapter.

PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the data analysis from the study exploring the use of the Personal and Academic Development Portfolio (PADP) in a school of nursing in KwaZulu-Natal from the perspective of the master's students. The main purpose of the study was to explore the views of nursing education students about their use of the PADP as a learning tool. The objectives of the study were (a) to explore the views of nursing education students about the use of the Personal and Academic Development Portfolio as a learning tool; (b) to explore the perceptions of nursing education students on how the different sections of the Personal and Academic Development Portfolio contribute to their learning; and (c) to describe the views of students about the support provided during the learning process using the Personal and Academic Development Portfolio.

Two cohorts of master's students in nursing education participated in this study. Both groups consisted of 13 students, with the researcher being one of the second group. A total of 11 participants served as informants in this study. Five were part of the focus group and six participated in individual interviews.

A number of themes emerged under how the participants perceived the PADP. The themes include: (1) Conceptualization of PADP as a learning tool; (2) Perceived contribution of different elements of the PADP; (3) Participants' perception of characteristics of the teaching and learning process; (4) Participants' perceptions on available support in using the PADP as a learning tool; (5) Nature of the student; (6) Perceived outcomes of using the PADP as a learning tool; and (7) Challenges of using the PADP as a learning tool.

The themes and their associated sub-themes **(annexure 7)** will be presented below.

4.2 Theme 1: Conceptualisation of the Personal and Academic Development Portfolio as a learning tool

A number of subthemes emerged under the theme of how participants conceptualized the PADP as a learning tool. PADP was perceived as (a) an unfamiliar educational tool, (b) a tool that promotes competency-oriented learning, (c) a tool that promotes self-directed and self-regulated learning, (d) a tool that promotes self-pacing and self-monitoring, and (e) a tool that fosters development of metacognitive skills.

4.2.1 The PADP as an unfamiliar educational tool

The data sources presented the PADP as an unfamiliar, but worthwhile educational tool. Most of the participants had encountered the PADP for the first time when they were doing their postgraduate studies. The findings revealed that participants felt that they had developed in a number of ways through using the PADP. They had learned to identify their strengths and weaknesses and to be systematic in doing things, as reflected in the extracts below;

> *With me, it was a new thing to use, but the thing I found was that I benefited a lot because … it assisted me to know my strengths and weaknesses. [FG Participant 2]*

> *At first it was not easy using this tool but using it now and again, it helps you identify all grey areas, it helps you to be systematic, but earlier on I had a problem. [FG Participant 4]*

> *I find it of great benefit to me, really though it was not real practice. I could not relate to it [FG Participant 1]*

4.2.2 The PADP promotes competency-oriented learning

The participants perceived the PADP as a tool that promotes competency-oriented learning because the learning process began with self-assessment against a set of competencies. These

set of competencies were related to transferrable core skills, such as academic writing, computer skills and becoming a self-directed adult learner. Data revealed that the participants worked towards achieving the desirable set of skills or competencies at masters' level. Through self-assessment, the participants established their own strengths and weaknesses. The outcomes of self-assessment served as a guiding framework to establish specific learning goals and plans directed at achieving desirable competencies.

> *We evaluated and rated ourselves first, the skills we have as self-directed learners and the possession of skills such as academic writing, computer skills, problem-solving skills, research skills and many more as expected at the end of the program [Participant D]*

> *… it needed me to be very honest with myself … how much transferrable core skills and how much self-directed I am [Participant C].*

> *Sometimes you score yourself but as you try and do the work you realize that e.g. the computer skills are not enough for me to do all the required Masters work therefore your assessment is not accurate because you need more skills to search for literature, etc. As a whole you improve from initial rating and personally you are confident that you have acquired the necessary skills [Participant D]*

> *As a self-directed learner, I was supposed to learn the computer, so that I can retrieve articles. … it helped to identify my weaknesses to achieve that first [FG Participant 5]*

4.2.3 The PADP fosters self-directed and self-regulated learning

According to the participants, the PADP as a learning tool fosters self-directed learning and self-regulated learning. The learning contract component of the PADP particularly fosters these as it gives students the power to decide and regulate their own learning. The participants reported that they initiated the learning process and were responsible for all activities that arose out of the needs identified. They had to organise their learning in an orderly manner as prioritised and manage their time to achieve the set objectives. Based on

what was expected of them at master's level and the strengths and weaknesses they had identified during self-assessment, the students decide on what to learn and at what pace, guided by the course timelines. As part of regulating their learning, the participants indicated that they were expected to identify their own learning needs, set their own goals, plan how to address the identified learning needs, set timelines for achieving activities, decide on the evidence to submit as proof of achieving the set goals and reflect on the whole learning process, with the help of the facilitator, in order to enhance their learning.

> *It was indeed self-directed because nobody was going to help you. You set yourself those goals and you have to do it* [FG participant 1]

> *You know, I happened to get used to doing things independently, and set up your goals and know what to do* [FG participant 2]

> *You set yourself those goals and you have to achieve them. You try your best to achieve them...* [FG Participant 1]

> *You are able to plan how you are going about achieving the learning outcomes that you have set out yourself. [Participant C]*

The participants described how they were able to diagnose their learning needs with the use of the PADP and pursue those specific needs according to the plan.

> *I had this task to do in the computer but did not know how to go about doing it, and then I decided I needed to update my skills in the computer before I can achieve my goal [FG Participant]*

> *I had a problem mixing with group members, working in teams, doing group work. I had to contract myself to develop this skill and I am good at this now [FG Participant 2].*

> *It really assisted me to plan appropriately what I need to achieve and how much time I need and to also make it a point that I stay in that plan and get it [Participant D]*

4.2.4 The PADP promotes self-pacing and self-monitoring

Embedded in self-regulated and self-directed learning is self-monitoring and self-pacing. The participants expressed that they had to be committed to achieving the goals they had set. That required them to monitor that their progress according to the plan. They had to set time lines and work hard to meet them.

> *You are able to plan how you are going about in achieving the learning outcomes which you set out for you. You plan how much time you want to spend on each and every aspect of the outcome and so that makes it easy for you to schedule yourself if you feel that you have been busy, you make up at a later stage. [Participant C]*

> *It allows the student to monitor her progress and identify and see his or her performance. [FG Participant 2]*

> *I find the portfolio to be of benefit and also help in tracking the progress of learning... I found that it helped to make you take time to move from one point to another and actually see how much you have achieved. [Participant D]*

> *It (the portfolio) does help to push yourself to achieve what is of value to you. It helped me assess myself, how I actually manage my time and work. [Participant E]*

> *I had learnt that if something is due, I had to submit it. I would then start early with my work. [FG Participant 3]*

4.2.5 The PADP fosters development of metacognitive skills

Data sources reflected that the PADP fosters development of metacognitive skills. These include self-appraisal, with participants evaluating themselves critically, making judgments regarding their skills, their learning and improving their academic performance based on critical self-appraisal. The participants expressed that in compiling PADPs, they engage in a number of activities that foster metacognitive skills. They quoted the extended CV and learning contract as examples of such activities. They highlighted the learning that took place

through compiling their extended CVs. The process required them to critically reflect on their past learning experiences in the context of the skills expected at postgraduate level; critically engage with learning that took place during their previous learning experiences, making connections about learning that took place in the past; and to identify the gaps and prioritize them in the order of their importance in order to develop plans for their learning process. The following excerpts highlight participants' thoughts about how the extended CV facilitated their learning:

> *As I was writing my extended CV I had to think carefully of the learning that took place and the gaps to build on as I work on my learning contract. [FG Participant 5]*

> *Compiling an extended CV was the best part I enjoyed because I critically reflected on all my previous learning experiences, …what I have achieved up to now. … and actually I saw how much I learnt and made me see my worth. [Participant C]*

> *I had to critically engage with learning from the past, establish the learning that took place, link the skills developed from previous learning to the skills expected to students at masters level (skills of a self-directed learner and transferrable core skill) that took place from the past [Participant D]*

4.3 Theme 2: Perceived contributions of different elements of the PADP

Data revealed that various elements of the PADP were perceived as contributing to the teaching and learning process and to the academic and personal development of the student. It emerged that (a) the learning contract promotes individualised learning, (b) the reflective learning diary promotes theory practice integration (c) critical self-assessment; extended CV; learning contract and reflective learning diaries promotes student centred learning; and (d) critical self-assessment and learning contract promotes skills focused learning

4.3.1 The learning contract promotes individualised learning

It emerged from the data sources that the learning contract promotes individualised learning. According to the participants, this element of the PADP caters for their differences because it allows them to identify their own learning needs, decide on their own individual learning goals, and develop their own learning plans and contract with the facilitator on how to achieve those set goals. The learning contract allows some flexibility because students may alter their plan if there are unexpected demands that affect its execution. The facilitator is there to provide individual support to students as they work on what they have contracted themselves to do, as stated in the extracts below;

> *It really assisted me to plan appropriately what I need to achieve and how much time I need. [Participant C]*

> *You set yourself those goals and you have to do it [FG participant 1]*

> *I found it is something that allows the student to progress and identify and see his or her performance from the very beginning to the end. [FG participant 2][*

> *…you are able to plan … how you are going about in achieving the learning outcomes which are set out for you. You plan how much time you want to spend on each and every aspect of the outcome and eh so that makes it easy so that you can schedule yourself if you feel that you have been busy, you can make up at a later stage [Participant C]*

> *The facilitator was very patient with me. At the beginning I was really struggling. I was not familiar with the computer; I was not familiar with academic writing. She made feel at ease. She never changed her attitude. She corrected me and said I must go back and do it again.[Participant D]*

4.3.2 The reflective diary promotes theory practice integration

It emerged from the data that the reflective learning diary, which is part of the portfolio, promotes integration of theories learned to practice. In their process of reflecting on the

significant occurrences they have experienced, students are expected to analyse the significant occurrence against a relevant theory to establish whether the incident was managed according to the principles in that selected theory or whether there were some gaps in the management of the incident. They then have to decide how they would manage the situation in the future according to that particular theory, as stated below:

... each time you reflect on an incident, we were told that it must be linked to a certain theory, so you go back and learn those theories and you try and fit the theory to the situation whether the information you have, you are able to deal with issue properly or not [FG participant 3]

it (reflective diary) assist to be able to use my theories because when we taught theories, each time you reflect an incident we were told that it must be linked to a certain theory [Participant 3]

reflective diaries were just building blocks for theories that are there in nursing, because, it made me ... understand different situations, what to do, what approach will I use, a theory to reflect against [Participant 2]

4.3.3 Critical self-assessment, extended CV, learning contract and reflective diary promote student-centred learning

The findings of the study revealed that the student is central in use of the PADP as the teaching and learning revolve around the needs and interests of the student and is directed by the student. The student's success is based on the outcomes of critical self-evaluation and critical reflection on their learning process and the outcomes are measured by the evidence generated to support the claim that the student has developed personally and academically. The elements of critical self-assessment on transferrable core skills, on being a self-directed learner, as well as compiling an extended CV, promote student centred learning. Compiling and executing a learning contract and the reflective diaries also promote student-centred

learning. The learning that takes place is centred on each student's identified needs and is therefore relevant to each individual student, as reflected in the extracts below;

Compiling an extended CV was the best part … because I reflected on all my previous experiences with what I have achieved up to now… I looked into it and actually I saw how much I learnt and how I learnt and it made me see how worthy I am…. Investigation and recollection, everything about it, I saw all I had done and I appreciated it [Participant C]

It … start with you as a learner, I need to move and get this information or this skill [Participant D]

…go out there to find information for yourself for what you regard as important for you [Participant C]

4.3.4 Critical self-assessment and learning contract promote skills focused learning

Data revealed that when using the PADP, the teaching and learning process starts with critical self-assessment, whereby the student assesses their self-directed learning skills and transferrable core skills against a set of skills and the result of the self-assessment focuses on the development of these essential skills. The study revealed that participants identified gaps in their transferrable core skills and self-directed learning skills and used the identified areas of weakness (gaps) to plan the areas of learning they would pursue. Data also revealed that participants used the learning contract to decide what to learn, how to learn, when to learn, how their learning would be evaluated and with which evidence. This is reflected in the extracts below:

… it made me to identify my weaknesses and my strengths. So it was very important for me to be able to ensure that I build on those weaknesses that I had, to be able to overcome whatever problem [FG participant 3]

It assisted me because I had to deal with my weaknesses, especially with time [FG participant 3]

I decided I needed to update my skills in the computer before I could achieve my goal. Now that taught me to use introspection from my side knowing that I needed this skill before I can do that. It helped me to identify my weaknesses to achieve that first [FG participant 5]

4.4 Theme 3: Participants' perceptions of characteristics of the teaching and learning process

The findings revealed that participants perceived the teaching and learning process as being characterized by (a) active participation in the learning process; (b) self-directed learning; (c) evidence-based learning; and (d) reflective learning. These emerged as subthemes under the theme teaching learning process.

4.4.1 Active participation

The findings of the study revealed that participants accepted responsibility for their own learning through the use of the PADP. It emerged from the data that the participants were actively involved in their own learning and they realized that if they did not take responsibility, they would have failed themselves. The PADP instilled a desire in the participants to achieve set goals.

It made me go out and seek for information [FG participant 5]

… you have to go find information for yourself [FG participant 1]

It makes it possible for you not to hesitate to go find information from other resources because nobody is going to assist you, you have to see where you want to get information and you have to go [Participant C]

4.4.2 Self-directed learning

Data revealed that the use of the PADP cultivated and strengthened self-directed learning amongst the participants. It emerged from the study that participants used the different aspects of the PADP to self-assess; diagnose their individual learning needs; plan their learning; schedule learning activities; monitor their progress; and evaluate their own learning. The following extracts reveal that the integration of various sections of the portfolio, such as the extended CV, learning contract and reflective diaries, promoted the teaching and learning process for self-directed learning:

> *It really assisted me to plan appropriately what I needed to achieve and how much time I need and to also make it a point that I stay in the plan and get it* [Participant C]

> *…I found it is something that allows the student to progress and identify and see his or her performance from the beginning to the end* [FG participant 2]

> *I find that the portfolio helps in tracking the progress of learning* [Participant D]

> *I found that it helped to make you take time to move from one point to another and actually see how much you have achieved* [Participant D]

4.4.3 Evidence-based learning

Data revealed that learning that was claimed to have taken place was evaluated by evidence submitted. Evidence emerged that the learning process was fostered by the facilitator who assisted the students in deciding what they would submit as evidence of learning that had taken place. The facilitator also had a role of critiquing evidence submitted by the students to ensure that it was of a good standard. It emerged from the study that the art of constructing, reflecting and presenting evidence developed participants' critical thinking skills because they had to be self-critical, as indicated below:

… the evidence, you can collect as much evidence as you feel, of the things that you have acquired, but if you do not have evidence, that means it won't be validated in the portfolio, i.e. you have not achieved it . … the evidence … speak for you [Participant D].

By submitting evidence, we were actually opening and subjecting ourselves to critique and questioning by the facilitator. That was scary but a learning curve. Writing and collecting evidence was also like a skill that had to be learnt [FG participant 4]

… we learnt from the process of evidence collection. The evidence will come from your incidences by you looking at what you learned form that, who assisted you, how did they assist you. The proof is now tangible evidence that yes I have developed and during evaluation, you are appreciated, you are able to attain the standard [FG participant 2]

4.4.4 Reflective learning

The data revealed that reflection is core in the teaching learning process. The participants indicated that they had to reflect on their previous learning and work experiences so as to identify their own strengths and weaknesses. They not only used the reflective learning diary of the PADP to reflect on significant learning occurrences during their practice, but also on their learning progress and their practice as nurse educators. The significance of the diary is expressed in the following extracts:

Compiling an extended CV was the best part which I enjoyed because I reflected on all my previous experiences with what I have achieved up to now [Participant D]

…you really get time to reflect on what has happened during your educational endeavors. It sharpens up your reflective skills. Sometimes you tend to not really reflect on what you have done and what you have achieved from each and every experience, I found that the portfolio makes you go deeply with reflection [Participant C]

…reflective diaries, I was able to reflect on what happened and improve on it
[Participant B]

4.5 Theme 4: Participants' perceptions on available support in using the PADP as a learning tool

Data revealed the following four forms of support available to the students; (a) orientation; (b) facilitator support; (c) university resources; and (d) peer support.

4.5.1 Orientation

Participants indicated that they were introduced to the PAPD as a learning tool during their orientation at the beginning of their course, which had provided some foundation information on the purpose of the PADP and how to use it. They had also been provided with guidelines on how to compile a PADP, which they could refer to as they worked on their portfolios.

> *… in the beginning of the course we were oriented nicely about it, what it is all about,.…* [Participant C]

> *Orientation was done* [Participant F]

However, some of the participants indicated that that the orientation had been inadequate as they had encountered various challenges in the process of compiling their PADPs, particularly when working on their learning contracts as they were not sure how much evidence was required to support the learning that had taken place. They felt that they had wasted a lot of time learning through trial and error. The following extracts explain:

> *In the orientation, there were no clear guidelines as to how much evidence is needed and how it will be evaluated. So you don't know if what you are doing is enough* [Participant D]

> *Orientation … there should be thorough explanation at the beginning of what is expected. So the support was there, but as we have been saying, trial and error.…* [FG participant 1]

Orientation was done but I still found myself confused throughout the whole portfolio situation. So I can't say I benefitted that much [Participant B]

Hm.. I think the orientation on it was not enough, it wasn't enough [Participant A].

An important factor that was revealed was that orientation takes place at the beginning of the year before all students have been registered, which resulted in some participants missing the orientation. The responses from those who had missed the orientation were phrased as if there had been no such support offered and it became evident that missing the orientation on use of PADPs had impacted on their learning process.

*… there was no orientation, and eh, we were just given a guide and the guide has to ensure to that it assist,… If there is orientation, we were not going to have these problems… * [Participant 1]

… if there were clear guidelines and were good orientation on what it is that is tangible evidence that is needed, we were not going to have these frustrations [Participant 3]

4.5.2 Facilitator Support

Data revealed that the facilitator supported the students through one on one meetings. These meetings were organized through appointments. A number of participants expressed satisfaction with the availability of the facilitator by appointment and with the nature of support provided by the facilitator. It emerged from the data that the facilitator was very patient with the students, guiding them on the learning process, especially because the participants were not familiar with the PADP. This is evident in the following extracts:

…the facilitator was there and she made herself available for us when we need her for that [Participant C]

The facilitator was very patient with me. At the beginning I was really struggling. I was not familiar with the computer; I was not familiar with academic writing. She made feel

at ease. She never changed her attitude. She corrected me and said I must go back and do it again. [Participant D]

The facilitator was good, very supportive…as long as you have submitted and you do your work, so she was alright [FG participant1]

The nature of support provided by the facilitator was in a form of a scaffolding approach, with the facilitator guiding and directing students instead of providing them with information. The role of the facilitator is to guide the students in discovering information for themselves to ensure that learning takes place. The facilitator points the students in the direction to search for information that was lacking in their submission and the students are expected to correct their work until it meets the expected standard.

She corrected me and said I must go back and do it again… even though she will not give you an answer but she was there for me [Participant D]

You keep on writing and submitting and get corrected and try again [FG participant 3]

But the problem is it will come back and you keep on writing [FG participant 1]

However, some of the participants expressed challenges regarding the availability of the facilitator outside appointment times. They expressed frustration with the system of having to make appointments in order to meet with the facilitator. Whilst some of the participants acknowledged that there was only one facilitator responsible for the whole group and that such a load contributed to their unavailability, others indicated that they found having to wait for an appointment a challenge in their busy lives. They felt that the facilitator should be available whenever they were on campus because that is the time they are away from work and they need to use that day to attend to all their academic needs. One of the participants

indicated that because they are used to teacher-directed learning, they tend to forget that the program promotes self-directed learning.

... when you try and reach the facilitator, she is not there, she is not available. You are delayed and you wait at least two hours for somebody who is not available because that is when you have time [FG participant 3]

… I also expected the supervisor to be there for me at all times forgetting that this is student- centred learning [FG participant 4]

The facilitator was there. It's not easy juggling work and study because sometimes you are at varsity and the facilitator is not available. But if you are persistent, you end up getting her [Participant E]

4.5.3 University resources

The participants indicated that the university proved various other forms of support, such as a library facility, with a librarian specifically dedicated to the nursing department, and academic support workshops in areas such as time management. Data revealed that most of the participants did not have problems identifying the resources available to them and they found the information they were looking for in those resources.

The librarians also were very patient with us. Showing us step by step what to do [Participant D]

Material resources were there, and we could learn from each other, go to the library etc. also workshops here and there were available [FG participant 3]

… I attended a workshop on time management and that helped me because I could see that those things are important to me [Participant B]

As far as resources the resources are there for you to consult. There are many people, librarians, whatever, they are there willing if you schedule an appointment, and material resources are available, not a problem... [Participant C]

However, participants raised a few concerns, saying that some of the learning resources were outdated, thus adding to their expenses. They explained that they sometimes had to pay for interlibrary loans because the university did not subscribe to some of the journals they required, as indicated in these extracts:

The problems we had were the journals. Some of them are not easy to get. If the university can subscribe and have easy access to most of the journals, it will be good for the students to have access to them and have all the materials [FG participant 4]

Learning resources are available but sometimes expensive [FG participant 2]

Material resources were there, … go to the library etc. … You keep trying and trying, sometimes you get old articles and not recent ones. … but the librarians are there to help and other students are there as well and always will help [FG participant 5]

4.5.4 Peer support

It emerged from the findings that participants also turn to each other for support as they tackle their learning outcomes. They support each other as they share information.

Other students are there as well and always will help [FG participant 5]

We could learn from each other [Participant B]

We will get together and look for things together and try to assist each other [Participant C]

My fellow students were also very helpful and we really assisted each other [Participant D]

4.6 Theme 5: Nature of the student

Data from the study revealed that participants perceived students using the PADP as developing special characteristics. A number of subthemes emerged and included (a) reflective leaner; (b) self-directed learner; and (c) collaborative learner.

4.6.1 Reflective learner

The data revealed that the use of a PADP is based on a strong culture of reflecting and students using this tool are taught to reflect on their prior learning, their current learning process and their development. It emerged from the data that the PADP required the students to start the process of learning by compiling their extended CV. Through this process, the participants would look at their education history and learn about themselves. The following extracts highlight how students felt they had benefitted from the process of identifying their strengths and weaknesses by means of the extended CV:

> *It sharpens up your reflective skills. Sometimes you tend to not really reflect on what you have done and what you have achieved from each and every experience,... I found that the portfolio makes you go deeply with reflection* [Participant D]

> *It needed me to be very honest with myself and honestly look at myself as truthfully as possible...it assisted me to really look into myself to know how much I know and how much I put out* [Participant C]

> *It's an important, versatile, learning experience which helps you look at yourself and identify what you know* [FG participant 1]

> *... helps you look at yourself and identify what you know it because it made me to identify my strengths and weaknesses* [Participant D]

Analysis of the data revealed that the skill of critical self-reflection resulted in self-diagnosis as participants identified gaps in their learning and thus planned their study strategy accordingly. This is an important aspect of the PADP as the learning process is dependent on a learner who is able to diagnose their own learning needs and how to address them.

> *At first it was not easy using this tool, but using it now and again, it helps you identify all the grey areas* [FG participant 5]

…so it was very important for me to be able to ensure that I build on those weaknesses that I had [FG participant 3]

…I had this task to do in the computer but did not know how to, then I decided I needed to update my skills in the computer before I could achieve my goal. Now, that taught me to use introspection, knowing that I needed this skill before I can do that. It helped to identify my weaknesses [FG participant 5]

Data revealed that participants conducted self-evaluation as part of the PADP process. This was done through sifting through their evidence to select which was most appropriate to include as proof that they had achieved their skills. It emerged from the findings that participants would judge their own methods of learning as well as their own achievements as they compiled evidence for submission.

You have self-judgment. You now end up knowing that you have to try by yourself first before you ask for help. You get it without being followed and you become more independent and it leads to self-growth [FG participant 4]

You look at what you benefitted from each experience and when you share your experience, and then it becomes more significant [FG participant 2]

By submitting evidence, we were actually opening and subjecting ourselves to critique and questioning by the facilitator. That was scary, but a learning curve; writing and collecting evidence was also like a skill that had to be learnt [Participant E]

4.6.2 Self-directed learner

It emerged from the data that one of the critical characteristics that a student needs to develop for learning to take place using the PADP is self-direction. Use the PADP as a learning tool demanded them to be self-directed and not depend on the facilitator all the time, as stated below:

It was indeed self-directed because nobody was going to help you. You set yourself those goals and you have to do it [FG participant 1]

We didn't have a chance of sitting down with our facilitator and actually formulate the contract. It was like formulate your own and submit, it was not a matter of sitting one on one you are able to know what is expected. It was trial and error (laughing) [Participant B]

It makes it a point that you go out there to find information for yourself for what you regard as important to you [Participant C]

It helps us to identify that you need to have the drive to go for help. It needs to start with you as a learner, I need to move and get this information or this skill. It helps [Participant D]

The participants indicated that students using the PADP as a learning tool take responsibility for their learning. Students plan their learning activities by means of the learning contract and the findings revealed that participants used the PADP to regulate their learning activities, pace themselves and monitor their progress.

It really assisted me to plan appropriately what I need to achieve and how much time I need and to also make it a point that I stay in that plan and get it [Participant C]

…it is something that allows the student to progress and identify and see his performance from the beginning to the end. You find that it makes the learner try a maintain a standard or try keep his level best to see himself in a good position using the portfolio [FG participant 2]

I find portfolio to be of benefit as it helps in tracking the progress of learning, how the learner progresses academically and personally [Participant D]

It emerged in the findings that participants using the PADP were also goal directed. The study revealed that participants evaluated their learning by reviewing whether they had managed to achieve the goals they had set for themselves. Some participants indicated that

they had found it frustrating if they had not managed to meet the goals they had set, but they had still learnt from the experience:

Generating goals, through the learning contract, even though it was trial and error,.. but it taught me something, how to work hard, how to achieve something even if you are not well versed on it [FG participant 3]

You know, I happened to get used to doing things independently, and set up your goals and know what to do [FG participant 2]

I found it has got a lot of benefits, in the sense that you are able to plan how you are going about in achieving the learning outcomes which you set out for you. You plan how much time you want to spend on each and every aspect of the outcome and so that makes it easy for you to schedule yourself if you feel that you have been busy, you make up at a later stage [Participant C]

Data revealed that students using the PADP took responsibility to initiate dialogue between themselves and their facilitator for questioning, information reviewing and for feedback on their learning. Participants acknowledged the input of the facilitator as a valuable source of information. They also noted other sources, including the librarian and their peers.

At first you use the guide, then you realise you need more information, then what I did was I contacted an ex student and got some information from her in terms of what exactly is needed. I contacted the librarian when I needed her and we would assist each other as a group of students. When you think you are doing what is expected, then you submit to the facilitator and she will review it and then you redevelop and improve from the discussion you have with her [FG participant 3]

At first I just wrote what I thought was right and I sent it to the facilitator, after our initial discussion I realised I needed more help from my peers. We assisted each other a lot to achieve our goals [FG participant 2]

4.6.3 Collaborative learning

The study findings revealed that participants learnt to rely on each other and use each other as sources of information. This was in a form of group activities as well as exchanging information amongst each other.

> *At some stage mixing with other group members, it's something I learnt, it was a lot of creation on my side because in the end you find out how this is, how I can get this skill so that I can do another skill. If I was doing it alone, it was going to be very hard to do things on my own, some other things. So it was another way of learning where you are using independent and dependant learning in order to reach what you want to have [*FG participant 2]

> *It made it possible to discuss issues with the others who were also doing the course, together, it make you to be part of a discussion because where we didn't understand we will get together and look for things together and try to assist each other, so I saw it eh that there is a lot of group work going on and it facilitated that [Participant C]*

> *I think I got the support from the students* [Participant A]

> *My fellow students were also very helpful and we really assisted each other* [Participant D]

4.7 Theme 6: Perceived outcomes of using the PADP as a learning tool

The study participants revealed a number of outcomes that resulted from using the PADP. The following sub-themes emerged from development outcomes of the PADP, including (a) development of transferrable core skills; (b) academic development and (c) development of reflective practice.

4.7.1 Development of transferable core skills

It emerged from the study that participants developed transferrable core skills through the learning process of using the PADP. These included skills that benefitted the participants in

their careers as nurse educators, such as using computers; conducting literature searches; time management; team work; and organisational skills. The findings of the study reveal that the participants acknowledged that using the PADP had helped them to develop and grow professionally.

> *For me professionally I was really developed because things like time management which are a priority in our profession, I've improved in such a lot of things, working with other people, working and using reflective diaries, which we are keeping. It has helped me a lot and I'm different from before the encounter with the portfolio* [FG participant 1]

> *I was able to improve on time management* [Participant B]

> *Now I keep my things neatly, keep them where they belong because now I understand that this is my evidence of the things I'm doing* [FG participant 5]

> *It has helped me professionally; I'm just a better lecturer* [FG participant 3]

Data revealed that participants reported an improvement in communication skills and leadership skills, particularly when dealing with their own students, colleagues and other members of the health team in their work areas. Some participants reported that they had reviewed their perception of themselves as lecturers as a result of what they had learnt using the PADP and that there is evidence of change in their personal educational philosophies.

> *It changed me; it made me change my attitude as a lecturer towards the learners* [FG participant 5]

> *…professionally I'm able to relate with my fellow lecturers and my seniors better…students, I now am more patient with the students, I allow them to say what they need to say and I reflect on what they are saying and we both come up with a solution as to what will best help. So, I'm working better with them* [FG participant 5]

Well, the skills I acquired I use them at work. My students participate even more in class now. I want them to be responsible for their learning. I have confidence in that now [Participant F]

Development was seen, some involved other members of the health team, how you approach them, giving them time, having a listening ear, being persistent and getting what you want to have [FG participant 2]

The study findings showed that participants perceived the PADP as enabling them in the development of problem solving skills, critical thinking skills and in becoming lifelong learners. They also acknowledged that it had improved their confidence on a personal level.

I think I benefitted as well because, maybe I feel I need a skill, and I just go for it now. I don't feel like I won't be able to do it. I'm able to prioritise and know that this is the right time. I do it [FG participant 5]

I find it was exciting when it helped me do my work the way I wish and I see it come together as I planned it. So now you know that this is the theory and this is the method to use and the situation comes together and it is really exciting [FG participant 2]

It has developed me because firstly I know where I stand and again it promotes lifelong learning, because I know I'll keep on using what I now have [FG participant 4]

4.7.2 Academic development

Study findings revealed that participants developed academic skills whilst using their PADPs. Participants reported improved academic writing skills, better use of library facilities and an enlarged scheme of knowledge.

Objectives that I had on my learning contract, I managed to achieve some of them, an example is academic writing…and also the use of the computer wisely, I really learnt a lot from it. Generating goals…even now I can do those things with my eyes closed and say do it this way [FG participant 3]

...being persistent and getting what you want to have. I was able with that to academically see myself progressing far more than before and it was a good step forward [FG participant 4]

I am so proud of myself for achieving all this. My computer skills are up to date. I know how to search for information. My academic writing is also improved a lot. I know I'm capable [Participant D]

It has helped me a lot and I'm different from before the encounter with the portfolio, academically I'm more confident with my skills, academic writing, using the computer. So, I'm really changed by the portfolio [FG participant 1]

4.7.3 Reflective practice development

Data revealed that participants perceived development of reflective practice as one of the outcomes of using the PADP. Participants indicated that they continued to use reflection in their day to day activities at work as a result of their introduction to reflective diaries whilst using the PADP

Reflection was a skill I benefitted a lot from because even today it is a skill that I'm still using. In situations today I still find that I always now think back to see how I managed that and how I can make it better [FG participant 1]

...like reflection for example. Now I'm able to utilise it in situations that I come across in my teaching [FG participant 1]

I love reflective diaries. I still use them at work. You look at your decisions and you change. Even your behaviour towards your students change because you are constantly observing and checking if you are making the right choices [Participant F]

4.8 Theme 7: Challenges to using the PADP as a learning tool

A number of sub-themes emerged under the challenges to using the PADP as a learning tool and these included (a) workload; (b) collection of evidence; and (c) no time dedicated to compiling the PADP.

4.8.1 Workload

The findings of the study revealed that participants were challenged by time demands in creating their PADPs. This was associated with general time restraints of the program, as all participants were also fully employed. This resulted in them having limited time to achieve their goals. They expressed that they felt pressured by the sometimes unrealistic goals they had set themselves as part of their learning contracts.

> *It made me to go out and seek information whilst there is no time* [FG participant 5]

> *You formulate the learning contract at the beginning , only to find that there is a lot of work, which you didn't know about, but you have committed yourself to this specific time but because you are forced and not properly achieve your goals* [FG participant 1]

> *It's just the timing since you work and you are a student as well. Sometimes you like to attend a workshop but you need to be at work* [Participant B]

> *However I found that because I was a working person at the same time studying, sometimes you find that you would have wanted to go to this much in something but because of constraints of time and whatever, you feel you don't want to put a lot of things in that contract which you would not be able to cover, so partly that was the limitation that I wouldn't want to put in many things which I won't have time to do* [Participant C]

Participants reported that developing their PADPs in conjunction with the workload of the program became stressful when they were struggling to achieve goals they had set out in the timeframes they had. The participants suggested that this led to some activities of the PADP being done at the last minute or not being achieved satisfactorily.

I find that it is challenging me to do it, you do not know how long the process will take because you are not finished, because you do this and it's that, and you do this and it's that. You find yourself having conflict with the contract which you created and other workloads, at times having fear of not finishing up [FG participant 2]

Time management, it was very bad, working, being a student, trying to do more work, it was bad, I was always behind, trying to achieve my objectives, I was always behind because of the workload [FG participant 5]

The study revealed that their frustration was justified as there was a lot more required by the program than the portfolio and collecting tangible evidence for the portfolio added to the time required to complete the tasks of the portfolio. Participants suggested that it would have been better if there was specific time in the program dedicated for the portfolio.

Yes I found that sometimes you feel it is a lot of work, and it being a lot of work, you have to sacrifice time for doing other things which you were supposed to do because of it, eh, I would say it is very laborious, you have to do a lot of looking for information, you have to look for evidence which some of it is not easy to get, that takes time, and another thing you are still expected to be doing some work, there was no dedicated time for the portfolio itself [Participant C]

4.8.2 Collection of evidence

Data revealed that the collection of evidence was a challenge to the participants. In developing their PADPs, participants were required to collect evidence of their achievements to validate the skills they claimed to possess. The findings of the study reveal that participants struggled to understand the nature of the evidence that was required by the portfolio.

We were not sure what tangible evidence was, if it was things we were doing... [FG participant 3]

...sometimes we would submit things that were not right, just take things for granted, for an example, bring a certificate as evidence, that was not right [FG participant 5]

…it was difficult to obtain the evidence of what you are capable of achieving because if you can't provide evidence, it was like you had never achieved that and the most of the things I thought would be evidence, our lecturer said that was not evidence, so that was difficult [Participant B]

The findings revealed that participants were not only challenged by the process of gathering evidence, but also on the availability of human resources to make the evidence authentic and reliable as the people they needed to validate their evidence were often unavailable.

The other challenge was getting the evidence because you need the cooperation from somebody else, you need the signature of that person, for example the librarian, which is proof that you really know. Without producing evidence that you know how to perform that particular skill, how will anyone know that you are not just saying [FG participant 1]

To support the frustration, at times you had the knowledge and plan on how to collect your evidence… where you go to the person and they say no, you have to go to authorities first to authorise that I give you this evidence and it causes a delay and as a student that is not good, it is not what you want. You may be tempted to change to get another form of evidence because this is delaying and you are not happy as a learner because now this is not the evidence that you wanted to begin with, it is just now a mere collection [FG participant 2]

It's not that I couldn't get the evidence. Sometimes you have done something but the person that is supposed to give you the letter or certification, you can't get them at the time you want to get them [Participant C]

4.8.3 No time dedicated to compiling the PADP

The findings indicated participants found it challenging to find enough time to work on their PADPs as there was no time dedicated for this purpose. Participants explained that as developing a portfolio is time consuming for both the student and the facilitator, having time allocated for this purpose would assist both the student and the facilitator. Below are the supporting extracts:

...there is no time allocated for the portfolio and even during the instruction and facilitation, there are no days for the portfolio, so you have to fit it in-between. So I felt like really, even the facilitator herself never dedicated enough time solely for it, it is difficult because when we see her, we want her for other things which we think are a priority or more important than the portfolio [Participant C]

For me the facilitator support was not good because when you try and reach the facilitator, she is not there, she is not available. You are delayed and you wait 2 hours for somebody who is not available because that is when you have time [FG participant 2]

4.9 Conclusion

This chapter described the findings of the study on the use of the PADP as a learning tool.

The findings of this study revealed that participants conceptualised the PADP as an unfamiliar educational tool, but that it promoted competence-oriented learning; self-directed learning; and self-regulated learning once they had started using it. The PADP made participants develop self-pacing and self-monitoring skills to progress in their learning and fostered development of metacognitive skills. The study also revealed that various elements of the PADP contributed to the teaching and learning process of the students. The learning contract promoted individualised learning through the use of self-assessment; the reflective learning diaries promoted theory-practice integration; the self-assessment tool developed transferrable core skills which in turn promoted skills focused learning; and all the elements together promoted student centred learning

The chapter also presents data of how participants perceived the teaching and learning process as characterised by active participation in the learning process, self-directed learning, evidence-based learning and reflective learning. The nature of the student support regarding the PADP included orientation to portfolio development, facilitator support, university resources and peer support

Data also revealed that in compiling the PADP students develop characteristics of a reflective learner, a self-directed learner and a collaborative learner. The outcomes of using the PADP as a learning tool were found to be the development of transferrable core skills, academic development and reflective practice. The challenges were that of the workload, the collection of evidence and no time dedicated to compiling the PADP.

DISCUSSION AND INTERPRETATION OF FINDINGS, RECOMMENDATIONS, LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY AND CONCLUSION

5.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the discussion and interpretation of the findings of the study in relation to the literature reviewed and conceptual framework. The chapter also makes recommendations in view of the findings, shares limitations and provides a conclusion of the study.

The aim of the study was to explore the perceptions of nursing education students regarding the use of the Personal and Academic Development Portfolio (PADP) in a selected school of nursing in one of the universities in KwaZulu-Natal. The study objectives were: (a) to explore the views of nursing education students about the use of the PADP as a learning tool; (b) to explore the perceptions of nursing students on how the different sections of the PADP contributed to their learning; and (c) to describe the views of students about the support provided during the learning process using the PADP.

The summary of the findings as presented in the previous chapter was that participants initially conceptualized the PADP as an unfamiliar educational tool. Once familiar with it, however, they conceptualized it as promoting competency-oriented learning; self-directed learning and self-regulated learning. They felt the self-pacing and self-monitoring aspects of the tool fosters development of metacognitive skills.

Participants perceived that the different elements of the PADP contributed towards the promotion of individualized learning; theory-practice integration; student-centered learning and skills focused learning. The teaching and learning process was characterized by active

participation in the learning process; self-directed learning; evidence based learning and reflective learning. The findings showed that students were supported in the use of the PADP by an orientation presentation on how to use the PADP. They also received support from the facilitator, library resources and their peers. Participants' perceptions of the outcomes of compiling a PADP included development of transferrable core skills, academic skills and reflective practice. Workload, time constraints and lack of time dedicated to developing the PADPs were identified as challenges to using the PADP as a learning tool.

A discussion of the findings is presented below.

5.2 Conceptualization of the Personal and Academic Development Portfolio as a learning tool

5.2.1 The PADP as an unfamiliar educational tool

The findings described in the previous chapter show that participants had initially been unfamiliar with the concept of using the PADP as an educational tool as they had encountered it for the first time when they registered for the master's course. They recognized, however, that the PADP would assist them in identifying their strengths and weaknesses and be systematic in their learning. The participants thought this would be valuable as it would enable them to focus their attention on areas that they needed to work on and improve.

Almost all studies on portfolio development (Tiwari and Tang, 2003); (Jones, 2010); (Kean and Embi, 2010) describe participants' first encounter with the portfolio as unfamiliar, some going as far as expressing that it causes anxiety to students. In their study of the teaching portfolio, (FitzPatrick and Spiller, 2010) described how tertiary teachers who had to compile a multipurpose portfolio as part of a postgraduate course in tertiary teaching experienced intense emotions due to the uncertainty of the portfolio and its requirements. The study does

reveal, however, that "it is interesting to note that all of the negative emotions detailed by participants were experienced at the beginning of the teaching portfolio task and/or during the compilation process". The findings of that study show that participants expressed enjoyment and satisfaction on completion of the portfolio. Similar findings are described in the study by (Ryan, 2011) on evaluating portfolio use as a tool for assessment and professional development in graduate nursing education. This author reported that students had to deal with uncertainty of what the portfolio was and the rationale for using, especially at the beginning of the process when it was unfamiliar. The findings advocate providing students support and a better introduction to portfolio development and its use, especially at the beginning of the process when it seems most needed. (Imhof and Picard, 2009) found in the study of views on using the portfolio in teacher education that participants "emphasized the importance of a comprehensive introduction to the portfolio process…they wanted to have a clear idea of the formalities, the content, and the prospective learning benefit". This would alleviate the anxiety of unfamiliarity and allow for a better acceptance of the portfolio as a learning tool.

In studies on portfolio development with emphasis on learning, (Buyukduman and Sirin, 2010) and (Lekamge and Karunanayake, 2007) found that participants initially found the portfolio helpful in identifying strengths and weaknesses and focusing on what they needed to learn and achieve. In an exploratory study on the evaluation of the Personal Development Portfolio in higher education by (Head and Johnston, 2012), findings showed that the most popular section in the personal development portfolio which they were currently using was the section called SWOT, where students identified their strengths and weaknesses and identified opportunities to deal with them. The second most popular section was the action plan as it allowed them to reflect on what they had achieved and see what they still needed to do. These sections focus the activities of the portfolio to learning as the students know that

they have to improve. However, (Vance et al., 2013) conducted a study evaluating an established learning portfolio comparing participants' perspectives of the learning portfolio with the previous study in the same setting. They found that fewer trainees than the previous study saw the portfolio as useful in focusing their training or in helping with recognition of individual strengths and weaknesses.

5.2.2 The PADP promotes competency oriented learning

The findings of the study suggest that the PADP promoted competency-oriented learning where the students focused on achieving certain competencies which they had prioritized according to the weaknesses they had identified. This was a direct result of the self-assessment that the PADP required from the participants which rated the students on the transferrable core skills expected at masters level.

These findings support findings by (Sargeant et al., 2011), who conducted a study in four countries which involved five learner programs, three of which were postgraduate, to look at the features of assessment that learners use to make informed self-assessments of clinical performance. All of the programs used portfolios as a method of self-assessment by learners. The study found that across all the participants, " the availability of specific target tasks, competencies or standards upon which to reflect and with which to compare one's performance was considered to enable more productive reflection and self-assessment" ((Sargeant et al., 2011) 639). Competencies therefore lead to better self-awareness as it focuses the student to a specific target of the competency required. The same findings were evident in a study by (McKenna et al., 2010)173), which found that "one of the most useful aspects of the portfolio is that it allows students to clearly identify where they feel further training in a particular competency may be required". (Gordon et al., 2011) reported similar results in that " the portfolio helped individuals to see an accumulation of their work that

provided comparative context from which gaps in professional and academic prior learning, which often aided individuals in determining whether they needed to upgrade their skills". A study on the Personal Development Portfolio by (Head and Johnston, 2012) found that linking the portfolio to competencies greatly increased the usefulness, relevance and the potential of the portfolio for students.

5.2.3 The PADP fosters self-directed and self-regulated learning

Findings from the study showed that using the PADP fostered self-directed learning and self-regulated learning. Participants in the study reported that the PADP enabled them to decide what to prioritise based on their self-assessment and identified weaknesses. They became self-directed in that they had to take responsibility for all their own learning. They were responsible for initiating their learning, and regulating their learning and timelines. They were expected to use the PADP, with the help of the facilitator, to identify their own learning needs, set their own goals, plan how to address the identified learning needs, set timelines for achieving activities, decide on the evidence to submit as proof of achieving the set goals and reflect on the whole learning process in order to enhance their learning.

The findings echo the outcome of the study by (Kariman and Moafi, 2011) which compared advanced midwifery students using the portfolio with those not using the portfolio. In their evaluation, these authors concluded, "moreover, portfolios help students develop three basic self-directed learning skills, assessing the quality of their own performance, formulating learning needs, and selecting future learning tasks" (Kariman and Moafi (2011: 4). (Cheng and Chau, 2013) found that participants who reported frequent use of self-regulation strategies scored higher marks in portfolio scores, signifying that self-regulation assists students to achieve more in portfolio learning.

However, according to the theory of adult learning, not all adult learners are at the same level of self-directedness. Findings from a study conducted by (Imhof and Picard, 2009) show that using portfolios for learning suits some individuals more than others and those who benefit the most are already self-efficient and have proactive attitudes. In their study using the learning portfolio to enhance constructivism and student autonomy, (Buyukduman and Sirin, 2010) concluded that even though the portfolio allowed for student autonomy and self-directedness, students still needed their teacher support in portfolio development. These findings agree with those of (Vermunt and Endedijik, 2011) which looked at how the portfolio was used to regulate teachers' learning activities After reviewing literature on patterns in teacher learning in different phases of the professional career, the findings were contrary to expectations and showed that introducing the portfolio did not automatically lead to self-regulation and meaning-directed learning.

5.2.4 The PADP promotes self-pacing and self-monitoring

The results of the study indicate that with self-directed learning and self-regulated learning came self-monitoring and self-pacing, where participants monitored the progress of their learning from the beginning until the end. The monitoring was based on the learning contracts that they had developed. The findings suggest that participants felt responsible for learning activities and wanted to ensure that they kept to the timelines they had specified in the learning contract. The study shows that participants were constantly monitoring their learning to ensure that they achieved their learning goals.

The findings are in line with those of (Lekamge and Karunanayake, 2007), who found that in compiling a portfolio, students mentioned that they learnt "to be more methodical, hardworking, and working on time, reminding themselves of targets to be achieved, reflect on their work and try to be more effective, ability to face challenges and ability to put theory into

practice". The findings echo the results from various other studies. In a study by (Head and Johnston, 2012), students acknowledged that the process of portfolio development encouraged them to review their progress on regular basis and the study by (Kamel and Attia, 2010) found that the portfolio process helped the students to take more responsibility for their learning. On similar lines, (Jones, 2010) found that using the portfolio assisted students in assessing their own practise, setting goals and working to achieve those goals. All this they found was a result of the knowledge and skills developed in the portfolio compilation process. They concluded that these aspects enhanced professionalism and were fundamental to the on-going development of a professional. (Chetcuti et al., 2011) attribute these benefits to the skill of reflection, whereby compiling a portfolio requires students to apply their minds to previous experiences, think critically about their activities and take decisions to improve their experiences.

5.2.5 The PADP fosters development of metacognitive skills

The study findings revealed that the participants developed metacognitive skills through the compilation of their extended CV as well as through the use of the learning contract. Data revealed that participants used the information they discovered about themselves in their extended CV to critically reflect on their learning patterns, their achievements and the skills they lacked, and to make judgments about their past educational experiences. The information they had about themselves from that exercise alone allowed them to plan appropriately the learning that needed to take place, the resources they should use, time management strategies required and methods for monitoring and evaluating their learning. All this was part of the learning contract of the portfolio. Self-awareness, through critical self-reflection, resulted in students who were aware of their capabilities and what they needed to learn, and who were able to plan their individual learning and determine if their learning goals are being achieved. (Jones, 2010) found that "the requirement for the annotation of

evidence was identified as an important factor in promoting meta-cognition and reflection". (Young and Fry, 2008) found these metacognitive skills to be correlated to academic achievements and that graduate learners had more regulatory skills than undergraduate learners. (Shen and Liu, 2011) advocate for training students in metacognitive skills as their study found that such training helped students to enhance their self-plan and self-monitoring skills. (Vrieling et al., 2012) found that increasing self-regulated learning opportunities increased the use of metacognitive skills amongst their student teachers. They concluded, "Hence, student teachers that receive more self-regulated learning opportunities apply more metacognitive learning strategies" ((Vrieling et al., 2012) 112).

5.3 Perceived contributions of different elements of the PADP

It emerged from the findings of the study that different elements of the PADP contributed to the teaching and learning process through the promotion of individualised learning; promotion of theory practice integration; promotion of student centred learning; and skills focused learning.

5.3.1 The learning contract promotes individualised learning

 The findings of this study show that participants identified the learning contract as an element of the PADP which promoted individualised learning. According to the participants, it was the self-assessment process of the learning contract that allowed them to pursue what they identified as priority learning areas. The learning contract required them to detail how they planned to achieve their individual goals. The written plan facilitated communication with the facilitator as it had to be discussed and contracted between the learner and the facilitator. The learning contract allowed for changes in the plan, which gave them the flexibility needed in individualised learning. The facilitator played the role of support as the students worked through their plans of the learning contract. The study found that the

learning contract gave the students the flexibility they needed to choose activities they were interested in. This allowed them to manage those activities the best way as they were motivated by their interest in them. Overall, the study found that the learning contract improved the self-esteem of the students.

This finding was supported by various other studies. In their study, (Kean and Embi, 2010) found that participants became involved in their learning process through development of their portfolios. The study summed this up by stating, "Hence it could be said that portfolio development has emphasized the element of learner-centeredness in them. Learner-centeredness is often examined as learner involvement in the learning process through development of awareness and preparedness for learning" (Kean and Embi, 2010: 298). In their study on stimulating learning ownership by using a learning contract, (Abdullah et al., 2012) concluded that the use of the learning contract transferred ownership to their students and the outcome was that their students were strongly motivated and engaged in meaningful learning activities and achieved their learning outcomes. They stated, "merely immersing students in student centered approach without empowering them to be responsible in their learning experience is not adequate in stimulating creativity and innovation in them. They need to be given ample opportunity to solve problems and make decisions on how to control and direct their own learning" (Abdullah et al., 2012) 62). (Ani et al., 2014) advocate the use of the learning contract as an important tool which allowed students in their study to develop skills that will set them apart from other job seekers over and above the academic qualification which employers seek, such as diligence, independence, effective communication skills, leadership skills and critical thinking skills.

5.3.2 The reflective diary promotes theory practice integration

It emerged in the study that participants identified the reflective learning diaries as the main element of the PADP that facilitated the integration of theory and practice. The participants indicated that the reflective learning diaries expected them, as students, to link their significance occurrence with a specific learning theory and use the principles of the theory to better understand the occurrence and to review the decisions made so as to make better decisions in the future. The participants acknowledged that using the reflective learning diaries in this way allowed them to integrate the theories learned into their teaching practice.

The findings are in line with several other studies (Moss et al., 2010); (Kariman and Moafi, 2011) where participants engaged in literature more during their reflections and therefore theory became applicable to their own experiences which they were reflecting on. (Vrieling et al., 2012) had similar findings when their study revealed that self-regulated learning, which includes self-reflection, allowed the student teachers to be more confident in their classroom work as they transferred their theory to practice. They stated, "Student teachers appreciated the self-regulated learning increase and felt more confident towards the transfer from theory to their own classroom practice, the assignments and the final test" (Vrieling et al., 2012) 113). (Kathpalia and Heah, 2008) 302) similarly reported, "specifically, reflection helps students to combine experience and knowledge together to produce new learning, to apply theory to practice, encourage a critical reflection, gain insight into personal development and manage emotions throughout the learning process". (Chetcuti et al., 2011) concurred that when the portfolio is used as part of the teacher preparation program, it becomes "a significant professional asset that helps teachers make the transition from teacher education programmes to actual teaching".

5.3.3.Critical self-assessment, extended CV, learning contract and reflective diary promote student-centred learning

It emerged from the study that all elements of the PADP are student centred. The extended CV, as the first aspect of the PADP, allows the student to self-assess and critically self-evaluate their previous learning and, using the transferrable core skills, identify their individual needs. Critical reflection on their learning as they work through evidence for what they claim to possess is also centred on the student. Developing a personal learning contract and working towards individual goals all promote student-centred learning. The reflective learning diaries are about individual significant occurrences and how to improve similar incidences based on the theories learnt. The students get to collect evidence of their personal learning and development. Therefore, the whole process is about the student, is driven by the student and develops the student based on their needs.

Several studies found similar results where the portfolio was about the students' learning and gave evidence to the process of their own learning (Kamel and Attia, 2010); (Head and Johnston, 2012); (Kariman and Moafi, 2011). A study by (Ryan, 2011) on use of the portfolio found that faculty participants identified the portfolio as a students' story of how they have developed from the beginning of the course.

5.3.4 Critical self-assessment, learning contract and reflective learning diaries promote skills focused learning

 Data revealed that the PADP promoted skills focused learning. The teaching and learning process of the PADP is initiated by the self-assessment process, which allows the student to critically assess how self-directed they are as learners as well as the transferrable core skills they possess. This leads to identification of weaknesses and gaps which are highlighted to develop individual plans of what needs to be pursued. The findings also show that participants will then use their learning contracts to direct their learning to acquiring the

specific skills they have prioritized, specifying what they will learn, how they will learn and what evidence they will use to show that learning has taken place. (Ryan, 2011) found that the portfolio gave direction to learning and helped their participants visualize progress. Similar results were found in the study by (Chetcuti et al., 2011) which found that compilation of evidence of achievements by the teachers in their study allowed them to have a better understanding of what they know and do and this develops professional knowledge from practice.

5.4 Participants perceptions of characteristics of the teaching and learning process

The findings of the study reveal that the teaching and learning process is characterized by active participation in the learning process; self-directed learning; evidence-based learning and reflective learning

5.4.1 Active participation

It emerged from the data that the participants were actively involved in their own learning and had come to the realization that if they did not take responsibility, they would have failed themselves. The findings of the study revealed that participants accepted this responsibility through the use of the PADP as it instilled a desire in the participants to achieve set goals.

This finding was supported by a study by (Alexiou and Paraskeva, 2010) where participants were involved in compiling an e-portfolio and the study findings showed that it promoted self-regulation as the students monitored their own learning. The study concluded that the e-portfolio was a "scaffolding approach of understanding and engagement" since it allowed the participants to be actively involved in their learning ((Alexiou and Paraskeva, 2010) 3053). (Chetcuti et al., 2011) found that development of the professional development portfolio helped their participants acquire the idea that they need to question all learning activities, resulting in active involvement in the methods, the outcomes and all areas of learning.

5.4.2 Self-directed learning

Data revealed that the use of the PADP cultivated and strengthened self-directed learning amongst the participants. It emerged from the study that participants used the different aspects of the PADP to self-assess; diagnose their individual learning needs; plan their learning; schedule learning activities; monitor their progress and evaluate their own learning. The data revealed that the integration of the sections of the portfolio, such as the extended CV, learning contract and reflective diaries, promoted the teaching and learning process for self-directed learning.

(Cheng and Chau, 2013) found that development of the e-portfolio in their study promoted self-regulation, critical thinking and peer learning as the students critically self-assessed, planned and monitored their learning. These are all aspects of self-directed learning. (Lekamge and Karunanayake, 2007) also found that teacher education students using the portfolio as a learning tool collected various types of evidence to showcase their achievements of different skills. The study concluded that this was not only evidence of students' active participation in their own learning, but also evidence that meaningful learning had taken place and therefore proof that competencies of self-directedness had been achieved. In the study by (Head and Johnston, 2012), students acknowledged that the portfolio had helped them to identify areas where they needed to improve their learning. However the research highlighted a growing concern in research on portfolio development that such significant attributes are identified only at the end of portfolio development and not earlier when it would be most beneficial.

5.4.3 Evidence-based learning

Data revealed that learning that was claimed to have taken place was evaluated by evidence submitted. Crafting evidence emerged as a learning process with the facilitator assisting the

students in deciding what they should submit as evidence of learning that had taken place. It emerged from the study that although relying on feedback from the facilitator, constructing, reflecting and presenting evidence developed critical thinking skills in the participants because they had to be self-critical.

(Corry and Timmins, 2009) conducted a study on the use of the teaching portfolios to promote excellence and scholarship in nurse education and they found that participants expressed the significance of the evidence collection as a vehicle for reflection and self-evaluation. They quoted the following extract of one of their participants, "We discovered that our entries allowed us to reflect on past teaching. This was very informative. For example one particular entry resulted in a realization that although espousing a student-centered approach, this was not reflected in the evidence gathered…it provided experiential evidence of the benefits of the portfolio use as a vehicle for self-evaluation" (Corry and Timmins, 2009) 391). These authors concluded that the portfolio is a tool that should be used by nurse educators to keep evidence of their academic activities, thus making it easy for peer reviews and development. (Norris and Gimber, 2013) also found that each choice the student makes with evidence generation leads to critical thinking and reflection. The study by (Chetcuti et al., 2011) found that the evidence becomes significant for another reason after the students have qualified and have started their teaching careers as it gives them a sense of direction and encouragement. They claimed that "evidently, the PDP documents acts as a source of support and morale booster for novice teachers" (Chetcuti et al., 2011) 68).

5.4.4 Reflective learning

The participants in this study indicated that they were expected to use the reflective learning diaries to reflect on their previous learning and work experiences so as to identify their own strengths and weaknesses. They were also expected to reflect on significant learning

occurrences during their practice as nurse educators using the reflective learning diaries. Participants acknowledged that they found the reflective diaries valuable and identified reflection as core to the teaching learning process.

Various studies support these findings. According to (Corry and Timmins, 2009) 391),"the portfolio can support ongoing professional development as it provides documented evidence of continuing professional development in nurse teaching through reflection on a series of teaching entries. This reflection can result in new understandings, new knowledge and ultimately better teaching." (Kean and Embi, 2010) found that all of their respondents recognized that the portfolio encouraged self-reflection, enabled them to monitor their learning and helped them to identify their strengths and weaknesses. In their study, (Chetcuti et al., 2011) found that the majority of their participants, who were in their first year of teaching, indicated that they had developed the skill of reflection whilst preparing their professional development portfolios and they defined this reflection as thinking back and thinking through critical incidences which could be used to improve their practice. (Whitworth et al., 2010) also found that the portfolio was useful in teacher employment as administrators and teacher educators believed that its significance is in its ability to allow for self-reflection for the novice teachers. Findings by (Jones, 2010) showed that the portfolio 'both promoted and enhanced skills and scope of reflection" in their participants.

However, findings of the study by (Imhof and Picard, 2009) suggested that the participants were not convinced that it was the portfolio which assisted them to reflect. The study revealed that participants felt they were reflecting on their work anyway and the portfolio did not add any benefit to that.

5.5 Participants' perceptions on available support when using the PADP as a learning tool

Findings from this study showed that there were various forms of support available to the students, including orientation, facilitator support, university resources and peer support.

5.5.1 Orientation

The findings indicate that participants were orientated by the facilitator on the use of the PADP at the beginning of the course. Participants were also given guidelines on how to compile a PADP, which they could refer to as they worked. However, findings revealed that as it was the first time many of the participants had been exposed to the PADP, they found the orientation to be inadequate, particularly with respect to collecting evidence of their achievements. The findings revealed that participants had to rely on trial and error as the guidelines did not specify how much evidence to collect.

In their study on the use of the portfolio with pre-service teachers, (Imhof and Picard, 2009) found that participants expressed the need for a comprehensive introduction to the process of portfolio learning, which would include the rationale for the portfolio, the content and the prospective benefits. In a study by (Chetcuti et al., 2011), the facilitators advocated for the use of group tutorials to assist their participants with the process of compiling the portfolio. Their study also found that tutorials were helpful in giving students opportunities to update their portfolios throughout the program.

5.5.2 Facilitator support

The study findings revealed that the facilitator was available by appointment for student support. For most participants, however, the appointment system proved to be a challenge as they had limited time on campus as they were also working. Findings suggest that the participants would prefer the facilitator to be available when they are on campus so as to

allow them to attend to all of their campus needs. (Imhof and Picard, 2009) found that participants in their study complained about the lack of feedback and felt that "the portfolio process ought to be driven by the communication with either the instructor or their peers". In their study using medical students, (Altahawi et al., 2012) found that the students' value of the feedback developed to the extent that it shifted their perspective on the role of the feedback and the students actually looked forward to receiving feedback as they knew it was constructive for their development. This inspired the students to give feedback to each other, which also helped them to improve. After they qualified, the feedback was seen as being more useful than a grade.

Head and Johnston (2012) found lack of time impacted portfolio development, which in turn affected facilitator support. Lack of time resulted in students leaving their portfolio work until the last minute, thus increasing the workload of the facilitator who was not able to allocate enough time for each portfolio. Participants in this study did acknowledge that one facilitator assisting all the students was a heavy workload and suggested that the student facilitator ratio be improved as the unavailability of the facilitator limited the support and feedback they received. (Sargeant et al., 2011) found that participants described lack of formative feedback as a barrier to their learning, but ultimately recognized that they had to initiate the process and seek feedback in order to learn and improve themselves. In their study promoting self-directed learning skills in a residence, (Nothnagle et al., 2010) advocated for students having one-on-one meetings with a mentor, who would act as a learning coach assisting students to reflect on their learning, set learning goals, develop metacognitive skills and create learning plans as well as assisting in overall use of the portfolio. Their results were encouraging, showing an improvement in residence confidence and self-directed learning skills.

Regarding the nature of support, data revealed that the facilitator played a scaffolding role during the learning process in order to facilitate discovery learning. Participants revealed that they were learning through trial and error and had to discover information for themselves. They then received feedback from the facilitator and had to correct their work until it was of the expected standard. In their study on mentoring portfolio use in undergraduate and postgraduate medical education, (Dekker et al., 2009) found that individual meetings were the most popular method of mentoring and the core function for these individual meetings was providing feedback and stimulating reflection. Their study therefore recommends specific training of mentors so that the impact of portfolio learning is enhanced. (Head and Johnston, 2012) study supported these findings and recommended the same as they identified that mentoring is a special characteristic in portfolio learning, as it has the ability to improve communication by creating opportunities for regular meetings between staff and students.

5.5.3 University resources

The findings showed that there were resources available to the students at the university which the participants used to facilitate their learning through the PADP. These resources included the library facilities, with a librarian dedicated to the nursing department; workshops on use of cumulative indexes and other literature search engines in the library; academic support workshops, such as time management; and computer support services. It emerged from the study that participants used the different university facilities based on the needs they had identified during the self-assessment phase of the portfolio. Because of the process of scaffolding, some participants attend workshops which will help them identify other skills that they need to develop. Although findings showed that the resources were conducive to portfolio learning, a few concerns were identified by the participants, such as journal articles that had to be paid for and interlibrary loan facilities, which took time

(Tochel et al., 2009) found that one of the advantages of the portfolio was its ability to facilitate engagement with learning and this was evident with the availably of university resources. The discussions that participants had with each other also helped them to identify resources that would assist them to problem solve and develop competencies which they needed. (Brennan and Lennie, 2010) found that students in their study were motivated to build their portfolios by learning outcomes and enjoyed taking responsibility for their learning. This was also evident in the current study where the available resources allowed the students to take responsibility for what to learn, how to learn and when to learn the particular skill. In their study, (Wassef et al., 2012) introduced a change from a paper based portfolio to the e-portfolio and found that university resources was one of the main issues they had to take into consideration in deciding the change. That study found that it was essential to identify university resources in the planning phase to assist and support students and staff with the use of the new portfolio, such as student access to computers and technological support personnel. They said that "a critical supporting factor was the commitment to this project was made by the educational computing team in the form of consultation, education, and ongoing support for students and faculty" (Wassef et al., 2012) 244).

The study by (Hall et al., 2012) on the development of an e-portfolio in medical education addressed concerns such as technical issues, support for coaches and students and facilities, which allowed them to gradually improve the use of the e-portfolio and hence its significance in the learning of the students.

Peer support

Study findings reveal that participants used each other for support in finding information, reviewing their work and finding out about available resource on campus. Participants learnt from each other and assisted each other with feedback and relevant information. Studies on

portfolio learning have identified the significant role played by peers in portfolio learning ((Austin et al., 2005); (Imhof and Picard, 2009, Schaub-de Jong et al., 2009). (Vivekananda-Schmidt et al., 2011) found peer support to be more significant with students who were developing reflective skills while (Sargeant et al., 2011) found the most significant aspect of peer support was that it was at times the primary source of feedback for students. (Lam, 2013) concluded that even although students valued feedback from the teacher, there was evidence that combined feedback from the teacher, peers and self-feedback improves the students' self-regulated processes.

5.6 Nature of the Student

The study shows that the students using the PADP developed special characteristics. These included a reflective learner; a self-directed learner and collaborative learning.

5.6.1 Reflective learner

The study findings revealed that reflection is at the core of portfolio learning using the PADP. All the activities of the PADP involved reflection, whether it was on participants' prior learning, current learning or on their development. Compilation of the extended CV initiated the reflection process as it allowed the participants to look back at their previous educational endeavors and make judgments on their skills. This led to identification of strengths and weaknesses, which resulted in students learning more about themselves, how they learn, what they have achieved and what they still need to achieve.

These findings were supported by several other studies (Kamel and Attia, 2010); (Corry and Timmins, 2009) (Head and Johnston, 2012) who found that reflection allowed for new understandings and encouraged the identification of areas that needed development. These studies concluded that portfolio use was a vehicle for self-awareness, which leads to development and learning. (Altahawi et al., 2012) concluded that letting go of objective

measurement of performance led to a reflective approach to learning. (Vivekananda-Schmidt et al., 2011) acknowledged the role that reflection plays in portfolio learning and advocate that students should be taught reflection in foundational programs before they reach postgraduate levels so as to receive maximum benefit from portfolio development at that level. (Ryan, 2011) also found that students in their study needed more direction on self-reflection as they would submit evidence, but not expand on why that evidence was used.

5.6.2 Self-directed learning

Study findings showed that another key characteristic of using the PADP effectively is that the learner needs to be self-directed for learning to take place. It emerged from the study that learners had to initiate the learning process with the extended CV, which led to self-diagnosis. With the identification of gaps in their knowledge, learners had to then design their own plan as to how they will learn. The implementation of the plan was dependent on the individual learner. Therefore, skills of self-directed learning were required for learning to take place. The study revealed that participants could not rely on the facilitator to learn. The learning contract allowed the participants to monitor their progress and to evaluate whether they had achieved their goals. The findings also revealed that participants had to initiate communication with the facilitator and peers to get information for achieving their goals and to receive feedback.

(Imhof and Picard, 2009) found that individuals who were more self-directed and more proactive tended to benefit more from the portfolio, arguing that "individuals with a strong proactive attitude tend to find the portfolio more important and more useful than individuals with a weak proactive attitude" Imhof and Picard (2009 :152). In a study by (Kamel and Attia, 2010) the participants stated that the portfolio helped their learning because it helped them take more responsibility for their own learning. (Alexiou and Paraskeva, 2010) suggest

that the portfolio could be viewed as " a scaffolding approach of understanding and engagement… can be used in order to enhance self-regulated learning skills". The portfolio not only allows for communication as the learner discovers and seeks information, but the learner is evaluating and monitoring their learning throughout the process.

5.6.3 Collaborative learning

It emerged from the findings that the participants developed collaborative learning in using the portfolio. The participants turned to each other as sources of information and there were a lot of group activities where they came together and assisted each other with portfolio activities. (Sargeant et al., 2011) described how participants in their study valued discussions with their peers as they claimed that they assisted each other in reflecting and informing on their performance. The study concluded that even although self-directed learning is necessary, it needs to be balanced by formative feedback from peers as well as facilitators. Similar findings in a study by (Welsh, 2012) found that when students actively participate in the assessment process, there is self, peer and tutor feedback, and this leads to development of higher order thinking skills and a view of assessment for learning instead of assessment of learning.

5.7 Perceived outcomes of using the PADP as a learning tool

It emerged from the findings that participants developed specific outcomes by engaging the process of PADP development. These included development of transferrable core skills, academic development and reflective practice.

5.7.1 Development of transferable core skills

The results of the study revealed that the participants had developed transferrable core skills from the PADP learning process. As part of the PADP process, participants were expected to

evaluate their level of transferrable core skills against a set standard. If they felt they needed to improve certain core skills, they therefore prioritised those skills for development. The results show that the outcome of this exercise is that skills such as time management, literature search, team work and organisational skills were developed. Participants valued the development of these skills as they realised that acquiring and improving such skills have developed them professionally. In this study, participants expressed how the portfolio had changed their worldview as lectures, improved communication with students and colleagues and evidently changed their educational philosophies.

(Ryan, 2011) found that participants in her study also found the portfolio had benefited their work and effected change in their work environment. (FitzPatrick and Spiller, 2010) found that the portfolio had developed the participants professionally. All the participants in their study had experienced positive emotions on completion of the portfolio and felt recommitted and re-energised about their teaching practice since they now had a clearer direction and knew their strengths and weaknesses. A study by (Chetcuti et al., 2011) found that the teachers were using their portfolios as a point of referral and that the portfolio documents acted as a source of support and a morale booster for the teachers.

5.7.2 Academic development

It emerged from the study that participants had developed academically. Participants expressed how they had seen an improvement in skills such as academic writing, use of university library facilities and also expressed how the portfolio had allowed them to progress further with other academic studies they were pursuing. The participants valued the development of these skills as they gave them the edge with other academic tasks required by the program.

The findings are similar to the study by (Head and Johnston, 2012) where participants found that the portfolio influenced their development throughout the program as they developed skills to monitor all their academic activities and review their progress on regular basis. In their study on portfolios for learning, assessment and professional development, (Klenowski et al., 2006) concluded that "the construction of learning portfolio with an explicit focus on learning brings about important changes for course participants. As they become more aware of their own learning, through a process of meta-learning, they are able to support others' learning. The construction of the learning portfolio is, therefore an effective form of professional development".

5.7.3 Reflective practice

The study findings revealed that the participants continue to use reflective practice in their day to day activities as lecturers. Participants continue to review their decisions, especially concerning their interactions with students and colleagues, as they understand that they can learn from viewing issues from different perspectives.

This is supported by (Scott, 2010) who explained, "Because reflection generates inquiry and a search for meaning, it provides the potential to see things in a way they have not been understood before. More simply, reflective practice contributes to learning" (page 433). (Chetcuti et al., 2011) conducted a study on reflective practice by teachers who had kept a portfolio for their learning whilst at university. Their findings showed that all the participants still reflected on their practice after qualification. Their findings, however, suggested that the reflection that takes place is on the individual level and therefore leads to individual personal development. Their study recommended that teachers be trained to engage in deeper reflection. A study done by (Corry and Timmins, 2009) on nurse educators concluded that not only does the portfolio support development of the educator through reflection on teaching

practice, but that it leads to better teaching because the portfolio allows the individual to keep all the evidence of their progress in teaching together.

5.8 Challenges to using the PADP as a learning tool

The study revealed that even although there were many beneficial outcomes with the development of the PADP, there were, however, various challenges that were identified by the participants, which included the workload; collection of evidence and no time dedicated to compiling the PADP

5.8.1 Workload

Numerous studies have revealed that time demands for portfolio activities challenge students, especially in conjunction with other requirements of their courses (Kean and Embi, 2010); (Head and Johnston, 2012). These studies have concluded that the competing demands of the portfolio activities and other activities of the course add to the time constraints of the students. This was found to be true in this study where all participants were fully employed and were therefore challenged to find sufficient time to keep their portfolios up to date, while at the same time working, pursuing their studies and attending their other coursework activities. The participants felt that the time they had available limited what they could achieve. As in the study by (Head and Johnston, 2012), participants described how some activities of the portfolio were left until the last minute due to other demands of the course which took priority.

Participants expressed that it would have been better if specific time had been allocated for compiling the portfolio. A similar suggestion was put forward in the study by (Kean and Embi, 2010) who recommended that regular scheduled portfolio reviews are necessary to ensure that portfolio activities are done regularly and not left until the last minute.

5.8.2 Collection of evidence

The findings of the study revealed that one of the aspects of developing their portfolios that participants found particularly challenging was collecting the required evidence of their achievements. They were not only unsure about what evidence to collect and how much, but also experienced difficulties in identifying the right people to validate their evidence. Time constraints once again became an issue as participants revealed how they would allocate precious time to get to the people, only to find that they were unavailable at that time.

(Corry and Timmins, 2009) had similar findings in their study, where participants, who were all nurse educators, also reported being challenged by the collection of evidence for their portfolios. They expressed how difficult it had been to find teaching evidence that had been filed away in different places and that they had found the experience of putting it all together challenging. Iin their study evaluating an established learning portfolio, (Vance et al., 2013) also found that trainees had difficulty in establishing what evidence to collect and how much and the participants in that study complained that some of their supervisors were not providing useful guidance on this regard. (Jones, 2010), in their four year study, changed portfolio requirements and the teaching program associated with portfolio development based on the data sourced and specified that "broadly the key changes to the requirements were designed to simplify the construction of the portfolio by reducing the number of sets of evidence from seven to five." (Jones, 2010) 298). They found that by doing that the portfolio became more effective and less overwhelming to their students. Other changes which that study implemented included early submissions of small samples of work with the evidence and the study found that it promoted early engagement and discussions around quantity and appropriateness of evidence.

5.8.3 No time dedicated to compiling the PADP

It emerged from the study that the participants struggled to find time for their portfolio activities and found that this was true for the facilitator as well mostly because there was no dedicated time for the portfolio in the program. Participants recommended that time be allocated their program specifically for the portfolio so that they can address issues and get feedback on areas of uncertainty. Numerous studies on portfolio learning also advocate for such activities, especially at the beginning of the program when the students are still coming to an understanding of what the portfolio requires (Driessen et al., 2007); (Jones, 2010) (Tochel et al., 2009). (Ryan, 2011) found that if the students are not told in advance that they should initiate communication with the facilitator for portfolio feedback, they do not, which limits the benefits of portfolio development. In the study by (Head and Johnston, 2012), the staff interviewed in the study identified the challenge of prioritising portfolios within their workloads, as they were unable to fit them in.

All these findings suggest that there should be specific time allocated to development of the portfolio so that such challenges are minimised.

5.9 Recommendations

The study suggests some recommendations for the improvement of the use of the PADP as a learning tool.

Although the PADP forms part of an educational program that supports portfolio development, it is also part of the learning process. It is therefore recommended that it be integrated into the educational activities planned in terms of time allocation. (Jones, 2010) found that when participants experienced difficulty in understanding the requirements of the portfolio, it became necessary for them to change the teaching program. This author

explained that "the teaching programme thus evolved to ensure early emphasis on technical requirements" (Jones, 2010) 298).

The study findings have shown that the PADP forms part of an educational program that mainly attracts learners who are fully employed. These learners are studying part time and have huge time constraints. It is recommended, therefore, that the course coordinators look into how the PADP can best be fitted into the limited time available to the learners. The suggestion by the researcher, which is also evident in literature, is the use of the e-portfolio in the form of online learning, where the learners can work on their portfolios and have access to facilitator feedback even when they cannot come on campus. (Tochel et al., 2009) found that literature on e-portfolios show that e-portfolios users spent more time on their portfolio than paper based portfolio users and they were more effective for feedback than paper based portfolios. Studies on portfolios have shown that regular feedback enhances portfolio success and the e-portfolio benefits include flexibility of access (Tochel et al., 2009). However, studies that advocate the use of the e-portfolio do recommend training on IT skills for the facilitators as well as students and that IT support be planned and available.

The study found that participants identified the portfolio as an unfamiliar learning tool. The researcher therefore recommends that the introduction of the PADP be enhanced by workshops on portfolio development which will provide the information on the portfolio as well as clear guidelines about the procedure, format and the content, as also recommended by (Dekker et al., 2009) after their review on portfolio use in undergraduate and postgraduate medical education. These recommendations will benefit the students, especially at the beginning when they are encountering the portfolio for the first time.

Another recommendation stemming from the findings of the study concerns the allocation of scheduled times for PADP support, as it was evident in the study that participants felt that

portfolio activities are time consuming, especially the collection of evidence. This could be in the form of class sessions, as recommended by (Jones, 2010), where they found that the introduction of class sessions in their institution initiated discussion around challenges on the portfolio activities and assisted them with early engagement with their students.

Another recommendation is to formalise the mentoring process by introducing mentoring groups, which will not only enhance collaborative learning skills amongst the students, but also promote sharing experiences with peers. Research on portfolio development has shown that mentoring groups assist learners in portfolio development, especially with activities which they might not be familiar with, such as self-reflection (Austin et al., 2005); (Imhof and Picard, 2009); (Kean and Embi, 2010).

Another challenge that the study highlighted was the collection of evidence. The recommendation therefore is to specify the type of evidence and the amount of evidence required. This will assist students to have clear and specific guide on what is required.

Further research is also recommended using different data collection methods to view the prevalence of the different styles of learning that participants mentioned as promoted by the PADP.

5.10 Limitations of the study

The findings of this study are not generalizable as the study focused on one context of PADP development, which allowed for a limited population. The study also used an exploratory design, which was necessary for gaining better understanding of the concepts. The findings therefore can be used as a guide to further research concerning the use of the PADP as a learning tool.

5.11 Conclusion

This study explored the use of the Personal and Academic Development Portfolio (PADP) as a learning tool. The study used qualitative data of focus group interviews as well as individual interviews to collect the data. The findings of the study suggest that although the PADP was initially perceived by participants as an unfamiliar learning tool, it promoted competency-oriented learning, self-directed learning, self-regulated learning and the development of metacognitive skills. The different elements of the PADP were found to be significant as some promoted individualised learning, whilst others promoted the integration of theory and practice. However, overall, they all promoted student-centred learning.

The teaching and learning process was characterised by active participation, self-directed learning, evidence-based learning and reflective learning. Support was highlighted to be significant and was achieved by the facilitator through orientation and one-on-one sessions. The university resources also helped the students with needed support as did their peers. Using the PADP as a learning tool taught the students to be reflective, self-directed and collaborative learners. The study highlighted outcomes of portfolio learning to be the development of transferrable core skills, academic development and reflective practice. The challenges were identified as workload, collection of evidence and no time dedicated for the portfolio. Recommendations and limitations were also outlined.

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ANNEXURE 1: Ethical Approval

UNIVERSITY OF
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22 December 2011

Mrs MP Nkomo (891225149)
School of Nursing

Dear Mrs Nkomo

PROTOCOL REFERENCE NUMBER: HSS/1309/011M
PROJECT TITLE: Exploring the use of Personal and Academic Development Portfolios in a School of Nursing in KwaZulu-Natal: The Masters Students Perspective

In response to your application dated 25 October 2011, the Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee has considered the abovementioned application and the protocol has been granted **FULL APPROVAL.**

Any alteration/s to the approved research protocol i.e. Questionnaire/Interview Schedule, Informed Consent Form, Title of the Project, Location of the Study, Research Approach and Methods must be reviewed and approved through the amendment /modification prior to its implementation. In case you have further queries, please quote the above reference number.
PLEASE NOTE: Research data should be securely stored in the school/department for a period of 5 years.

I take this opportunity of wishing you everything of the best with your study.

Yours faithfully

Professor Steven Collings (Chair)
HUMANITIES & SOCIAL SCIENCES RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE

cc. Supervisor – Prof NG Mtshali
cc. Mr Sugen Reddy

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ANNEXURE 2: Letter requesting permission to conduct the study

<div align="right">

M. P. Nkomo

Box 33290

Montclair

4004

Date: 29 /11/2011

</div>

The Head of School

School of Nursing

University of KwaZulu-Natal

4041

Dear Professor

Re: Request for permission to conduct a study from postgraduate Nursing students

I am a Masters' degree student at the University of KwaZulu-Natal in the Nursing education program. I am expected to conduct a research project as one of the requirements for the completion of my degree program. The title of my research project is: Exploring the use of Personal and Academic Development Portfolios [PADP] in a School Of Nursing in Kwazulu-Natal: The Masters student perspective.

The University ethical clearance committee has advised that I seek permission from the School of Nursing prior to them granting ethical clearance. The permission letter will be attached to the research proposal and sent back to the committee for approval.

Sincerely Yours

M.P.Nkomo

Cell: 0834977991

Email: lolu@absamail.co.za

ANNEXURE 3: Letter granting permission to conduct the study

ANNEXURE 4: Information Sheet

Dear Participants:

Introduction:

You are invited to participate in a research study **exploring the use of Personal and Academic Development Portfolios in the school of Nursing, the masters' students' perspectives**.

The purpose of the study is to explore the use of the personal and academic portfolio as a learning tool.

The study is conducted as part of partial fulfilment for the degree Masters in Nursing (Nursing Education) by the researcher.

The method of collecting the data will be focus groups, where you and your fellow group mates will discuss your views around the use of the portfolio as part of your learning. The discussions will be audiotape recorded. The researcher will work as a moderator to facilitate your discussion. An assistant moderator will be present who will assist in the data collection process. Each focus group discussion will take approximately 1hour 30 minutes.

The information that you provide will benefit future decisions pertaining to use of Personal and Academic Development Portfolios as learning tools.

Anonymity is assured since the discussions will be coded for each response. All the information will be kept confidential with regard to individual identity. Your participation in the study is entirely voluntary. You may choose not to take part and/or you may withdraw from the study at anytime

All data collected will be kept safely locked and will be destroyed after 5 years as per University policy.

If you have any further questions regarding the study, please do not hesitate to contact the researcher: Mrs M. P. Nkomo: cell- 0834977991: email- lolu@absamail.co.za   OR

Supervisor: Professor N.G.Mtshali:0794872187   : email- mtshalin3@ukzn.ac.za

Thank you,

…………………

M.P.Nkomo (Researcher)

ANNEXURE 5: Informed consent

    Researcher   : Mary Patience Nkomo

    Student Number   : 891225149

    Cell number   : 0834977991

    E-mail   **:** lolu@absamail.co.za

DECLARATION

Title: Exploring the use of Personal and Academic Development Portfolios in a school of Nursing in Kwazulu-Natal: The masters students perspective

I.. (Full names of the participants) hereby confirm that I understand the contents of this document and the nature of this research project and I consent to participating in the research project.

I understand that my participation is voluntary and I may withdraw my consent without penalty and fully understand the conditions and time commitment involved in my participation.

Participant's signature: ....

Researchers name: Mrs M.P.Nkomo

Researcher`s signature: ....

Date: ....

ANNEXURE 6 : Interview guide

<u>Interview Guide</u>

Main question

1. What are you perceptions about the use of a PADP as a learning tool?

   <u>Probing questions?</u>

   - <u>What do you view as the benefits of this learning tool? Please elaborate.</u>

   - <u>What do you view as the limitations of this learning tool? Pleas elaborate.</u>

Main question
2. What are your views about the different components of the portfolio

   Probing questions will focus on
   - Compiling an extended CV

   - Self- assessment process with specific reference to becoming a self-directed learner, and possession of transferable core skills.

   - Generating and working on learning contracts

   - Reflective diaries

   - Collection and compiling of supporting evidence

Main question
3. What are your perceptions about the nature of support provided during the learning process?

   Probing questions will focus on
   - Facilitator support

   - Learning resources (both human and material resources)

   - Other forms of support as perceived by the student (e.g. orientation, time management skills, etc)

Main question

4. The purpose of a PADP is to develop students professionally and academically. What are

   your views about this in relation to your personal experience in this programme?

ANNEXURE 7: Themes and sub-themes

Themes	Subthemes
1. Conceptualisation of PADP as a learning tool	- Unfamiliar educational tool - Promotes competency-oriented learning - Fosters self-directed and self-regulated learning - Promotes self-pacing and self-monitoring - Fosters development of metacognitive skills
2. Perceived contributions of different elements of the PADP	- Learning contract - Promotes individualised learning - Student –centred learning - Skills focused learning - Reflective learning diaries - Theory-practice integration - Student centred learning - Critical self-assessment - Student centred learning - Skills focused learning
3. Perceptions of characteristics of the teaching and learning process	- Active participation - Self-directed learning - Evidence-based learning

	➢ Reflective learning
4. Perception on available support in using PADP as a learning tool	➢ Orientation to the use of the PADP ➢ Facilitator support ➢ University resources ➢ Peer support
5. Nature of the student	➢ Reflective learner ➢ Self-directed learner ➢ Collaborative learner
6. Perceived outcomes of using PADP as a learning tool	➢ Development of transferrable core skills ➢ Academic development ➢ Reflective practice development
7. Challenges of using the PADP as a learning tool	➢ Workload ➢ Collection of evidence ➢ No time dedicated to compiling the PADP

ANNEXURE 8: Link of Elements of conceptual framework to the Research questions

Research questions	Elements in relation to the research questions
1. How do nurse education students perceive the PADP as a learning tool in the nursing education program?	• Identification of strengths and weaknesses • Critical self-reflection • Generating learning contract • Adult learning principles
2. How do students view the process of learning through the use of the portfolio?	• Critical self-reflection • Active engagement and continuous reflection • Evidence based outcomes
3. How do different components of the portfolio (extended CV; self-assessment; learning contract and reflective learning diaries) contribute to students' personal and academic development?	• Critical self-reflection • Generating learning contract • Engaging in learning and teaching practice • Reflective learning diaries • Evidence generating and production
4. What are the views of the students about the nature of support they receive during the process of learning through portfolios?	• Adult learning principles • Continuous facilitator support
5. How can the process of learning through the PADP be enhanced?	• Academic development • Personal development

ANNEXURE 9: Proof of Editing Letter

29th November 2011

Ms M P Nkomo
P O Box 33290
Montclair
4004

Dear Ms Nkomo

Support in conducting research from the Post Graduate Nursing Students

With reference to your letter dated 29th November 2011, regarding the above, we are pleased to inform you that your request is hereby supported in order for you to conduct research on the study entitled " Exploring the use of Personal and Academic Development Portfolios (PADP) in a School of Nursing in KwaZulu-Natal: A Masters student perspective" provided you receive ethical clearance from the relevant University Ethics Committees.

Thank you

Sincerely

Professor B P Ncama
Head:
School of Nursing
UKZN

Editing Declaration   P O Box 531
                                                   Hillcrest
                                                   3650
                                                   KwaZulu-Natal

                                                    2014-11-15

Thesis Title: EXPLORING THE USE OF THE PERSONAL AND ACADEMIC
DEVELOPMENT PORTFOLIO IN A SCHOOL OF NURSING IN KWAZULU-NATAL:
THE MASTERS STUDENTS' PERSPECTIVE

Author: Mary Patience Nkomo

This is to certify that I have edited the above thesis from an English language perspective and
have made recommendations to the author regarding spelling, grammar, punctuation,
structure and general presentation.

A marked-up version of the thesis has been sent to the author and is available as proof of
editing.

I have had no input with regard to the technical content of the document and have no control
over the final version of the thesis as it is the prerogative of the author to either accept or
reject any recommendations I have made. I therefore accept no responsibility for the final
assessment of the document.

Yours faithfully

Margaret Addis