



Enhancing humanized nursing: How contemplative education helps nurse educators achieve personal transformation and enhance their teaching practices

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Abstract

This action research aimed to explore the impact of teacher development in transformative learning management employing a Contemplative Education approach in personal transformation in nurse educators and their transformation in teaching and learning. The study was conducted in four provinces of Thailand. The study adopted the “Teaching out of the Box: Transformative Teachers from Within” project for nurse educators at the Boromarajonani Colleges of Nursing, Praboromarajchanok Institute, as a case study. Purposive sampling was employed to select the target group of 24 nurse educators. From March 2021 to April 2022, data were collected using various methods and analyzed using content analysis. According to the study, nurse educators reported personal transformation in four areas: self-reflexivity, self-awareness, resilience, and deep listening. Furthermore, they incorporated Contemplative Education into classes, extracurricular activities, and patient care practices on three levels: (1) using some contemplative learning activities; (2) creating a short course for student preparation before and during internships at the hospital, and (3) integrating Contemplative Education with course content to create new activities. Contemplative Education was integrated to assist students in understanding humanized nursing care. The findings suggest that Contemplative Education should be incorporated as a mindset and approach for effective nurse educator growth and student learning in classrooms and patient nursing care settings. It is recommended that nursing institutions should adopt Contemplative Education for teacher development, providing resources and training. They should also establish ongoing support for diverse teaching styles and adjust institutional culture and policies to ensure administrative backing and proper resource allocation.

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Introduction

The Thailand National Health Act of 2007 defines “health” as a state of a human being that is perfect in physical, mental, spiritual, and social aspects, all of which are in holistic balance (National Health Commission Office, 2007). This regards the emphasis on the need for nurses to have not only scientific and clinical knowledge but also interpersonal, intellectual, and technological capabilities to meet patients’ biopsychosocial and spiritual needs (Kheokao et al., 2019). Furthermore, nurses who provide empathic and compassionate care feel fulfilled and satisfied, which leads to improved performance, comprehensive patient care, and a positive impact on healthcare organizations (Phumivadhana, 2020).

The concept of humanized care is of utmost importance, not only in nursing practice but also in nursing education. The Praboromarajchanok Institute, a public higher education institute in Thailand that produces public health workers, established the institute’s graduate identity as “The Humanized Health Care,” which means to provide friendly service with loving kindness and to focus on the actual problems and needs of service users (Praboromarajchanok Institute, 2013). The Boromarajonani Nursing Colleges are affiliated with the Praboromarajchanok Institute and are located throughout Thailand. Their nurse educators play an important role in strengthening the teaching and learning process by cultivating intrinsic characteristics which form their relationships with students.

Contemplative Education is gaining recognition for its role in fostering self-awareness, self-understanding, and personal growth among nursing students. This educational approach encourages transformation at various levels, including self-transformation, organizational transformation, and social transformation, thus aiding students in broadening their perspectives and evolving into fully realized individuals (Wasi, 2014). Contemplative Education has been successfully utilized to enhance development of Thai nursing students in many aspects; such as spiritual well-being (Jantaveemuang et al., 2017), empathy (Anan et al., 2018), self-awareness, and happiness in learning (Sornlob et al., 2020), desirable characteristics (Charoensuk et al., 2016).

However, there has been limited research on how it can benefit nurse educators in Thailand both professionally and personally. Thus, the Contemplative Education Center, Mahidol University, conducted the “Teaching out of the Box: Transformative Teachers from Within” project for nurse educators at the Boromarajonani Colleges of Nursing, Praboromarajchanok Institute, in 2021–2022, using an action research methodology. This research

aimed to investigate the impact of teacher development on transformative learning management using a Contemplative Education approach. The findings of this research can offer valuable insights into the development of humanized nursing teachers, particularly for those interested in or actively engaged in Contemplative Education and transformational learning.

Literature Review

Contemplative Education reveals its profound impact on self-awareness, empathy, and personal growth in both nursing students and educators. Contemplative Education, an approach that combines introspection and experiential learning with academic study, incorporates practices such as mindfulness meditation, reflective writing, and dialogue into the curriculum to develop the intellectual, emotional, and spiritual dimensions of individuals.

Sornlob et al. (2020) conducted a study with second-year nursing students and found that the implementation of a Contemplative Education Program resulted in increased self-awareness and happiness in learning among participants while Anan et al. (2018) conducted quasi-experimental research on second-year nursing students and incorporated 30 hours of contemplative activities into their curriculum. The study revealed a statistically significant increase in empathy scores after participating in the contemplative activities. Furthermore, qualitative data showed that students experienced transformations in their self-awareness, emotional intelligence, and interpersonal relationships, leading to a higher level of empathy.

Charoensuk et al. (2016) explored the effects of extra-curriculum activities based on contemplative education on nursing students. The results indicated that participation in the program led to a significant increase in desirable characteristics, including goodness, competence, and happiness. Qualitative data from focus group discussions emphasized the development of these characteristics, as students reported increased responsibility, respect for self and others, and gratitude, along with enhanced leadership, teamworking, and mindfulness. The study concluded that contemplative education promotes inner growth in students, fostering their goodness, competence, and happiness.

These studies collectively demonstrate the positive impact of Contemplative Education on self-awareness, empathy, and personal growth in nursing students, making it a valuable approach for educators to consider in enhancing both the academic and personal development of their students. Further research could explore its potential benefits for nurse educators in Thailand.

Methodology

Participants

The study selected 24 nursing educators, constituting one-third of participants in the “Teaching out of the Box” project at the Boromarajonani Colleges of Nursing, Praboromarajchanok Institute. Purposeful sampling targeted educators actively involved in the project, responsible for teaching, ensuring a focused exploration of transformative teaching experiences in nursing education. This deliberate representation ensured a significant and meaningful sample size relative to the project’s scope, emphasizing the participants’ willingness to share information. The study’s use of purposeful sampling aligned with research goals, and the sample size (24) allowed for data saturation, ensuring adequacy in capturing key themes of transformative teaching experiences in nursing education.

Data Collection

This study is an action research based on Kemmis and McTaggart’s (1990), consisting of three steps: Planning, Action and Observation, and Reflection (The PAOR model). In the Planning step, the research proposal was developed, research tools were constructed, and ethical approval from Mahidol University Center of Ethical Reinforcement for Research was obtained. Objectives and research plans were presented to the administrators of four target areas, and 80 educators were recruited for the study.

In the Action and Observation step, the researchers organized workshops to enhance educators’ potential in managing transformative learning through Contemplative

Education. The workshops were held four times in each nursing college. The observation was carried out in accordance with the action. The research team collected data throughout each workshop using field notes, in-depth interviews, and an after-action review.

In the Reflection step, data from the observation step are critically analyzed, evaluating planned actions, identifying supporting or hindering factors, and addressing issues and goal achievement (Kemmis & McTaggart, 1990). Therefore, learning outcomes from workshops, summarizing knowledge gained and innovations in teaching were assessed. This final session involved extracting lessons, developing sustainable strategies, and making project recommendations.

The research instruments, comprising field notes record, after-action reviews record, in-depth interviews form, and group interviews form, were selected for their appropriateness in collecting comprehensive data, and their reliability was verified through pilot testing and feedback refinement.

Data Analysis

The research utilized inductive content analysis due to a lack of prior knowledge about the phenomenon. The derived categories resulted from data analysis, involving open coding, category creation, and abstraction (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008). This structured process facilitated a comprehensive exploration, ensuring a deep understanding of the impact of Contemplative Education on both the personal transformation of nurse educators and the transformation of teaching and learning management.

Based on the descriptions provided in this methodology section, I have formulated the following research framework.

Table 1 Details of training workshops to develop educators’ potential in managing transformative learning through Contemplative Education

| Workshops | Description |
|--|--|
| First workshop, (Self-awareness and Other awareness, 3-day duration. | Understanding the meaning of contemplative education and transformative learning through practicing self-awareness, self-reflection, and deep listening. Fostering oneself with positive emotions like gratitude, love, and kindness, which are crucial for personal life, passing on positive energy to students, and providing nursing care to patients. |
| Second workshop, nature connection, 2-day duration. | Learning in nature to perceive with all senses and present-moment mind, resulting in free of attachment, slower pace, and more time with oneself. Practicing true perception of surroundings: nature and people, and open heart for serenity and wisdom within. |
| Third workshop, teaching outside the box, 2-day duration. | Concept and skill development as a facilitator, valuing both students and educators’ humanity. Integration of first two previous workshop and “The Courage to Teach: Exploring the Inner Landscape of a Teacher’s Life” (Palmer, 1998), which has three dimensions: intellect, emotion, and spirituality. |
| Fourth workshop, exchanging experiences of transformation, 2-day duration. | Forum for educators to share experiences and unique ways of organizing learning activities with students. Also, participants discussed their opinions and suggestions for the project. |

According to **Figure 1**, the teacher development process was structured using the PAOR model. The implementation of Contemplative Education in four workshops during the action and observation steps served as the independent variable. The dependent variables included the personal transformation of nurse educators and their integration of Contemplative Education into teaching and learning practices.

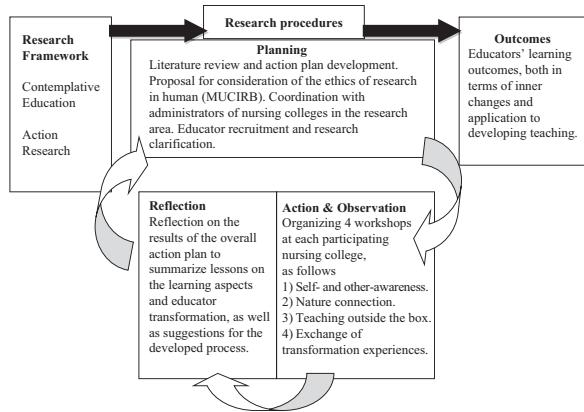


Figure 1 Research framework

Results

Educators' Personal Transformation

Self-reflexivity

The educators engaged in reflective thinking to recognize that certain thoughts and beliefs could lead to personal and collective suffering. This realization prompted them to explore alternative perspectives and approaches. Their awareness was shaped by various processes, including self-analysis of their strengths and weaknesses, taking time to connect with their feelings, and finding comfort in meaningful activities. They were also inspired by patient facilitators who provided participants with options. With an expanded frame of reference and a commitment to change, the educators experimented with different strategies and received positive feedback. Through the process of self-reflexivity, the educators were able to transform their own perspectives and approaches in life and learning, ultimately leading to a more positive impact on their students' learning experiences.

"In my job, I aim for humanized teaching, and I tried so hard to encourage students to express themselves. However, during this project, I realized we felt calm and enjoyed ourselves when the facilitators led us without effort. It completely changed the way I approach my students. We

need to understand them and keep things natural, letting them feel comfortable with us first. Then, learning will happen."

(Person A).

"The workshop made me realize that I might have been too strict with my students because I was driven by my fear of failure and being judged as insufficient. But now I trust their willingness to learn and improve, and I have seen progress. The same goes for patients and family members - I listen and help without judgment, making things easier for us all."

(Person D).

Self-awareness

Educators transformed themselves by exploring their feelings and thoughts, being mindful of negative emotions, and cultivating a positive mindset. By developing greater self-awareness of their emotional states, thoughts, and actions, they gained insight into the internal forces driving their behaviors, especially in relation to others. This enabled them to establish personal reference point to help them recognize and interrupt their habitual patterns of behavior, and cultivate a more peaceful and empathetic approach to teaching and interacting with others.

"After realizing my habit of speaking bluntly, I trained myself to pause and think before speaking. Now, I have an automatic warning point to talk with others more smoothly. I recognize that everyone has their own style and roles, and accepting those differences helps me communicate better."

(Person B).

Resilience

Resilience involves managing stress, bouncing back from adversity, and developing positive attitudes and coping mechanisms. Nurse educators have developed resilience to handle the challenges of their work and personal lives, resulting in fewer behaviors that contribute to their own and others' suffering. Additionally, they have prioritized self-care by allocating time and space for relaxation, particularly through spending time in nature, which provided them with valuable insights. This has helped them feel calmer and have more energy to fully engage with their students and overcome daily challenges.

"I know how to get rid of the stress I experience daily. Go sit down and look at the water or the trees in front of the house. I got deeper inside and gained insight into my students. One day, I noticed one student was anxious, so I talked and

listened to her, which helped. Before, I only found out about their issues during evening conferences. Now, I can help her right away."

(Person E).

Deep listening

Deep listening is a valuable skill for understanding others and considered as a mindfulness practice. It promotes love, kindness and open-mindedness towards oneself and others, and educators can use it to care for students, colleagues, family members, or patients. For example, educators can encourage students to discuss their feelings and growth after a task, and students can learn to listen better and improve their thoughts. Additionally, deep listening helps educators better understand and support students and can teach students how to listen to help others.

"During COVID, some college students went home despite being told not to. Instead of punishing them, we should hear them out. Understanding what they were going through may prevent violence. When we let them express themselves, they feel better and can comprehend the situation. This approach is better than just imposing rules without talking. Over time, we can give more chances and help more people."

(Person C).

"When caring for patients, some had mental issues like anxiety or stress that affected their recovery and sensitivity to pain. I advised my students to listen carefully, as it can help with healing and response. Ask the patient how they feel and let them speak their mind. This helps students identify issues and solve them without waiting for instructions."

(Person F).

In summary, the depicted personal transformation of nurse educators in **Figure 2** illustrates the development of key attributes and skills throughout the educational process.

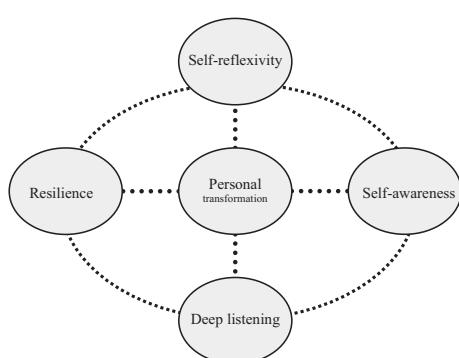


Figure 2 Participants' inner transformation

The four elements of personal transformation—self-reflexivity, self-awareness, resilience, and deep listening—synergistically support one another, fostering a sense of lightness and ease within oneself and in interactions with others, such as family, coworkers, students, and patients. As a result, participants expressed a grounded and optimistic outlook, reinforcing their ongoing dedication to transformative practices.

Teaching and Learning Development

In the fourth workshop and in-depth interviews, project participants shared their experiences in developing teaching through integrating Contemplative Education. It was discovered that educators had changed their teaching approaches in three patterns, as follows:

Utilizing some Training Activities

It was the approach that educators attempted when they had the opportunity, such as in their classes. The goal was for educators to recognize students' feelings and comprehend the basis of each student. Each activity took about half an hour to two hours.

One example was an educator who had an experience with a check-in activity before class, where students shared their feelings. One student seemed distracted and was on her phone. The educator asked her how she was feeling, and the student revealed anxiety about her aunt, who was terminally ill. The educator encouraged the student to reflect on what she could do to manage her feelings. Later, when the student's aunt passed away, the educator led the class in a moment of silence, making the student feel supported. In another situation, a student contracted COVID-19 and was denied an internship. The educator asked how she was feeling and what she had learned. The student expressed empathy for COVID-19 patients and developed patience, learning to distinguish between academic and personal issues. The check-in activity helped students reflect on their emotions, develop empathy, and feel supported. Additionally, **Table 2** presents examples of activities carried out by educators.

The implementation of Contemplative Education to prepare students before and during practical training on the ward

The activities were similar to pattern 1, except they were woven into a larger set. The goal was to help students lessen their anxiety and fear during ward practice while increasing their confidence and comprehension of what to do. This included fostering positive interactions between students and ward mentors. Before ward practice, half-day or full-day activities were scheduled.

Table 2 Examples of the activities carried out by educators

| Examples of the activities carried out by educators |
|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Check-in</i>. Allowing students share their thoughts and emotions before a lesson or activity. Teachers use this to gauge their students' emotional and mental states, which can affect their participation. Check-in activities can be discussions, written reflections, or physical exercises. • <i>The DISC personality system</i>. Helping learners understand themselves and others by comparing their behaviors to those of four animals: bull, rat, bear, and eagle. Learners can gain insights into their strengths and weaknesses, communication styles, and preferred learning methods. • <i>DISC personalities</i>. Allowing learners to assess their own and others' personalities by comparing their behaviors to those of four animals: a bull, a rat, a bear, and an eagle. • <i>Deep Listening practice</i>. Involving techniques and exercises that help students focus on and engage with the speaker in a meaningful way. It can help create a more respectful and collaborative classroom environment. Strategies may include techniques such as active listening, reflecting, and empathizing. • <i>Self-Reflection</i>. Allowing learners to self-reflect on their feelings and thoughts using various approaches such as speaking, writing, or art. • <i>Art activities</i>. Encouraging learners to engage in self-reflection by considering their experiences from the past and present, as well as their aspirations for the future, in a variety of art process. • <i>Nature connection</i>. Making use of nature to help learners learn about themselves. Recognizing that they are inextricably connected to other people and things. |

Educators used deep listening in the daily pre-and post-ward conversations in a relaxed atmosphere during the activities. The purpose of the conversation was not merely to discuss theoretical knowledge, but it was a valuable experience for students as well. At the end of the ward practice, students used numerous approaches to reflect on their whole learning experiences together, such as poetry, essays, quotes, and songs.

The study found that students learned from one another, expressed themselves freely, and listened attentively to others. Educators provided understanding and encouragement throughout the training process, resulting in continuous improvement. When students made mistakes, educators asked questions instead of scolding them, motivating students to study more. Additionally, educators celebrated positive situations with students, such as patients improving or receiving compliments.

By modeling behaviors like treating patients with care and dealing with pressing issues calmly, educators became role models and helped students feel confident and open to learning. The educators' approach was to create a friendly and relaxed learning environment, where students were encouraged to think courageously and act freely. Educators and students were on the same team, working together towards the common goal of learning and enjoying the nursing profession.

The integration of Contemplative Education into course content resulted in the development of a new teaching style

The objective was for students to learn the course content through direct experiences which were meaningful to their lives. Students would recognize the importance of what they learned and how to apply it professionally.

One example was a community health practice course where students were encouraged to visit their own homes to identify difficulties and design health promotion approaches. During home visitation time, the students practiced home visits to designated households and gained more skills, understanding, and confidence. At the end of the semester, students submitted academic essays summarizing their experiences and understanding from their house visit practice. The findings demonstrated that students had more conversations with their family members, acknowledged their health, and developed strategies to improve it with love, care and eagerness to learn. As a result, during their visit to the designated family, the students performed with the same level of care and attention as they would for their own families. Also, writing academic papers on independent topics helped educators get to know students from a new perspective, and they learned about various students' interests. This resulted in a new subject teaching technique that educators could develop in the next semester.

Table 3 Learning & Transformation impact in nurse educators and students

| Significant learning and transformation in educators | Significant learning and transformation in learners |
|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Educators became more open and flexible with more trust and less expectations, resulting in better outcomes and less exhaustion. • Educators comprehended and supported students better, acknowledging both positive aspects (learning, potential) and negative aspects (limitations, issues, barriers). • Educators acknowledged that Contemplative Education did not necessitate sophisticated methods, but it transformed educators' nature, impacting relationships and instructional methods, shaping students' qualities as nurses with a human heart. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students learned about themselves, others, as well as their own weaknesses that needed to be improved. • Students became good listeners and were willing to speak up and ask questions. They willingly put more effort into studying, but had less stress. • Students learned to understand patients' needs by listening and observing without judgement and putting themselves in their shoes, inspired by their educators' role modeling. |

The approach showed that students can learn more deeply and meaningfully when they are connected to the topic through their personal experiences, emotions, and values. It also highlighted the importance of educators understanding their students and adapting their teaching methods accordingly.

In conclusion, the teaching and learning development patterns observed among educators in the aforementioned project highlight the impact of learning and transformation on both nurse educators and students. These findings are summarized in [Table 3](#).

Discussion

Personal Transformation

The study found that nurse educators who participated in the project experienced personal transformation, which went beyond acquiring knowledge and involved a fundamental change in their perceptions, questioning what they previously knew or thought, and examining things from new perspectives. (Mezirow, 1991). This transformation resulted in new behaviors that improved relationships with colleagues, students, and family members. The nurse educators also became more self-aware in terms of emotional states, thoughts, and actions. They became more mindful of their feelings. They recognized that their thoughts did not reflect reality or themselves (Kabat-Zinn, 2013), which reduced the effects of habitual worrying, such as anxiety and stress (Verplanken & Fisher, 2014).

Furthermore, nurse educators cultivated resilience by engaging in self-care and mindful nature connection, which helped them replenish their energy, remain grounded in the present moment, and attune their senses to gain insights that cannot be grasped by the intellect alone (Anantreechai, 2020). The nurses also used deep listening to cultivate kindness and acceptance towards themselves and others, which helped them become more open-minded and less judgmental towards their colleagues, students, patients, and family members. This supports Nhat Hanh's (2006) idea that peaceful understanding through listening can alleviate suffering. The study's findings emphasize that intellectual learning alone is insufficient for achieving lasting personal transformation. Consistent practice of contemplative techniques in daily life is essential. (Nilchaikowit & Jantrasuk, 2009).

Transformation in Teaching and Learning

The nurse educators incorporated Contemplative Education into classes, extracurricular activities, and

patient care practices on three levels to improve teaching and learning. They used contemplative learning activities, created a short course for student preparation before going to and during internships at the hospital, and integrated Contemplative Education with course content to create new activities. According to nurse educators, key student learning was self-awareness and empathy for others. They became better listeners, less stressed, more open to learning, and treated patients with empathetic understanding. Teachers who demonstrate this approach may have a significant impact on their students.

The study emphasized the significance of self-awareness in nurse educators over external knowledge acquisition, highlighting the importance of developing authentic and meaningful learning experiences over being strict and emphasizing external standards such as the institute's graduate identity, ethical principles in nursing (Hanyut & Wongsaree, 2018), or upcoming policies, which could create fear and hinder learning. The findings supported the notion that good teaching comes from the teacher's identity and integrity, not technique. (Palmer, 1998) Therefore, establishing a learning environment that allowed students to uncover their genuine passions was the key to educational transformation. (Robinson & Aronica, 2009)

In conclusion, the incorporation of Contemplative Education into undergraduate nursing curricula resulted in applying the humanized care concept in real-world settings, resulting in increased reflectivity, connectedness, respect, and gratitude in both learning and patient care, as supported by previous research studies. (Charoensuk et al., 2016; Fiske, 2017; Sable, 2014). The study suggested that nurse educators could use a Contemplative Education strategy to increase their teaching joy while promoting students' intrinsic love for the nursing profession, according to Hedges (2010), the fundamental objective of education is to shape minds rather than careers.

Conclusion and Recommendation

Contemplative Education, known for its capacity to foster self-awareness, compassion, and stress relief, has gained prominence in recent years. This research delved into its impact on nurse educators, unveiling transformative personal and pedagogical effects, including heightened self-reflexivity, self-awareness, resilience, and deep listening. Additionally, educators integrated Contemplative Education across three levels: firstly, by incorporating select contemplative learning activities; secondly, by designing a preparatory student course for internships within hospitals; and thirdly, by infusing Contemplative Education into course content to

craft innovative activities. This research provides insights directly from nurse educators, offering real-life examples and practical applications that enable readers to adapt these strategies within their own educational contexts.

To leverage these benefits, we recommend nursing institutions embrace Contemplative Education as a foundational framework for teacher development, with a focus on providing resources and training. Educators should access mindfulness, deep listening, and self-awareness workshops, enabling the integration of contemplative practices into their teaching. Sustained support, reflection, and feedback mechanisms should be established to accommodate diverse teaching styles. Furthermore, integrating Contemplative Education into curricula and training mentors can ensure students' continuous transformative learning experiences. Adjustments to institutional culture and policies may be necessary, emphasizing administrative support for this approach, resource allocation, and valuing educators' personal growth and development.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

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