

# Strategies to improve the performance of learners in a nursing college

## Part II: Issues pertaining to management, attitudes and values

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This article forms part two of a bigger study that was conducted in a nursing college to explore and describe the reasons for the poor performance of learners. Part one of the study dealt with the issues pertaining to education, while this article (part two) seeks to describe issues pertaining to management, attitudes and values that lead to the poor performance of learners in the nursing college under study.

A qualitative, exploratory and descriptive design that was contextual in nature was employed, and three focus groups interviews were conducted. Seven tutors formed one group while other two groups were formed by fourth-year learners following a comprehensive diploma course. All participants voluntarily participated in the study. Data was analyzed using the descriptive method of open coding in accordance with Tesch's protocol (in Creswell, 1994:154-156). Trustworthiness was ensured using the following principles: credibility, conformability, transferability and dependability (Lincoln & Guba 1985:290-326). Findings were categorized into issues pertaining to management, attitudes and values that had an influence on the poor performance of learners as follows:

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Management: Inadequate resources and study facilities; policies that change frequently; tutors' dissatisfaction with regard to staff development, the lack of involvement by management and lack of management support, staff shortage and mal-distribution of staff members; ineffective selection process of learners; inconsistent

regulations, and too many of them; policies and procedures resulting in confusion and poor discipline.

Attitudes and values: Tutors' lack of motivation and interest, lack of respect by learners and no team work among tutors. Through a conceptualization process and the recommendations by participants, strategies to improve the learners' performance were described. It is recommended that these strategies be submitted to the staff development committee for implementation and future follow-up research be undertaken to determine the effectiveness of the strategies. It is also recommended that other nursing colleges replicate the study within their context.

## Introduction

The purpose of this article is to describe strategies to improve the performance of learners with regard to issues pertaining to management, attitudes and values derived from the perceived findings supported by relevant literature.

Management of a nursing college plays an integral part in achieving the vision, mission and core values of the college. The management is responsible for creating a democratic, caring organizational climate to facilitate individual growth by staff *empowerment*, providing effective and efficient teaching and learning, providing a climate characterized by warmth, teamwork and the acknowledgement of people's work and efforts. According to Carl (2002:9), management's role is not to be oppressive, but to liberate, emancipate and to empower personnel. Carl, in the same vein, maintains that particular oppression, inequalities and injustices must be rectified.

Vavrus (in Carl, 2002:5) describes empowerment as the overcoming of workplace alienation and gaining the freedom to participate more fully in public and institutional affairs as a teacher. Lagan (in Carl, 2002:5) is of the opinion that empowerment is the process of providing people with the opportunity and necessary resources to enable them to believe and feel that they understand their world and have the power to change it, for example, greater autonomy and independence in decision-making. It means loosening control over what people do but gaining a wider span of control over information and outcomes.

Empowerment deals with change in that it focuses on the development of individuals as well as collective potential. According to Carl (2002:5), empowered individuals feel that they can actively take part and can make a contribution – can make a real difference.

## Problem statement

Issues pertaining to management such as lack of human and material resources, the attitude of management to personnel, the attitude of personnel to management, and the lack of consideration for personal and professional values and virtues appear to contribute to the poor performance of learners in a nursing college. The study seeks to describe strategies to overcome these problems. The research questions that emerged were: what are the issues that contribute to the poor performance of learners in the nursing college under study? What strategies can be employed to improve the situation?

## Aims and objectives

The aim of the study was to describe strategies to improve the performance of learners in a specific nursing college in Gauteng. The following objectives directed the study:

- To explore and describe the perceptions of learners and tutors with regard to the factors that contribute to the poor performance of learners in a nursing college in Gauteng.
- To describe strategies to improve the situation.

## Definitions of key concepts

### Learners

Learners undergoing a four-year comprehensive diploma (general, psychiatric, community nursing) and midwife registered with the South African Nursing Council constitute learners in this study.

### Strategy

A strategy refers to a broad plan of action with the view to achieving the intended aim. It outlines the approach you intend to take in order to achieve the purpose (Van der Horst & McDonald, 1997:124).

### Poor performance

In this study, poor performance entails individual learner performance of less than 50%.

## Management

Management is a process aiming at the attainment of organizational goals by relying on planning, budgeting, organizing, directing and controlling (Booyens, 1996:161).

## Attitudes and values

Attitudes are traits and beliefs, while values are broad general attitudes or beliefs about right or wrong and influence the behaviour of people (Vogt, 1997:21,41,50).

## The research design and method

A qualitative, exploratory, descriptive and contextual research design was employed to get a deeper understanding of the perceptions of learners and tutors concerning the factors that contribute to the poor performance of learners in a nursing college in Gauteng (Mouton & Marais, 1992:45; Burns & Grove, 1997:67).

## Data gathering

An expert interviewer with expert interview skills who has a doctorate in qualitative research conducted the three focus group interviews led by the research questions. An independent person, purposively selected, collected the field notes during the interviews to enrich the data collected. One group was formed by seven tutors who are involved with the teaching of learners undergoing a four-year comprehensive diploma course, and the other two groups were formed by fourth-year learners, with seven learners in each group. All participants voluntarily participated in the study. Briefing session was conducted by a member of the research committee on the purpose, objectives and the benefits of the study. Participants were ensured anonymity and confidentiality during the process of the study and were assured that the interview tapes would be destroyed after the completion of the study. Participants were further assured that there were no risks involved in their participation and that they were under no obligation to participate in the study if they did not want to do so. They were also informed that they were allowed to withdraw their participation at any stage of the research process.

Permission was granted by the deputy director of the nursing college. Participants gave informed consent to

**Table 1: Issues pertaining to management, attitudes and values that contribute to poor performance of learners.**

Category	Sub-category
1. Management	<p>1.1 Inadequate resources and learning facilities</p> <p>1.2 Human resources</p> <p>Learners: expressed dissatisfaction with policies that change all the time</p> <p>Tutors: expressed dissatisfaction with:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Insufficient staff development</li> <li>• Lack of involvement of management and lack of support</li> <li>• Staff shortage and mal-distribution of staff members</li> </ul> <p>1.3 Ineffective selection process of learners</p> <p>1.4 Inconsistent and too many regulations, policies and procedures resulting in confusion and poor discipline</p>
2 Attitudes and values	<p>2.1 Lack of internal motivation and interest in tutors and students.</p> <p>2.2 Lack of respect by student nurses</p> <p>2.3 Tutors work in isolation: no teamwork</p>

participate in the study and for the use of a tape recorder during the focus group interview process, which took place in a relaxed and non-threatening environment that was free of noise (Krueger, 1994:6). The three focus group interviews were conducted in one day, each lasting approximately 45 minutes. The duration of the interviews was appropriate, as the fourth-year learners were at the college and thus were easily accessible.

### Data analysis

Data analysis was done in accordance with the descriptive method of open coding described by Tesch (in Creswell, 1994:154-156). The audio-taped interviews were transcribed verbatim to ensure the accuracy of data collected. Field notes, which added value to the richness of the data, were analysed. Two external coders, independent of each other and purposively selected because of their expertise in qualitative data analyses, were employed to analyze the data separately following the protocol as described by Tesch (in Creswell, 1994:154-156). A consensus discussion meeting was held between the independent coders with the aim of agreeing upon final categories and sub-

categories regarding the factors that contribute to poor performance of learners in a nursing college (Lincoln & Guba, 1985:290-326). The defined categories and sub-categories were verified with the participants to determine the truth value of the findings. The findings were re-contextualized within credible literature. Through deductive and inductive reasoning, inference-making, analysis, synthesis and derivation thinking processes, strategies to improve the performance of learners were described.

### Trustworthiness

Credibility, transferability, dependability and conformability were used to ensure trustworthiness in accordance with Lincoln and Guba's model (1985:290-326).

### Credibility

The guidance provided by a member of the research committee in possession of a doctorate in qualitative research, the engagement of two experts in qualitative research to collect and analyze data, the triangulation of credible primary and secondary sources to re-contextualize the findings for the purpose of describing the strategies to improve the performance

of learners (prolonged engagement), participants verifying the findings, the use of the tape recorder to obtain accurate information and contextual validation ensured the credibility of the study.

### Transferability

Although the study has a specific context, the nature of the problem is of concern to all nurse educators responsible for the four-year comprehensive course in the country.

The described strategies may be of assistance to nurse educators with similar problems to improve the performance of the learners. The dense description of the method used will make replication of the study possible.

### Dependability and conformability

The qualitative research method was consistently used, and was guided by the research questions (dependability audit). The use of external independent coders to reach consensus agreement on the categories and sub-categories, and the code-recode procedure and triangulation of sources increased the dependability and conformability of the study.

## Findings

The findings of the study will be described and re-contextualized within the existing literature in accordance with Table 1. Strategies to improve the performance of learners will be described for each category and sub-category.

## Management

Management is a process aimed at the attainment of organizational goals by relying on planning, budgeting, organizing, directing, controlling and other management tools, for example, analysis of reports, scheduling, co-ordination and supervision of resources and personnel. Managers react to every pressure and events in the institution (Booyens, 1996:161). The categories and sub-categories will be discussed as indicated in Table 2. Direct quotations will be rendered in italics.

### Inadequate resources and learning facilities

The learners commented that there was a lack of facilities at the college; they mentioned the lack of *study facilities* due to *rigid college hours (07:00-16:00)* and the fact that the prescribed books were not available. They also voiced a need for *quiet study areas and extended time for library use: We have inadequate resources, we go to the library, look for a book and it is not there ... or they refuse to give you a book to take out. If we need the library to be open until 17:00, the answer will be, we don't have people and we cannot afford it.*

Thus, *good universities have become synonymous with good libraries* (Willemse, 2002:4). Willemse supports the importance of a well-stocked library to both lecturers and learners. He believes that training a professional cannot be done without a library with the latest information and publications. Willemse (2002:6) also stresses the point that a library is not just a place with many books. It is a multifaceted institution, with sufficient and dedicated well-trained staff, information technology and adequate buildings with enough seating for staff and students.

Wisker and Brown (1996:17) believe that all the learning approaches cannot take place without the development of an appropriate infrastructure. As early as 1993, institutions of learning have provided students with learning centres

(located within the main institution) to promote student learning. Institutions of learning should supply a range of resources, for example technology, library and study facilities.

Mhlongo (2002:52,58) found that the transformation of nursing colleges led to a lack of resources and facilities. Directors of the colleges indicated that, as a result of transformation, the intake of learners had increased, which led to tutors complaining that they could not reach the learners because the groups are too big and the facilities are such that in some other areas they do not have the facilities to accommodate all learners at the same time. Mhlongo further stated that *educational transformation has an implicated negative impact, the negative impact on nursing education is mainly centred on the lack of resources and facilities, for example financial, material and human resources.*

Kennedy (2001:1) states that higher education institutions also face common challenges and question whether there is enough of the right kind of resources for academic and recreational activities. He also asserts that improving the learning environment means that learners are more likely to perform well in conditions that are conducive to learning. Colleges that provide this kind of environment will be more successful. The environment, according to Kennedy (2001:3) and Cotton (1995:24), means a campus with easy and universal access to computers and the Internet, libraries and classrooms with small class sizes. Classrooms should be set up to allow communication, small group discussion or collaborative learning.

### Human resources Learners' dissatisfaction with policies that changed all the time

The learners commented that they experienced a lack of tutor support and interest, which resulted in blaming. They made comments on the double-bind messages received from tutors. On the one hand, tutors opened themselves up for one-on-one consultations, but when the learners wanted to consult, tutors were either in class or in practice: *They say 'I'm available for consultation', but when we want to consult it is already after hours and they are not available. They do not really care about us ... they work here and if it is time to leave at 16:00, they will not go out of their way*

*to help support you, they go home.*

Williams (1995:42), Thyer and Bazeley (1993:339) and Carlson, Kotzé and Van Rooyen (2003:30) found similar responses from learners regarding the lack of communication, or poor communication between tutors and learners as well as the unavailability and inaccessibility of tutors. This had a negative effect on the learners' academic performance as learners experienced the tutors to be insensitive and unavailable. Mashaba and Brink (1994:181) state that, traditionally, when learners had difficulty with their college course work, they were referred to counsellors or tutors for remediation and one-on-one tutoring. Study and remediation skills were conducted in isolation from the individual learner's coursework, resulting in unsatisfactory improvement in the results. A comprehensive educational enrichment programme, by contrast, aims to combine essential academic and study skills with the learner's coursework.

Based on Tinto's research (1987:136-141) the following is suggested: ensure that new learners have the opportunity to acquire skills (English reading, writing, reflective and study skills, to name but a few). Making personal contact with learners remains a challenge. Extended, flexible consultation hours with the tutors that suit both the tutor and the learner would be preferable, as would be the establishment of a peer tutoring system. A systematic retention plan is needed. Starting programmes early in a proactive manner would alleviate the need for a remedial focus. During the tutors' interview, it was suggested that the learners go through a basic course to see whether they were able to do the nursing course (reading and writing) before starting with their training. Lastly it is important to ensure that commitment and education form the primary goal of all the stakeholders.

Educational enrichment programmes should also focus on the development of staff and faculty members. Learners commented that the language of the tutors was also a problem and that they were not understood in their writing. It was mentioned that tutors could not speak English. According to Mellish, Brink and Paton (1998:277), the nurse educator's responsibility in human resources development is three-fold, namely responsibility towards

themselves and learners, responsibility to those they have trained and responsibility to the profession as a whole. It is strongly advised that tutors and staff also attend courses on language proficiency. Consultants can be used to conduct the training sessions regarding diagnosing academic deficiencies, programme development, correlating academic and study skills to the nursing courses, monitoring progress, developing and utilizing interactive and creative teaching/learning strategies and teaching learners methods for taking responsibility for their own learning. Learners are not merely given support but are taught how to develop skills to enhance their learning.

### **The tutors' dissatisfaction with regard to**

#### **• Insufficient staff development**

The tutors commented that they experienced a lack of support from management regarding further study and education of tutors: *We don't get any study leave. You don't have time to develop yourself. You are also overloaded and you don't get any new information through in-service training.*

Mabalane (2001:32) found similar responses from academics in that their universities failed in their duty to promote staff development. Academics view staff development as a tool for self-empowerment and the lack of it as retarding their academic progress. He also states that the lack of staff development may lead to the malfunction of the institution. According to the literature, teacher growth through staff development is at the heart of any organization. Matthews (1997:1) states that staff development and training must be at the core of organizational strategy. Moses (1988:2) believes that employer-employee relationships and the ethics of work are such that today they are regarded as profitable in the provision of professional development. According to Ainscow, Hopkins, Southworth and West (2001:59), schools will not improve unless teachers, individually and collectively develop.

The research indicated that management at the college was not assessing the development needs of the staff: *Management never sit down with us and do career planning.* It is this aspect that makes staff development programmes irrelevant to the needs of the staff.

Literature on academic staff development confirms the importance of mutual career planning and needs analysis before the planning of staff development programmes and their implementation (Mabalane, 2001:43; Walters, 1995: 81; Erasmus, Van Wyk & Schenk, 2000:474; Jerling, 1999:39 and Mhlongo, 2002:52).

Muller (2002:295) and Matthews (1997:2) emphasize the importance of a staff development policy. Matthews (1997:2) stresses the importance of a training policy and asserts that any organization which is genuinely and seriously committed to offering its staff a range of developmental experiences, not only for organizational benefit, but also for the benefit of the staff members themselves, should have that commitment made public in a training policy. The authors suggest that where policies do exist, they should be operationalized.

#### **• Lack of involvement and support on the part of management**

Tutors felt that they did not really receive support from management to deal with the lack of discipline. The tutors and learners are quite aware that there is a *split* between management and the tutors: *One of the HODs (Head of Department) taught one of the undisciplined classes and after that she was exhausted and up to today she still says she doesn't know how we can cope without the support of management ... it is very difficult in the classroom. You find that here at the college we are not integrated with management.*

*The tutors are on one side and they (management) do not participate in the learning of learners. They don't know what is happening on the ground and they become unrealistic in their expectations.*

The lack of support and caring on the part of management experienced by the tutors is not uncommon in the nursing environment. The majority of nurses did not receive enough support and caring from their nurse managers. The lack of a two-way communication leads to the erosion of a trusting relationship.

According to Marriner-Tomey (1996:329), organizational and intergroup conflict leads to backbiting and blaming others for the problems, and the formation of sub-groups or cliques is common. These split the group and the potential for disharmony is substantial, if not

inevitable (Booyens, 1998:245).

#### **• Shortage and mal-distribution of staff**

Tutors felt unsupported in the face of change and transformation of nursing education in the country. They felt that they could not cope with the increasing number of learners that resulted from the merging of nursing colleges, where several nursing colleges closed down: *If you're sick there is chaos because there is no one to take your place and one tutor has 100 learners in her class ... How can this integration be meaningful? One tutor cannot cope, so at the end of the day you run in, give the class and get out. Mal-distribution occurs when a tutor who is conversant with her/his discipline is allocated to teach another discipline she is not at ease with.* It is obvious that delivery of service will be inefficient and ineffective to the learners.

Mhlongo (2002:52) found similar responses from directors of nursing colleges, who indicated that, as a result of the transformation of nursing education, the intake of learners has increased resulting in tutors complaining that they could not reach the learners because the groups were too big.

To reiterate the issue of the teachers being comfortable with the subject they teach, Mellish et al. (1998:72) maintain that one of the qualities of an effective teacher is the acquisition of knowledge and clinical competence. The authors argue that educators must know and be up-to-date with the subject matter they are expected to teach in order to motivate the learners. As an educator, one should also have the coaching, facilitating and assessment skills, and the ability to use practical examples in the related field. Using real-life examples that form the learner's frame of reference is didactically correct because this will assist the teacher to be able to connect, relate or integrate the learners' previous conception with the new knowledge – thus facilitating meaningful learning. Mellish et al. (1998:72) are of the opinion that nurse educators should have expert clinical knowledge, should read widely, should keep abreast of the developments and should be 'lifelong' learners in their field of speciality for their entire professional life. It is therefore advisable to have stability in the allocation of teachers to a nursing college in order to realize the vision and mission of the

college.

Effective staff distribution is an integral part of effective management. According to Muller (2002:258) and Gillies (1998:237), an organization in which there is staff maldistribution produces staff that is demoralized, irritable, frustrated and exhausted. Staffing is certainly one of the major problems of any nursing organization (Swansburg, 1993:46). Ensuring effective staff distribution requires a process that includes the nature, type and amount of the work to be done and assessed. Assessment of the available staff with regard to their knowledge and skill, their ability to perform the task, their motivation and the need for their training and development is important. Recruitment, selection and the appointment of personnel to balance the staff:student ratio is advocated. Distribution of the work to the most suitable person based on the assessment findings is important (Muller, 2002:162-164, Gillies, 1998:229-230 and Swansburg, 1993:46).

### **Ineffective selection process of learners**

The tutors felt disillusioned about the type of learners selected to do a four-year comprehensive course. They mentioned that factors such as low internal motivation, the lack of passion for nursing and the lack of understanding of the real meaning of nursing contributed to the high failure rate among learners: *Students are here not because they like nursing, but because they earn a salary. They are not interested in nursing. They don't care for the patient any more; it is just a job for money.*

Mashaba (1986:2) stated similar reasons for students taking up nursing, which included nursing being just another job. I needed to earn money and I had no money to follow the career I had really liked. Motivation involves the question of why people think, feel and behave the way they do (Santrock, 2000:373). A key factor in understanding motivation is whether motivation is intrinsic or extrinsic, especially in the area of achievement. Intrinsic motivation refers to a high personal standard of achievement and an emphasis on personal effort. Many psychologists believe that intrinsic motivation has more positive outcomes than extrinsic motivation and produces more competent behaviour and mastery (Harackiewicz, 1998 in Santrock 2000:389). Extrinsic

motivation refers to competitiveness, comparing the self to others and seeking external rewards. Extrinsic motivation by itself is usually not recommended. Tennyson and Nielsen (1998:10) also assert that motivation influences both the attention and the maintenance process of learning. Hendrich (2001/2:22) confirms that the attitude of learners and internal motivation contribute significantly to their subsequent academic achievement, and external motivation correlates negatively with academic achievement.

Research has indicated that workers of the future need to be self-starters and motivated from within (Slabbert, 2001/2:31). A change in attitude from *the world owes me, to how can I serve, is necessary*. It is important to examine ways to facilitate changes within the learners themselves, as well as personal environments (Sawatzky, 1998:115). Shelton (2000:30) remarks that if we can help learners become aware of their own dynamic of learning, we can often help them increase their emotional competency to support their learning needs. Both the learner and the tutors need to be motivated. Learners and tutors are interdependent on each other with regard to motivation (Williams, 1995:66). Long (1990:75) suggests that we should change our mindset to one in which we consider creating an environment in which people can apply their motivation rather than one in which we motivate people. Motivation and emotion are closely linked. Emotion can be defined as a feeling or affect that involves psychological arousal, conscious experience and behavioral expression (Santrock, 2000:393). The *Oxford Dictionary* (2002) describes passion as intense emotion and enthusiasm for something. Hendrich's (2001/2:23) results emphasize the fact that learners' initial attitudes play a predominant role in their subsequent academic achievement.

A policy should be developed for the recruitment of learners, focusing on the essential competencies required. Learners should have a basic knowledge of English (reading, writing and comprehension) and should have some of the following competencies: an action orientation; career ambition; compassion; creativity; ethics and values; character, integrity, respect and trust; motivation; organizational ability; patience; good peer relationships; perseverance; problem-solving abilities;

the ability to set priorities and a work-life balance. These aspects can be seen as inherent job requirements, according to the Labour Relations Act (Act no 42 of 1996) and the Employment Equity Bill (1997).

Another factor that needs to be taken into account during selection is learners' ability to read and write and their passion for what they want to do. Participants indicated: *The media we use is English. The students cannot express themselves in this language. They don't know how to ... It demands a lot of time and thinking. They do not understand what we are telling them in class.*

English is the second or in some cases the third or fourth language for the majority of the learners in the college. English as a second language has been identified by a number of researchers worldwide as a major stumbling-block to achieving academic success (Williams, 1995:33, Phillips & Hartley, 1990:29; Thyer & Bazeley, 1993: 339; Barnsley, 2002:7). Problems relate to understanding, interpretation and written communication, which in turn act as academic stressors. English is important not only as a medium for learning but also for vocational purposes. It is imperative to raise the level of competence in the English language of both tutors and learners. It is not always possible to give learners the kind of individual attention that is needed for remedial help because of large numbers of learners. Computer-assisted instruction provides instructional activities that accommodate differences in the learners' levels of ability as well as providing technical skills. Reading and comprehension skills are improved and confidence is built. This leads to better learner attitudes through active involvement with the subject matter. Something else that could be of assistance is neurolinguistics.

### **Inconsistent and too many regulations, policies and procedures resulting in confusion and poor discipline**

Learners complained that *there are too many policies and regulations and that they change continuously*. Muller (2002:129) defines policy as a written guideline that directs decision-making during a specific action and as such is a rule or prescription that regulates behaviour. Popovich (1998:100) states that policies and procedures as found in

traditional organizations were products of an old paradigm of prescriptive command and control. Such a paradigm caused people to be alienated from their work, caused them to have limited accountability, and created distrust between management and employees. He suggests that an analysis be undertaken to determine whether current processes/activities have any direct bearing on the achievement of intended results.

Bridges (2000:29-30) argues that clearly defined standards and procedures with precise specificity cut off the creativity and freedom of those who must implement them. On the other hand he refers to other organizations that keep their options open and distrust definition. He adds that while procedures and policies become natural, in an organization where there are no standard operating procedures, things tend to be unpredictable as the individual needs and opportunities of the moment dictate how things will be done. In such a situation, new people may find it difficult to learn to do things and this may result in inconsistency.

In describing the role of managers towards policy-making, Van Der Waldt and Du Toit (1999:121) explain that public managers make constant inputs for the adjustment of policies during the implementation phase. In this way, policies may undergo incremental adjustment until they suit the particular issue. Policy-making at macro and micro levels has been dynamic since 1994. Policy-making is part of quality control where all the stakeholders are involved. Policies, procedures and systems should be congruent and unified. A whole re-engineering process is required. If this happens, it will reflect a more secure environment and learners will be less defensive. The policies with regard to examinations, sick leave, supplementary examinations, and the telephone contact numbers of lecturers should be contained in every study guide that learners receive.

Armstrong (2002:4) states that policies should be based on a strategic plan and give direction, authority and information about how the objectives of the nursing education institution should be achieved. The following criteria regarding policy-making are suggested: the policy development process includes all stakeholders and is relevant to the goals of the organization. Policies are

communicated, and made available to all internal customers. The actions, processes and powers of the governance structures are inclusive and aimed at meeting the needs of the organization.

## Values and attitudes

Values are broad general attitudes or beliefs about right or wrong and they influence the way we behave. Attitudes are traits and beliefs. Our values and attitudes influence the way we think or behave and they are acquired across a lifetime and modified in relation to experiences (Vogt, 1997: 21, 41, 50). Participants regarded the following values and attitudes contributing to poor performance of learners: lack of internal motivation and interest in tutors and learners; lack of respect by learners; tutors working in isolation – no team work.

### Lack of internal motivation and interest in tutors and learners

The psychological connotation of motivation indicates goal-directedness, driving force, impetus, stimulation of needs, and is focused on goal achievement (Gerber, Nel & Van Dyk, 1995:316). Botha (in Klopper, 2000/01:136) defines motivation as the creation of dissonance which results in man searching for new experiences which will be pleasant, satisfying, interesting, challenging and meaningful. Dissonance is regarded as a dynamic human condition characterized by the affective experience and cognitive awareness of conflicting emotional, social, normative and knowledge contents. It implies that human beings pursue harmony and congruence with themselves and their environment.

Both tutors and learners complained of demotivation. Learners experienced that tutors use *teaching strategies that are demotivating in a class room. The climate is also demotivating*. Tutor participants stated: *they (learners) coped with the situation by making a lot of noise or by sleeping in class*. On the other hand the tutors felt demotivated and viewed the learner as *undisciplined and disrespectful* because of the noise and deliberately sleeping in class. Brown, Armstrong and Thompson (1998:20-22) found that uninspiring teaching and badly taught material often bore learners and they believe that under-motivated learners are hard to teach, gain little

benefit from their studies and drain the resources of the institutions in which they study, contributing to poor completion rates and stretching the learners' capacities and patience of their tutors. According to Encarta (2003:5), learning is usually efficient and rapid when the learner is motivated and attentive.

Brown, Armstrong and Thompson (1998:1) recommend that delivering content in an imaginative way changes the learners' attitude to content and thus motivates them to learn. Newble and Cannon (1995:153) emphasize how important it is for educators to help learners and to apply the principles of adult education. Effective ways of teaching will therefore improve the learner's motivation.

Jay (1995:25, 27) recommends that managers recognize employees' achievements, communicate effectively and handle mistakes amicably to improve the working environment and encourage team-building among staff members.

### Lack of respect by learners

Tutors complained about the *lack of respect and discipline from the learners* while on the other hand the learners stated that *the teaching strategies and the classroom environment created by their tutors demotivated them and they coped by making noise and sleeping in class*. Tutors perceived the *noise and sleeping as a sign of disrespect and a lack of discipline*. The *Oxford Dictionary* (1983) defines respect as to treat with consideration. Therefore, the noise during lessons implies this lack of consideration for the tutor and fellow learners. Brown, Armstrong and Thompson (1998:1-3) also agree that the classroom and the programme environment should reflect mutual respect and trust as a foundation for all interactions. Sutcliffe (2001:1-4) places great emphasis on mutual respect. And she states that she was shocked by the disrespectful way educators treated and spoke about learners. She suggests that educators should be role-models and should help learners to become fully actualized and recommends the use of respect as a strategy to be used in this regard.

Newble and Cannon (1995:18) found that disruptive behaviour and talking in class were common problems and could not

be ignored, both for the educator's own concentration and for the majority of learners who are in the classroom. The authors recommend that such behaviour should be handled firmly and calmly. Sutcliffe (2001:1-5) recommends the following requirements for educators: educators are required to be role-models and mentors for learners. They have to take the place of a parent since parents may be far away. Educators have to teach manners in the classroom by respecting learners and being well-mannered. They must accept the learners. The author defines an accepting attitude as the willingness of a teacher to accept learners with their weaknesses and strengths. Learners should never be embarrassed in front of their peers. Discipline should be exercised outside the classroom. Learners respond better to kindness, encouragement and friendliness. The classroom should be learner-centred instead of teacher-centred. The author suggests that the classroom climate and teaching strategies should be facilitative of learning in accordance with OBE (outcomes-based education) principles.

### **Tutor work in isolation: no teamwork**

In this study it is evident that there is a lack of teamwork in the college as a whole. Tutors stated that there was a *lack of support from management* as well as a *division*, a *fence* between them and management. Learners also reported a *split* between management and the tutors. The tutors also stated that they worked in *isolation from other tutors*.

The *Oxford Dictionary* defines teamwork as a combined effort or organized cooperation. According to Jones, Palmer, Osterwiell and Whitehead (1996:172), teamwork means different things to different people. To some it may mean breaking down barriers and encouraging communication and information-sharing between departments; to others, it means totally restructuring the organization around projects or business processes and introducing cross-functional teams to them. Teamwork is one of the critical outcomes of the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA). Jones et al. (1996:177) also define a team as a small number of people with complementary skills who are committed to a common purpose, performance, goal and approach for which they hold themselves mutually accountable.

In any organization, individuals and

workers have different skills, characteristics or personality types (Jay 1995: xi-x). A manager therefore has the responsibility of identifying the qualities and the characteristics of an effective team so that good qualities from each individual may be utilized effectively to attain the objectives. Jay (1995: x) compares a team to a three-piece jigsaw, namely task, group and individual. If you neglect one aspect, the pieces of the team will fail. For example, if you focus on the individual and the group only, tasks will not be performed, and if you focus on the tasks only, the group morale wanes. Jay (1995:x) and Jones et al. (1996:172) have identified the following benefits of teamwork: it improves quality, productivity, service, job satisfaction, morale and motivation, decreases staff turnover and operating costs, encourages innovation and flexibility, simplifies job structures and flattens hierarchies and it is far easier to overcome problems when everyone works as a team.

Brethower and Smalley (1998:33) acknowledge that not all problems can be solved through teamwork. The challenge is to identify which problems could be solved or prevented by teamwork. Jones et al. (1996:179) refer to *untouchables* who block teamwork. They are "paid-up members of the old order who may have positions of power, or empires to defend the old order; power which could be diminished or even totally eroded in a consensus-driven information-sharing society" (Jones et al., 1996:179). The authors go on to say that the perceived power of such individuals has been created through old systems and structures, and has been sustained through autocratic leadership and secrecy (lack of transparency) and sometimes by management through fear. Therefore, the message sent down in the organization is that individual power is more important than teambuilding (Jones et al., 1996:179-181).

In this study one of the issues raised was *policies that change all the time*. Policies of the country as a whole have been changing rapidly since the birth of the new democracy in 1994. The college policies have therefore been changing in order to keep step with the macro policies of the country. In this study policy changes were identified as causes of poor performance and demotivation. The

poor performance of the learners coincided with the restructuring and merging of nursing colleges in 2000. Jay (1995:147) supports the above and states that changes, such as mergers, takeovers, restructuring, new legislation and relocation, affect teamwork.

The teamwork approach is in keeping with *Ubuntu*, which is the capacity to express compassion, justice, reciprocity, dignity, harmony and humanity in the interest of building, maintaining and strengthening a community. The concept Ubuntu refers to interconnectedness and the responsibility to each other that flows from our connection. Nussbaum (2002:1-3) states that Ubuntu emphasizes a sense of interconnectedness as a global community if we are to survive. In this research, a "*split*" between management and tutors has been identified. The *interconnectedness* has therefore to be acknowledged and nurtured.

Some authors believe that teams may be seen as a way to avoid taking responsibility for one's actions (Jones et al., 1996:178). The authors warn against taking teambuilding to extremes, because avoidance of conflict within the team can lead to a situation where conformity is more desirable in team members than creativity, task orientation or commitment. Such over-conformity can result in the team closing itself off to external influences and can become an end in itself (Jones et al., 1996:178-181). While it is important to reinforce messages about teamwork, team performance management cannot totally replace individual performance management. The individual must take responsibility for his or her own action and be acknowledged for his or her performance and be developed (Jones et al., 1996:180).

Jones et al. (1996:175) discuss the *lack of visible support* and state that managers should praise their teams and see the importance of their contributions and achievements. Managers must *live* the culture of team work and be role-models. According to Jones et al. (1995:187), the culture of teamwork can take off only if those at the top of the organizations have embraced it for themselves.

It is a process that needs to be reinforced, nurtured and reflected upon constantly. There are a number of training and development opportunities, namely: a



teambuilding workshop run by an external consultant, in which a constructive climate is created for team members to air their ideas and views, and come up with a team action plan (Giliers, 1994:180). A series of teambuilding training sessions based on particular issues such as participatory management, flexible and purposeful strategic planning sessions, problem-solving, decision-making and project management (Hamel; Prahalad; Thomas & O'Neal 1998). Teambuilding training needs to be task-focused and tailored to add value to the team. It should not be training for the sake of training, or just to fill "training days".

Teambuilding training should have a clearly defined and well-communicated theme – e.g. enhancing interpersonal and life skills through experiential exercises, case studies and role-play, performance evaluation skills or achieving a certain standard in a technical area. Members must be held accountable for what they learn in terms of performance results. Training sessions should be taken seriously. Coaching is an element of training, which can and should be carried out on a regular basis. It is about encouraging the team to find their own solutions and having the courage of their convictions in implementing them. Coaching entails providing a vision. Team players must own it and live it out.

## Recommendations

The recommendations made by participants such as the development of adequate infrastructure, policy development focusing on essential competencies required, comprehensive educational enrichment programmes and the integration of management, head of departments and tutors through coaching and capacity-building should be acknowledged as ways to improve the performance of learners.

The importance of the effective management of human and material resources, and the upholding of the core personal and college values and the positive attitudes by all people involved in the education and training of the learners is emphasized. The identified factors that lead to poor academic performance of learners should be of great concern to all the stakeholders in general, and to the college staff development committee in collaboration with the university the college has

affiliated to in particular.

## Conclusion

The findings of this research should act as a stimulus to further research by the research committees of other nursing colleges in South Africa so that such problems can be dealt with 'head-on' by all people involved in the education and training of learners in nursing, that is, professional nurses in waiting.

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