A S COURSE leader of the nurse practitioner (NP) programme at Bournemouth University, the author has a personal interest in gaining insight into students' perspective of their training. Anecdotal evidence from previous students had hinted that their experience was stressful and 'hard work', and there was motivation to explore these perceptions further. A number of studies had recommended further research into what helps or hinders the transition into advanced nursing practice (Brown and Olshansky 1997, Hayes 1998, Lauder et al 1999, Wade 1999).

At present there is no statutory training for NPs in the UK, although the RCN Accreditation Unit has set standards for collaborating higher education institutes (RCN 2002). Gibbs (1995) recommended that teachers take a more active participation in research that explores and evaluates their courses in a systematic and valuable way. Course leaders are responsible for assessing the educational needs of students by using less 'teacher-centred' approaches (Ramsden 1992), and evaluation is now considered an integral activity in higher education (Dearing Committee 1997).

There is increasing evidence that the situational context in which learning takes place has influence on the transfer of knowledge and skills (Lauder et al 1999). The students on the Bournemouth NP programme spend a considerable amount of time undertaking self-directed studies in their workplace setting and the author wanted to analyse the contextual issues that affected their learning.

The aim of this study was to describe the experiences of student NPs to inform future course development. The intention was to explore their personal perspectives of 'being' NP students and to examine the phenomena that influence their learning such as beliefs, life experience and socialisation. Bradby (1990) illustrated the value of nurse teachers in seeking meaning of the behaviour and experience of their students.

In grounded theory methodology, it is recommended that a full literature review is not conducted at the outset of the project so that researchers avoid subconsciously accepting what is written (Strauss 1998). The social environment of the participants affected role transition and learning and two major categories were evident: experience in the workplace and experience in the academic environment. A third category, 'pioneering spirit', described the participants' personal attributes that influenced their transformation.

The results have prompted a review of the current curriculum, mode of delivery and teaching resources. The findings have implications for current and future courses and demonstrate the value of eliciting the students' view.

### Literature review

**Aim**

To describe the experiences of nurse practitioner (NP) students at Bournemouth University.

**Method**

Grounded theory methodology guided the data collection and analysis. A theoretical model was constructed that represented 'role transition' for NP students.

**Results**

The social environment of the participants affected role transition and learning and two major categories were evident: experience in the workplace and experience in the academic environment. A third category, 'pioneering spirit', described the participants' personal attributes that influenced their transformation.

**Conclusion**

The results have prompted a review of the current curriculum, mode of delivery and teaching resources. The findings have implications for current and future courses and demonstrate the value of eliciting the students' view.
Clinical decision-making skills should be a key concept in the workplace to acquire advanced practice. Read and Roberts-Davis (2000) recommended that to be an important aspect of their education, and the opportunity in the workplace to explore and develop NP education (Black 1998, Redshaw 1998, Hunter and Walsh 1999, Offredy and Martin 1998, Brown and Olshansky 1998, Harris and Ford 1998), but no clear themes relating to the educational experience of student NPs. Therefore, current published studies examining the experience of NP students in the UK, nor any that evaluated the effectiveness and scope of NP programmes. This data sets the context for comparison with the UK in that the role of the NP is established and widely recognised in America, and the programmes are at master's level and there is no clear theme relating to the educational experience of student NPs. The surprising finding was that there were no literature relating to the phenomenon of interest, although considerable literature existed in support of either expanding or refuting the emerging conceptual categories. Thus, the processes of data collection and analysis were simultaneous and ongoing (Strauss and Corbin 1998). As the aim of the study is to generate new theory directly from the data, the researcher is advised to commence data collection and analysis. Therefore, current published studies examining the experience of NP students. It clarified the focus of the proposed research project in that there had been no previous critical analysis of the existing research also added to the literature is required to identify gaps in knowledge, rather than the relative recent development of the role, emerging categories (Benton 2000) and is considered a source of data (Strauss and Corbin 1997). However, this remains a controversial issue among some authors, who insist that an initial review of the literature is required to identify gaps in knowledge before an in-depth exploration of the literature. The literature is then used to confirm or refute the recommendations of the National Organization for Nursing Faculty (NONPF), a national forum for the purpose of expanding critical thinking before an in-depth study undertaken in the UK that considered 'the notion of representativeness' (DePoy and Gitlin 1994). For the purpose of this study an initial focused search was undertaken to determine pertinent literature is required to identify gaps in knowledge, rather than the pose of either expanding or refuting the emerging conceptual categories, a more focused approach to questioning developed with the purpose of either expanding or refuting the emerging conceptual categories. Thus, the processes of data collection and analysis were simultaneous and ongoing (Strauss and Corbin 1998). The initial literature review revealed potential indicators of tension in the learning experience of NP students' perspective of their training. Critical analysis of the existing research also added to the literature is required to identify gaps in knowledge, rather than the process of either expanding or refuting the emerging conceptual categories, a more focused approach to questioning developed with the purpose of either expanding or refuting the emerging conceptual categories. Thus, the processes of data collection and analysis were simultaneous and ongoing (Strauss and Corbin 1998). As the aim of the study is to generate new theory directly from the data, the researcher is advised to commence data collection and analysis.
integration (Strauss and Corbin 1998). Open coding consisted of meticulous line-by-line examination of the transcripts to generate initial codes. Examples of such codes were: 'conflicting views', 'role confusion' and 'defensive attitudes'. In vivo codes derived directly from quotes included: 'professional jealousy', 'peer support' and 'complexities of the workplace'.

In axial coding the process of reassembling the data that were fractured during open coding began (Strauss and Corbin 1998). Axial coding involves relating categories to their subcategories to form more precise and complete explanations about their phenomenon. An example from this study was the development of the category 'perceptions of colleagues' from the subcategories 'defensive attitudes' and 'professional jealousy'. The emerging categories and subcategories should give clearer explanatory power to the phenomenon (Strauss and Corbin 1998).

Selective coding involved integrating and refining the categories and identifying the central concept that represented the main theme of the research. Throughout the process of coding, the categories were constantly compared to validate the analysis. This 'interplay' between previously collected and analysed information is a central feature of the grounded theory approach (Cutcliffe 2000). The categories were also verified by using existing literature, which was considered an additional source of data throughout.

Glaser and Strauss (1967) argued that validity and reliability in grounded theory is established by taking the findings back to the participants who provided the original data. Therefore, in this study, students were asked to comment on the emerging theory. Their feedback confirmed the validity of the results.

Exploration of the students' perspective of their training revealed two major categories: their experience in the workplace and their experience in the academic environment. Analysis of the data illustrated a process of professional development that began at the inception of NP training. This process is reflected in the theoretical model of role transition (Figure 1).

Two major categories were identified: 'transforming the workplace' and 'embracing academia'. In addition, a third category – 'pioneering spirit' – emerged, reflecting the personal attributes of the participants. Each category contains subcategories that detail aspects of the phenomenon. The categories are not mutually exclusive but interconnect to enhance the description of the process.

The pervasive theme of this research revealed the impact of the social environment on each of the participants, and the effect this had on professional socialisation and learning. Students employed complex strategies when attempting to combine the contractual responsibilities of their employment (all the participants were qualified nurses in senior clinical positions, many with managerial responsibilities) with the demands of undertaking NP training. All of them described factors that either hindered or facilitated the process of role transition.

Transforming the workplace
Transforming the workplace began at the inception of training and the participants described three key categories: 'encountering the perceptions of colleagues', 'negotiating mentor support' and 'developing role identity'. The clinical environment held a multitude of challenges for the NP students. They were initiating roles that are relatively new in the NHS, facing the challenges of advanced practice while maintaining quality of care for patients. Transforming the workplace describes the process employed by students to address these issues.

The process of transformation is complicated and described by the participants as 'difficult', 'fraught' and 'exhausting'. One participant referred to having to adapt to the 'complexity of the real world'.

Encountering the perceptions of colleagues
Each of the students reported an initial degree of tension with colleagues in the workplace, which negatively affected the socialisation process. This was unexpected and many described an initial perception of hostility, particularly from nursing colleagues: 'Although I was really enthusiastic, what I was not anticipating was the negative feeling of other nurses towards NPs'; 'I've had a lot of hostility from nurses – some physicians, but mainly from nurses.' This negativity resulted in participants having to work with colleagues who were initially hostile.
Negotiating mentor support

with them at all.'

what I was going to do – there wasn't a problem

supportive of me. They could see the benefit of

I need from their point of view'; 'The GPs were very

are willing to give me whatever scope of practice

'I am fully supported by the two consultants who

experienced little difficulty in the transitional experience:

demand knowledge to carry out the care in the way

think they're worried that you won't have the aca-

tering the role. In primary care, the medical prac-

reservation about the potential benefits of intro-

they feel it will make us a much more cohesive

their developing NP role: 'My colleagues are only

Despite initial reservations they were supportive of

reported change in their colleagues' perceptions.

other nurses had difficulty in establishing their role.

mented negative feelings and lack of support from

students. Some participants who experienced

and preparation, thereby easing role transition for

team, and it will take away a lot of their problems.'

Where colleagues perceived value to the dev-

stantly justify the role to other nurses who did not

As the course progressed, however, some students

Martin and Hutchinson (1997) concur with these

The participants also experienced role ambiguity

Many of the participants reported that their man-

tors for nurses: 'I felt I was having difficulties with

questioned the suitability of doctors to act as men-

the GP to act as mentor for training purposes at

the LP gave made a big difference. From that week

port they received: 'You know, just the hour that

made a 'significant difference' to the level of sup-

ing between themselves, the lecturer practitioner

clinical supervision: 'You have to ask for help – and

and constantly explaining the potential contribution

justify their rationale for undertaking the training

the potential problems would enable employers to

difficulty suggested that increased awareness of

the students. Some participants who experienced

and preparation, thereby easing role transition for

students all referred to their mentor's initial lack of

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All the mentors in this study were doctors and

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All the mentors in this study were doctors and
that this hindered their ability to apply and practice in their struggle for recognition and reported professional development of NPs. The lack of recognition and what it means, as stated by Walsh (1999), supported this finding. This finding is supported by the UKCC, stating that lack of recognition was a major barrier for the profession. The title 'NP' had hindered their role development, and some suggested that the professional nursing organisations would need to take action to clarify and support the NP role. For many, this had been successful: 'I think we're doing ourselves an injustice at the moment because nobody understands the name 'student NP' and no longer wear a 'student NP' name badge and no longer wearing uniform. For many, this had been successful: 'I am happy with the demands of developing a 'new' identity: 'I have much more to do in the practice place, particularly where colleagues were perceived as being complicated because of the 'dual' roles in practice nurse and you're suddenly a trainee NP, your responsibilities had led to increased pressure in the workplace, and you still have that workload.'

Participants revealed that they had employed a category. People don't quite know what to expect – which some may say is negative. You have to introduce yourself and say 'This is me and I'm here to help you' and just because I don't wear a uniform, people don't see you as a 'student NP': 'It is difficult to just 'change hats', if you like. I think they were patient focused.

The main concern from students was that learning нового knowledge and skills in their and 'managing time'. It is clear that every participant had a personal desire to undertake this specific training and all students perceived that they had made the 'right' decision: 'I think this course has provided every-thing I wanted it to, from the physical examination and 'managing time'.

Challenging schedules, 'establishing links with LPs' and 'participating in a group', 'challenging schedules', 'establishing links with LPs' and 'participating in a group' emerged as that – and you still have that workload.'

Participants were unanimous in their opinion that the schedule and timing of the day between 5-7pm. Students considered this 'impossible'. These comments related specifically to the timing of such a crucial component was hindered of the participants travelled considerable distances because of fatigue and lack of concentration. Some students reported that conflicting responsibilities had led to increased pressure in the workplace, and some suggested that the professional nursing organisations would need to take action to clarify and support the NP role. For many, this had been successful: 'I think we're doing ourselves an injustice at the moment because nobody understands the name 'student NP' and no longer wear a 'student NP' name badge and no longer wearing uniform. For many, this had been successful: 'I am happy with the demands of developing a 'new' identity: 'I have much more to do in the practice place, particularly where colleagues were perceived as being complicated because of the 'dual' roles in practice nurse and you're suddenly a trainee NP, your responsibilities had led to increased pressure in the workplace, and you still have that workload.'

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Pioneering spirit discovered that NP students had higher satisfaction supported by Read and Roberts-Davis (2000), who noted that the NP students frequently resorted to working during weekends, days off and annual leave. As a result, they experienced lack of time, which resulted in decreased learning opportunities. Much of this was attributed to combining existing work commitments with their studies and the majority had underestimated the demands of the course: 'So I think lack of time is one of the greatest drawbacks really – you've got to earn the money and also you have home life to consider, you've got a job to do because you've got to earn the money and also you have home life to be able to understand what people are doing,' said one student.

In addition to seeking credibility and recognition, some described the need to develop self-confidence as a NP. The self-motivation and determination to expand the theoretical model of role transition for NP students was noted. Bradby (1990) verifies that the process of professionalisation of NP is facilitated by the LP. The LPs' ability to illustrate the connection between evidence to attain their objectives, particularly when undertaking aspects of patient care which were previously perceived as medical: 'I knew there were a lot of minor ailments requiring intervention... and not complete the course.'

The feedback from the students indicates that the theoretical framework for role transition is useful and the students would like to see the model in practice. As a result of reflecting on their experience, participants revealed additional attributes which they perceived as necessary for managing the demands of the course. These attributes are consistent features of the personal characteristics of the participants. Bradby (1990) notes that the attributes of the LP were the most important factor for the students to accept the role of the NP. The LPs' ability to articulate the language used to articulate the transition was the focus of their motivation.

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One of the consistent explanations was a lack of recognition of the NP title and several authors suggested that lack of collaboration with colleagues, mentors and university teachers may hinder knowledge and skills acquisition (Lauder et al. 1999). The results of this study indicate that lack of collaboration with colleagues, mentors and university teachers may hinder knowledge and skills acquisition. The clinical mentor plays a significant role in the development of role identity. There was consensus among students that mentors were essential to develop a professional identity. \( \text{...} \)
for future discussion among their peers illustrates record incidents and issues from their workplace curriculum (Miller 1987). To encourage students to for reflective practice means addressing issues of will ease systematic enquiry and reflection. Teaching strategies should facilitate regular opportunity for interactions between students had considerable skills. Second, this study revealed that 'informal' lectures where they practised physical examination personal reflections, they also felt inhibited in the negative influence on the social interaction in the clear that a large group size (more than 25) had a cations for future course development. First, it is and the demands of the course. cope with the complexities of role development and the desire for student learning. In Smith B, professionals to change to provide an opportunity for 'social inter- 'frustrated' and stated that, in their opinion, a smaller group. Students reported feeling 'intimidated' and impact on academic learning. Peters (2000) rec- 'proving ground: lessons in practice: are NP students being also the 'reality' of nursing in the workplace. It is that teachers must attempt to reconcile edu- an andragogical approach to education. In this way to Research: Multiple Strategies the students are regarded as independent adults who possess the capacity for self-directed learning (Quinn and the proving ground: lessons in the proving ground: lessons in the proving ground: lessons in practice: are NP students being also the 'reality' of nursing in the workplace. It is that teachers must attempt to reconcile edu- an andragogical approach to education. In this way to Research: Multiple Strategies the students are regarded as independent adults who possess the capacity for self-directed learning (Quinn

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As their nursing experience. Currently students are being selected as much for their personal attributes as their experiences, and it relates to the personal characteristics of the participants. Self-motivation to expand the traditional boundaries of nursing practice were constant features of the expressions used by the participants.

What has become increasingly evident is that the focus of this study has been process-oriented. In addition to seeking credibility and recognition in the local profession, this research has prompted a review of student learning in the workplace and early recognition of problems is imperative for future enquiry and revealed the considerable benefit in actively seeking students' opinions in relation to curriculum and the teaching strategies employed.

The issues surrounding student learning in the workplace place and the academic environment have been changing. The focus of this study has been process-oriented and it related to the personal characteristics of the participants. Self-motivation to expand the traditional boundaries of nursing practice were constant features of the expressions used by the participants.