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Evaluating the Value of Reflective Journaling in Training Municipal Police Recruits in British Columbia to Promote Successful Interactions with Mental Health Consumers

CANADA'S *leading*
PUBLIC SAFETY
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INTRODUCTION/BACKGROUND

The skills required by police officers are becoming more multifarious in conjunction with ever-shifting societal environments and conditions. One such example is the increase of mental health consumer-police interactions and the subsequent media and social attention they receive. Therefore, it was necessary to examine the training municipal police recruits receive in British Columbia in the context of their interactions with mental health consumers in order to promote successful and positive resolution of such interactions.

This study examined, from the recruit perspective, how sufficient the Block 1 training they receive at the BCPA is in addressing the complexities of increased MHC-police interactions. Additionally, following JIBC's mandate of applying experiential educational techniques, such as reflective journaling, the research evaluated whether the application of journaling could aid police recruits and staff in identifying potential learning issues and to see the evolution of cognitive learning recruits experience.

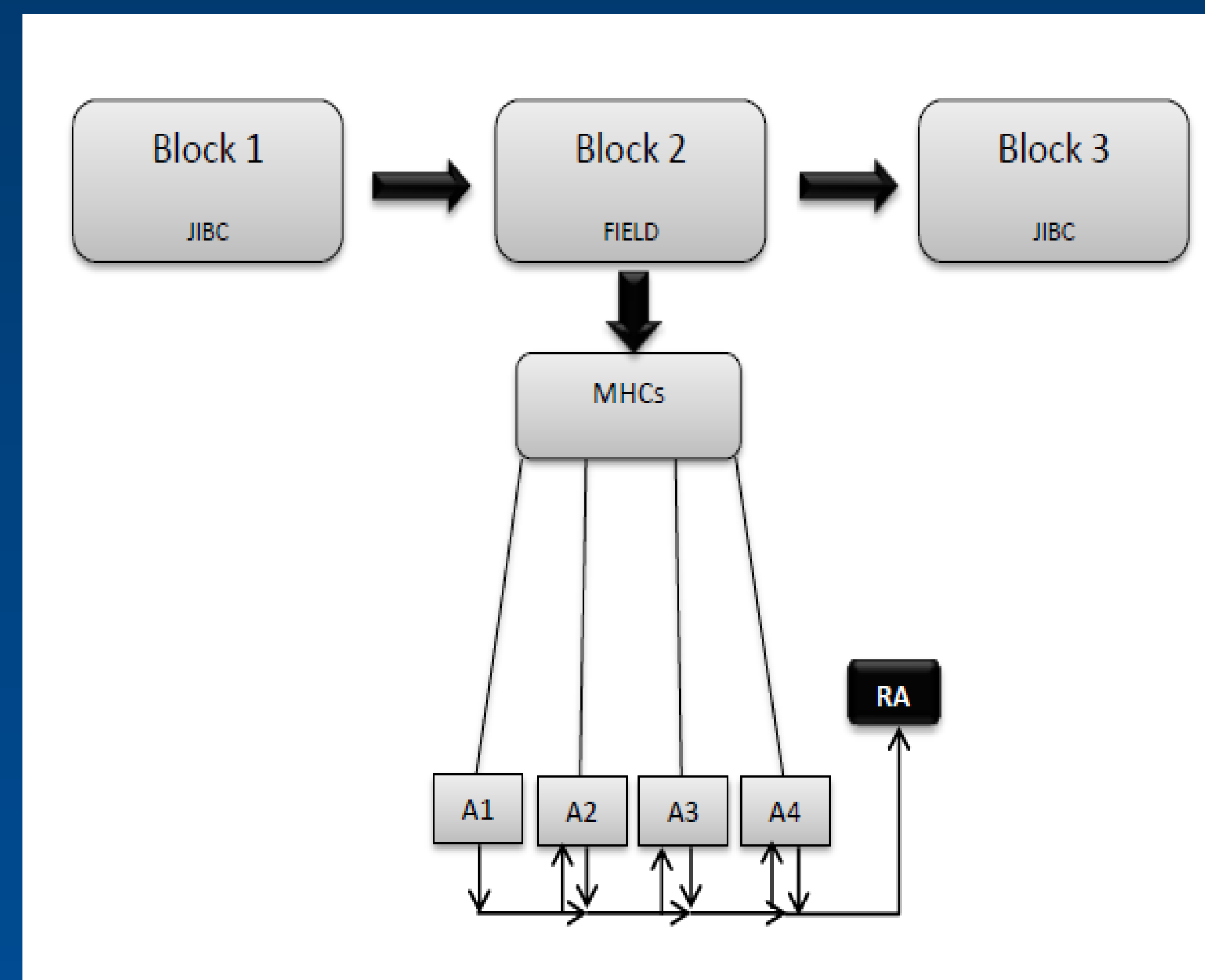
METHOD

This research was designed as a phenomenological study to explore the experiences of municipal police recruits at the British Columbia Police Academy by looking for qualitative data on how prepared police recruits feel when interacting with mental health consumers during the academy's Block 2 field training. One such way to guide the students through the reflective process is by assigning journaling assessments, which require learners to look more deeply at what they are learning as well as allowing the learning to have more participation in their individual learning processes.

Each participant completed a total of 5 assessments. The first four provided guiding questions regarding recruit behaviours and emotions while dealing with four separate MHC interactions. The fifth assessment asked the recruits to reflect on their learning development throughout those interactions in their Block 2.

RESULTS

All of the responses showed a combination of description and critical analysis, self-awareness, synthesis, and evaluation. In examining the data to address how confident recruits feel when they leave the BCPA after Block 1 to continue their training in the field, it was evident that the majority of the respondents acknowledged how significantly the training aided them in Block 2. While only two respondents recognized direct links between the use of reflective journaling and the development of their Stage 3 learning, all respondents demonstrated a progression to Stage 2 and 3 descriptors demonstrating reflective learning.



| Three Stages of Reflective Learning | | |
|-------------------------------------|-------------------|--------------------------|
| Stage 1 | Stage 2 | Stage 3 |
| Awareness | Critical Analysis | New Perspective |
| Discomfort | Self-awareness | Changed conceptual view |
| Excitement | Description | New Understanding |
| Curiosity | Critical analysis | Increased self-awareness |
| | Synthesis | Integration |
| | Evaluation | |

Based on the model provided by Thorpe (2004).

KEY REFERENCES:

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- Schön, D.A. (1987) *Educating the Reflective Practitioner*, San Francisco, USA: Jossey-Bass.
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DISCUSSION:

The data shows a number of individuals completed the assessments consistently applying and demonstrating a significant degree of reflective learning throughout each of the five assessments. While some of the respondents showed primarily second-stage reflection in each of the assessments, the majority demonstrated predominance in applying Stage 3 descriptors throughout the latter assessments.

The majority of the Stage 3 descriptors: changed conceptual view, new perspective, increased self-awareness, and integration were demonstrated primarily in the third or fourth reflective assessments. While it was not overtly expressed in the any of the respondent's first four journals, analysis of the responses categorized according to the stages and their descriptors shows an elevation in cognitive processing. It is not clear why many of the third and fourth journals indicate third-stage reflection; however, one possibility is that through completing these reflective journal assessments, the recruit respondents developed their reflective and critical thinking skills. This correlated to the posed research question of whether or not these assessments could benefit police recruit learners; the data does indicate evidence of this.

APPLICATION:

Before it is possible to encourage reflective learning and more specifically to do so through journaling, it is first necessary to inform and convince instructors on the usefulness of such assignments. Collaboration between instructors and students must exist in order for instructors to gain insight into learners' needs. To accomplish this, instructors need to put aside traditional student-teacher dynamics of the teacher as "expert" and instead create more of a balance of power where the student is able to contribute to how material and lessons are delivered. The significance of this is instructors need to model behaviours that practitioners need to replicate when interacting with clients. In the context of the BCPA, this may prove challenging as a hierarchical para-military culture predominates through an academy environment

With conducting these reflective assessments while recruits are early in their skill development, it is the hope that they will continue to apply reflection throughout the remainder of their training as well as in their careers. Therefore, it would be useful to increase the application of journaling activities to promote self-guide learning and reflection for the recruits of BCPA. By instituting feedback sessions throughout Blocks 1 and 3, recruits would have the opportunity to discuss the content of their reflective journals, provide feedback, and have some of their recommendations applied while they are still at the academy.