CONCEPT ANALYSIS

Developing a Professional Identity in Nursing through Reflection

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Abstract

PProfessional identity is the nurse's collection of beliefs about what it "means to be" and to "act like" a nurse. This represents his/her "philosophy of nursing" and it has a direct influence on how actual "roles and responsibilities" are followed. In other words, professional identity is the "foundational reference" in the nurse's cognitive process to which decisions are being made. Moreover, these are the values and beliefs held by the nurse as guiding principles in thinking, behaving, acting, communicating, and interacting with patients, the patient's family, and other members of the healthcare team.

As a practical science, nursing education has introduced the importance of reflective learning in the clinical setting when providing care to patients and in building nurse-patient relationships. This means that there is a developing awareness of assisting, encouraging, and teaching both students and professional nurses to become thoughtful individuals, capable of critical thinking and analogy to come up with innovative ideas. Reflection in this mode of instruction is considered as a tool for the analysis of nursing practice nurturing both the understanding of professional nursing and the building of important thoughtful approaches essential for providing nursing care in multifaceted and dynamic working conditions. As a result, reflection, as an instructional method, has been included in many nursing curricula.

However, the concept of reflection within the context of developing a professional identity has scarcely been defined to adequately identify research and educational indicators. This concept analysis aims to describe attributes, antecedents, and consequences of reflection in the development of professional identity in nursing and to provide clear evidence for nursing educators/faculty that support the systematic development of professional nurses as they advance in practice from the undergraduate to the graduate programs.

Keywords: *Reflection, Professional Identity, Professional Nursing*

Introduction

Patient-centered care (PCC) is identified to be at the heart of every healthcare provider. There is a need for healthcare professionals to empower patients (and their families) and to select and own their healthcare needs (Tashiro, Shimpuku, Naruse, & Matsutani, 2013). In modern times, the concept of PCC encourages people to attain and maintain wellness through working closely and building professional relationships with healthcare professionals. It entails shifting from a very "paternalistic" and "traditional" focus to a "people-centered" focus in healthcare. Moreover, patients are now more informed through technology and the worldwide web. With a click of a button, those needing medical attention can learn about their health and management of diseases.

Nurses are on the medical frontlines, working continuously and closely with patients needing help to cope with the impact of health deficiencies or the effect of changes in the nuances of life

stages. The "shift" of caring decisions toward the patient and their family requires a change in responsibility, thus changing the dynamic that plays in a nurse-patient relationship. This transformation in power and responsibility requires the development of needed competence in nursing, knowledge, skill, attitude, and ethical grounding that will directly affect the care provided to individuals, both sick and well. Competence is acquired through collaboration, socialization, and integration to internalize values, norms, and ethical standards of the professional culture into one's behavior and self-conception.

Professional identity is the nurse's collection of beliefs about what it "means to be" and to "act like" a nurse. This represents their "philosophy of nursing," and it has a direct influence on how actual "roles and responsibilities" are followed (Fagermoen 1997). In other words, professional identity is the "foundational reference" in the nurse's cognitive process in decision making.

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The nurse equips the said values and beliefs as guiding principles in thinking, behaving, acting, communicating, and interacting with patients, the patient's family, and fellow healthcare team members.

As a practical science, nursing education has introduced the importance of reflective learning in the clinical setting when providing care to patients and building a nurse-patient relationship (Pierson 2001). The dynamic between both parties means a developing awareness of assisting, encouraging, and teaching both students and professional nurses to become thoughtful individuals capable of critical thinking and analogy to develop innovative ideas. Reflection in this mode of instruction formed in the relationship is considered a tool for analyzing nursing practice, nurturing both the understanding of professional nursing and the building of essential and thoughtful approaches essential for providing nursing care in multifaceted and engaged working conditions. As a result, reflection has been included in many nursing curricula as an instructional method. However, the concept of reflection in developing a professional identity has scarcely been defined to identify research and educational indicators adequately.

This concept analysis aims to describe attributes, antecedents, and consequences of reflection in developing a professional identity in nursing and surrogate terms and is a model case to inform nursing students and nurses both in the academe and in the clinical area about developing reflective skills. Further, the findings of this study also aim to provide clear evidence for nursing educators/faculty that supports the systematic development of professional nurses as they advance in practice from the undergraduate to the graduate programs.

Study design

In unfolding, exploring, and clarifying the base of knowledge, concepts are important because as the concerned healthcare professionals gain criticism, it encourages acceptance by building critical consensus. Thus, this feedbacking method fosters understanding, and as research develops, the definitions of concepts evolve and eventually concretize (Morse 1996). In other words, concepts must first be adequately defined and described as it becomes the foundation and grounding of further exploration to develop valuable and updated knowledge in nursing science. Numerous methods and approaches for concept analysis were introduced to advance nursing theory and practice. Wilsonian (1963/1969) methods of concept analysis adopted and further developed by Walker and Avant (1983/1998/1995), Chinn and Jacobs (1983/1987), Chinn and Kramer (1991), and further reformed by Schwartz-Barcott and Kim (1986/1993) and Rodgers (1989/1993).

Rodgers (2000) upholds that concepts are dynamic and develop over time depending on context. Therefore, concepts are always subject to change rather than following fixed conditions with rigid rules that are not always appropriate for examining reflective learning in a new context. This paper then followed Rodgers's evolutionary concept analysis to analyze reflection towards developing professional identity among nurses. The purpose is not to elicit a conclusive answer but to identify a unanimous concept. As Rodgers (1989) suggested, the process of concept analysis is to explore the context on how the concept was used, retrieve data from different concept resources and references, and identify antecedents, attributes, and consequences of the concept. In addition to how the investigation was designed, the dispositional theory of concepts is adopted as described by Rodgers. "Reflection" as a context used in this concept analysis is in its scientific use as it appears in the published work contrasting to the familiar terms used in everyday conversations. The concept of reflection is chosen as it is defined and studied within the nursing educational contexts being delineated in search of published work.

Data Source

The search for electronically published work is from five databases: Google Scholar, EBSCO, Cochrane Library, Science Direct, and Scopus using a combination of the keywords "reflection," "nursing," "nursing education," "critical reflection," "reflection in practice," "critical thinking," "reflection in action," "nursing student journaling/journal writing," "blogging," "service learning," and "e-learning." The articles used are written only in English. Duplicates, non-academic, and unavailable articles were disregarded for use. Articles containing concepts of reflection including attributes, antecedents, consequences, surrogate terms, and essential aspects in nursing education are included, while articles with none are not. Fifty articles were chosen based on the abovementioned inclusion and limitation criteria. Rodgers pointed out that including at least 30 articles reach the common use of the concept (Tashiro, Shimpuku, Naruse, & Matsutani, 2013). The sampling, therefore, of this current concept analysis was adequate based on the guideline set by Rodgers.

Data Analysis

The 50 electronic articles were reviewed and analyzed using thematic analysis as suggested by Rodgers. The language used in the included published work was thoroughly examined to determine a trend by having the question in mind: *What is similar in using the word?* The following concepts are chosen from the description of "reflection" in the selected published works: (a) *antecedent* are the events that happen prior to the concept); (b) *attributes* are the traits related to the definition of the concept; (c) *consequences* are the results that are happening because of the antecedents and the attributes. These were then are placed in a table to evaluate similarities among the published articles. Cohesive contexts were continuously organized and

reorganized to develop a comprehensive and relevant analysis of the concept.

Results

Antecedents

Gap between thought and action

In the clinical setting, nurses often experience situations where the ideal option they have in mind is not clear and readily available (Parissopoulos 2019). These problematic situations prompt the nurse to analyze what they have experienced and what they thought they knew. A cognitive thought and an emotional awareness have sparked an uncomfortable feeling brought about by the realization that the knowledge being applied during their performance of patient care was not enough to explain what had transpired.

Through this, nurses can improve their critical thinking and problem-solving abilities. Therefore, nurses can identify their strengths and weaknesses to identify the need for growth and learning and adopt viable alternative workarounds to solve clinical dilemmas in the future.

Gap Between Theory and Practice

As nurses transcend from the schools to the clinical area, they soon face a break between what they learned and what they see in reality (Contreras, Edwards, Hall, & Lee, 2020). A vast pool of studies has mentioned the need for reflection to integrate theory and practice. Reflection is progressively acknowledged in nursing practice because of its contribution to the learning process and expansion of the body of nursing knowledge (Edwards 2017).

Advancement in Knowledge and Technology

As healthcare expands and becomes increasingly advanced and more accessible to people, there is an expansion and shifting of roles in advanced practice, which demands nurses to act more autonomously and make reasonable clinical judgments. These developments entail that nurses are now required to apply their specialized knowledge in dealing with well and sick clientele in collaboration with other professionals in the healthcare team. The changes also bring about the need for reflection in practice and nursing education.

Values and Cultural Differences

As nurses interact with other people, they get exposed to dilemmas from the diversity of culture, beliefs, and values. These problems may be rooted in differences in practices and multiplicity of beliefs as influenced by upbringing depending on one's country or place of origin; this poses a challenge for nurses to develop transcultural competencies and sensitivity (Siles-González & Solano-Ruiz 2016). Nurses must think about

ideologies, values, and ethical principles brought about by these concerns. Reflective learning is an important strategy to promote critical thinking and self-inquiry regarding their cultural values and how to adapt demands of the patient and their family without compromising their values and beliefs.

#### *Advancement in Education and Learning*

The development of more complex assessments and evaluation in nursing education that is leaning towards knowing oneself and others to build a professional identity makes the positivist traditional educational approach less effective. This is due to nurses being able to understand the process of caring through their inner self with others. Hence, they can attain a sense of accomplishment and self-actualization. Reflection as a tool can enhance self-effectiveness and respect of self and others.

Attributes of Reflection

Deliberate process of experience analysis

An extensive number of authors describe reflection as a tool to allow learners to reflect on their experiences freely. In turn, it helps the learner deeply understand what has transpired in their experiences to improve their decision-making, behavior, and practice approach. This leads to the reflection of a plan for changing and having new actions in taking necessary steps to change their thinking, perceptions, and their practice as shown in the cyclic process below:

Figure 1: *Cycle of Reflection*
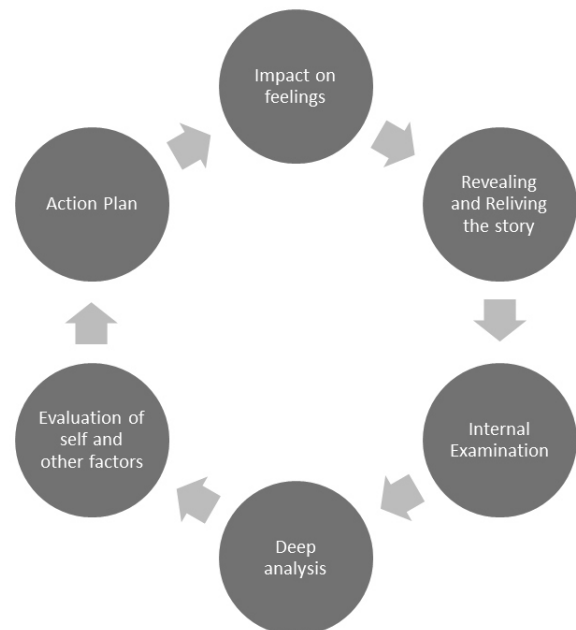
Spiritual, Emotional Quest and Examination of Inner Self

Through internally assessing and reflecting on past decisions, one can use reflection to identify uncomfortable feelings that made them think over the situation. The process, in turn, makes

one critically appraise and analyze the situation from different perspectives, thus developing new insight from experience.

Thought Process Relying Mostly on Memory

At the end of reliving and describing a situation, students are required to internally examine their feelings and thoughts, from their memories, considering their thoughts and emotions about the situation described. To form new understandings and appreciations, learners need to draw learning from experiences that are poorly defined, complex and influenced by many factors. Thus, it is imperative to assess and analyze what happened deeply and the influences in the issue of concern.

Consequences

Increased Critical Thinking Skills

Reflection brings a learner to critically analyze situations, be aware of one's own beliefs, values, strengths, and weaknesses, and decide what to accept as guiding principles. Learners can formulate questions, hypothesis alternatives, and plans to test principles by either experimenting or making mental maps. Through this process, the students will become more aware of their personalities and learn more about themselves, their roles, and responsibilities as nurses and members of a larger institution.

Facilitate Communication and Collaboration

Learners explore in reflecting their values and feelings and how these factors influence others around them. Reflection brings the means for professional nurses to realize knowledge and theoretical underpinnings in nursing by either accepting, challenging, or changing knowledge to meet the need of the present circumstance. As a result, nurses can contribute to the multidisciplinary team their enhanced knowledge to improve practice, thus improving patient care outcomes as a whole.

Development of the Meaning of Nursing

There are five identified consequences of reflection in the development of personal meaning in nursing: 1) Identifying gaps in their knowledge and thus opening the need for improvement of self; 2) Identifying opportunities of growth as a person and as a nurse; 3) Awareness of one's roles and responsibilities as a member of a profession; 4) Recognizing support for finding solutions in deciding during uncertainty; 5) Analyzing reasons of embracing the nursing profession as one's calling; & 6) Reflexivity in practice where nurses can see the interconnectivity in the lives of people, acknowledging and taking the responsibility of their presence in the lives of the different patients they are caring for through the reflective lens (Palaganas et. al 2017). In the journey of reflection towards reflexivity, nurses can put meaning in every aspect of their experiences in caring for patients, guided by the principle that their involvement in the lives of patients have an overall effect on the patient's decision-making for their health. (Palaganas & Estacio 2021)

Surrogate Terms

Life-Long Learning

Although life-long learning is more than reflective learning, reflection as a daily activity will continuously help enhance knowledge and skills to address immediate problems and participate in the process of self and professional development.

Transformative Learning

The term is the same as a perspective transformation where an individual can recognize the valid reason for a problem. This produces critical awareness where the cognitive process changes an outlook, behavior, or practice.

Experiential Learning

Learning through reflection is the processing, analyzing, and evaluating experiences where concepts are grasped, resulting in change or transformation. Thus, as Dewey (1933) proposed, "experience and reflection will result in learning."

Discussion

The author identified antecedents, attributes, consequences, and surrogate terms of reflection in nursing in developing a professional identity. The cycle of reflection is a circular model (Figure 1). The consequences of reflection to develop professional identity are seen as an overall linear upward trend.

Proposed Definition:

In the development of professional identity, reflection is a continuous and deliberate process triggered by the gap in thinking and action. Following the definition, the nurse is to describe and analyze experiences, identify and process their deepest emotional feelings, examine their thoughts, critically look at their behavior and the situation, and thus plan for more effective action. Through the cycle of reflection, they become more aware of their caring skills and be ambassadors of the profession to better communicate with patients, colleagues, and other healthcare team members. As a life-long learner in the process of reflection, a nurse can acquire self-directed learning skills leading to obtaining professional maturity.

Model Case

Cristopher is a newly hired nurse in his 1st year working in the Emergency Room. It was another work day for him and another shift to conquer as an orientee nurse. Fresh from passing the board exams, he was left to decide for himself and rationalize nursing interventions being done to his patients. He could cope with difficulties through guided reflection with his mentors at the end of every shift. Reflecting on his actions made him appreciate more the role of nurses in the healthcare system. This gives him strength and pride in his chosen profession.

Conclusion

This global, dynamic, ever-changing society brings about changes in nursing care, shifting from traditional to people-centered care. The shift requires increased responsibility and autonomy from a professional nurse. In this concept paper, reflection is identified as a potential tool for a nurse to find their identity where reflection helps them look into their perspectives. In this matter, they can enhance communication within themselves, their patients, and colleagues. As a result, they can find their identity as professionals dealing with patients and all aspects of life and thus improve the quality of care.

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