**Professional Identity: A Candid Self Examination**

Erika T. Jubitana

Galen College of Nursing

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Stephanie Trueblood, MSN, RN, CNE

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Who are you? What are your values? Those are essential questions to consider when formulating your professional identity. Studies have shown that developing a professional identity is a life-long process influenced by several factors such as your personal values and beliefs, your education, your professional practice, and your environment (Rossella & Massimiliano, 2018). Professional identity (PI) is defined as the perception of belonging in your chosen field and the accompanying pride to be a part of that profession. In nursing, it encompasses your values, ethics, attitudes, clinical competence, and professional socialization (Rassmussen et al., 2021). It is a dynamic process that results in you continuously and definitively thinking, acting, and feeling more and more like a nurse (Godfrey, 2020). Given its all-encompassing nature, I believe a well-rounded professional identity is multifaceted and requires a holistic approach to life. I have been a nurse for over 15 years, and during that time, I have developed a strong nursing professional identity. Nevertheless, I know that embarking on the Bachelor of Science in Nursing (BSN) program will inevitably alter said identity. A candid examination of my nursing philosophy and goals as a BSN nurse will clarify where my professional identity originated and where it is heading.

**Nursing Philosophy**

**Reasons for Choosing Nursing**

Shaped by my upbringing, my personal values predisposed me to love the nursing profession. The oldest of three children, I was in charge of watching over them. That practice made me a firm believer in the effectiveness of leading by example. Indeed, doing so promotes respect and trust, two desirable aspects of healthy interpersonal relationships. Caring for my siblings also developed the nurturer in me and made me value love and kindness, responsibility, dependability, integrity, accountability, and the art of observing and listening. Those are all values and personality traits a nurse needs to excel at her job. Furthermore, my mother, whom I idolized, was also a nurse. Subconsciously, that probably played a substantial role in my career choice. Consequently, when it was time for me to go to college and pick a field of study, my first choice was “something quick that made a decent living.” An Associate Degree in Nursing (ADN) fell in that category. Add that to my natural disposition for qualities desired in a nurse, and voila, I had nursing as a perfect fit. Indeed, in 15 years of practice, I have never regretted choosing nursing as a profession.

**Personal Nursing Philosophy**

Influenced by Jean Watson’s Human Caring Theory (Blais & Hayes, 2016), my nursing philosophy is simple: 1) Everyone deserves loving and compassionate care. 2) The best way to do so is holistically. I also believe that balance is the key to nursing excellence. Indeed, as a new nurse, I quickly realized that balance and compromise are essential. For instance, if a post-surgical patient tells me they cannot walk 100 feet as prescribed by the doctor, I compromise with them and ask them to first, only dangle at the side of the bed; next time, take five steps to a recliner; the following time, walk to the bathroom. So far and so forth, until they are strong enough to walk the prescribed distance. Balance and compromise are not an excuse for mediocrity or complacency. Instead, it is the desire to strive for perfection with the strength to accept when we fall short.

**Professional Strengths and Weaknesses**

Having good communication skills has been a strength for me professionally. Indeed, as a nurse, you need to get patients to focus, listen, believe, and trust you when they are at their most vulnerable moments. Many people lash out or are consumed by fear in those instances. That does not make for a willing or responsive audience. However, good communication can make them responsive. Effective communication is also essential when engaging with other members of the healthcare team. Being a good communicator has impacted my nursing philosophy by making me value healthy interpersonal relationships.

Personal weaknesses can negatively affect your nursing practice. However, awareness of said weaknesses can positively impact it. For instance, as a nurse, I can be opinionated and judgmental regarding illegal drug overdose patients. However, my awareness of my weakness helps me mitigate it. It helps me be mindful of when my attitude is not helpful nor conducive to healing. That helps me put my opinions aside so I can better care for my patients. Mitigating your weaknesses requires constant vigilance, which can be draining. Nonetheless, I believe in always striving to be better; therefore, even if they are exhausting, actions that promote self-improvement are worth pursuing. Consequently, I can say that my weaknesses have influenced my nursing philosophy by making me value the continuous quest for self-improvement.

**Effects of Nursing Philosophy on Professional Identity**

My professional identity is strongly rooted in the belief that people deserve to be cared for and nursed back to health compassionately and holistically. Balance, compromise, and good communication skills are needed to achieve that goal. Additionally, as nurses, our actions should always be guided by careful and rational deliberation. Lastly, I believe in turning weaknesses into strengths. Therefore, as nurses, we need to be aware of our shortcomings to mitigate them and prevent their negative affect on our practice.

**Goals as a BSN Nurse**

**Transitioning to the Baccalaureate Role**

I have always enjoyed reading and learning new things. This year, I finally decided to pursue a graduate degree in nursing. Going back to school is a lifestyle change that can be challenging. According to Blais & Hayes (2016), the Bridges Transition Model states there are three stages people go through when facing change: an *ending phase* (saying goodbye to your old ways), a *neutral zone* (superficially accepting the change), and a *new beginning* (internally accepting the change and being ready to move forward). Each stage has its own set of challenges. Based on Bridges’ Transition model, I would say that I am in the *new beginning* stage of transition: I have fully accepted the role of BSN student and am excited to absorb all the knowledge the program will bring.

So far, the BSN journey has not been challenging in my nursing practice. As of right now, I am still a bedside nurse. My colleagues know I am in school, but since I do not have a position of authority over them, our relationship has not been affected. However, were I to become their manager or supervisor, that might not be a smooth transition. At that stage, being aware of Bridges’ Transition model will be helpful. Indeed, it will make my actions as a new manager more mindful and purposeful. Being aware of the three stages of transition will help me anticipate and mitigate pitfalls that accompany the managerial role transition.

**Short-term Goals**

For this class, it was a requirement to seek out and interview a mentor. I, therefore, reached out to a former nursing supervisor, Denise C., for whom I have great respect and admiration. Denise, now a nurse manager, gladly agreed to mentor me on my journey. During the mentor interview, we discussed the importance of keeping measurable short-term goals to keep me motivated and engaged on my four-year journey to a career in nursing management. I told Denise that part was easy. I view each week in the program as a short-term goal. Accordingly, for each course, I print out the assignment calendar and, every Sunday night, I check off my fulfilled goal. Doing so gives me a sense of accomplishment and keeps me excited about the process of transitioning to a BSN degree.

**Long-term Goals**

Receiving my BSN degree is both a short-term and a long-term goal. Indeed, from this point on, it will take me 18 months to achieve it, technically making it a long-term pursuit. However, when compared to my main career objective, a BSN degree is a short-term goal relative to the path to a managerial position. After receiving my BSN, I plan on seeking a house supervisor position at my facility. At that point, my bachelor’s degree, combined with my 17 years in nursing, 6 of which were in ICU, should make me a viable candidate for the position. While working as a house supervisor, I will continue going to Galen, this time to obtain my master’s degree in nursing. While a master’s is not necessary for acquiring a managerial position in nursing, my mentor and I agreed that it is preferable, both personally and organizationally.

**Mentorship benefits**

Throughout my educational journey, I plan on keeping in touch with Denise. She had a similar path to her current role. Indeed, she has a master’s degree in nursing; she has an extensive history as an emergency room manager, a hospital nursing supervisor, and now a manager of two medical-surgical and telemetry units. I can significantly benefit from Denise’s knowledge and wisdom. For instance, when I face any professional challenges, she will be a great resource to get a different perspective and brainstorm a plan of action. Furthermore, she can also serve as an excellent reference for my work ethic and nursing philosophy when I apply for a managerial position.

**Effects of BSN Degree on Professional Identity**

There is a strong correlation between nurses with BSN degrees and a positive professional identity (Rasmussen et al., 2021; Rossella & Massimiliano, 2018). Indeed, the pride of academic achievement, the confidence and expertise of higher education, the peer and societal recognition, the broader choice of career paths, all those factors positively affect PI. In addition to this positive influence, a BSN degree seems to promote professional self-reflection. In truth, this assignment has made me aware of my strong sense of professional identity, though I had never before formally articulated it. Frankly, prior to taking this class, I do not think I spent much time reflecting on my professional identity. Ironically, the literature shows that lack of professional self-reflection is common among undergraduate nurses (Rasmussen et al., 2021).

**Reflection on the BSN Role vs. the ADN Role**

As of right now, as an experienced bedside nurse in her first BSN transition class, I do not yet feel a significant change in my nursing practice. But I believe that will slowly change throughout the program. When comparing BSN vs. ADN nurses, Rasmussen et al. (2021) state that BSN nurses have a higher PI than their ADN counterparts. The literature also shows that patients are better cared for by nurses with BSN degrees (McIntosh et al., 2016). While I agree with that view, I think patients benefit from having skilled, competent, and knowledgeable nurses, whether those skills, competence, and knowledge come from a formal or informal education. That being said, I think the knowledge acquired from a formal BSN education is desirable. I also will not contest that nurses feel an undeniable sense of accomplishment at receiving higher learning degrees. Additionally, the structure imparted by academia, the availability of so many resources, and the exposure to accomplished professionals, all provide a wealth of assets not accessible to an ADN nurse wanting to increase her knowledge on her own.

**Conclusion**

This essay was a candid examination of my nursing philosophy and goals as a BSN student. It made me realize that I have a strong nursing professional identity though I never articulated it before this class.Its origins are rooted in my belief that people deserve compassionate and loving care and that the best way to achieve that goal is via a holistic approach to life and nursing. My personal nursing philosophy is that balance is key to excellence. That mindset is based on Jean Watson’s Human Caring Theory which was implanted in me since college.When comparing an Associate Degree to a Bachelor of Science in Nursing, I think that, even without a BSN, nurses can seek knowledge, increase their skills, competence, and positively impact their professional identity. Nevertheless, a formal education via a BSN degree is a much more efficient way to do so. Additionally, the societal recognition and broader career choices that come with degrees in higher education most definitely affect professional identity more favorably than an AND degree. My long-term goal with obtaining my BSN is to gravitate to a managerial role in nursing, which should positively influence my professional identity. Along the way, I will have a mentor with similar career goals to guide me in my professional development. Overall, I can honestly confirm that this assignment achieved the intended purpose of illuminating where my professional identity originated and where it is heading.

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