

Maturing Professional Selfhood through Body Mapping

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Abstract

Nursing education's fundamental goal is to prepare students to effectively transition into practice. Success in this endeavor occurs when the student has a clear sense of themselves as a professional in relationship with their peers and grounded in disciplinary knowledge. Faculty must intentionally create opportunities for students to explore and mature their professional selfhood (PSH) to assist in a smooth transition from academia to practice. Educational strategies which enhance the awareness and continued development of PSH as a birthplace for professional identity may enable the graduate to navigate the healthcare system, mitigate ethical dilemmas, and enhance the quality of life for those they care for and themselves. Aesthetic narratives could be utilized to engage students in the analysis of their PSH as an alternative beyond the dominant text as an expression.

Keywords: *aesthetic; educational strategy; narrative; selfhood; student*

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How nursing students acquire the necessary knowledge, skills, attitudes, and attributes to create, navigate and sustain professionalism in a variety of settings was the impetus for this article. The purpose of nursing education is to create an environment for experiential learning through a variety of settings - theory, lab, and agency practical work in which to facilitate a successful transition to practice as a professional (Maykut et al., 2019). One would expect the development of professional identity to be stressed during these formative years, to ensure graduates are prepared to enter and navigate a complex healthcare system with competing interests. However, Macginnis and Sturt's (2018) extensive review of the literature, covering 17 years, discovered a paucity of empirical

research regarding the intentional and ongoing commitment to the formation of professional identity in nursing students. Wrigley (2017) has suggested that a curriculum that integrates personal awareness with disciplinary knowledge creates a space where individuals can dissect their worlds in which to revision just ones.

Although there is a vast amount of literature on professional identity for nursing students and practitioners, there is a lack of awareness of the importance of understanding self primordially as a fundamental step to guide how and why we enter into a sacred relationship with another. This examination must address how our social location (power, privilege, and oppression) influences the development of professional selfhood (PSH) (Maykut, 2021). Without this crucial step from self-integration to self-transformation, the ability of the student to create a professional identity reflective of a mature PSH may be limited (Roach, 2002). A mature PSH enables the student to respond to the universal call to be in a relationship as an authentic expression of shared humanity (Roach, 2002) by understanding their situatedness (Heidegger, 2010).

The purpose of this article is three-fold. First, to describe PSH as a foundational concept which needs to be explored in nursing education to lay the groundwork for professional identity. Second, to explain body mapping (BMap) as a potential teaching strategy to create awareness of the multiple influences on a student's PSH. Finally, to share a script to guide the implementation of the strategy and key questions to facilitate a collective discussion. Highlights include the importance of (1) creating an arts-based self-exploration strategy to dissect the world to inform PSH; (2) fostering nursing's voice within the dominant bio-medical paradigm; (3) integrating multiple domains of knowledge to inform PSH; and (4) providing a holistic lens to understand our bodies in the formation of PSH.

Background

Nursing students do not arrive in higher education as a blank slate but bring values, beliefs, and experiences which have informed their identity (Maykut et al., 2019). The purpose of nursing education is to provide the necessary knowledge, skills, attitudes, and attributes to become a safe, competent, ethical and compassionate professional (American Association of Colleges of Nursing [AACN], Canadian Association of Schools of Nursing [CASN], 2019; International Labour Organization [ILO], 2014). Developing a professional self must be contextualized in a humanistic curriculum to inform nursing actions (Curtis, 2014; Curtis et al., 2020). This self must be shaped by disciplinary knowledge of social justice, ethics, relational inquiry, advocacy, and intersectionality. However, critical awareness of PSH must be the initial step to foster self-transformation to begin to dissect who students are as individuals to inform who they are becoming as professionals.

Professional Selfhood

As humans, we come to know ourselves and others when we are in a relationship (Heidegger, 2010; Roach, 2002). Contemplative practices, to examine the self in and with the world, is a critical process for evolving in our humanity to PSH (Roach & Maykut, 2010). Being in a relationship, through the sharing of narratives, creates a liminal space for hearing other's stories which may, in turn, provide insights into our narratives. Fundamentally, as nurses, we must know ourselves first which then informs who we become as professionals. Roach (2002) challenges us as nurses to understand how we come to know ourselves beyond our professional roles to understand how human caring is lived in a relationship.

As nurses, we are in and with the world, suggesting an evolving reciprocal relationship that requires knowledge of, acting on, and engaging with - self, others, and context (Heidegger, 2010). Understanding self is paramount for nursing students to begin to explore how their values and beliefs intersect with their social location and code of ethics to shape their PSH. This initial awareness begins to inform how they are in a relationship with others as multiple perspectives/identities overlap. Being in a relationship with faculty and other role models provides a clear sense of PSH for sustaining and thriving as a professional (Curtis, 2014; Macginnis & Sturt, 2018; Song, 2016; Tan et al., 2017).

Conative Domain of Learning

Nursing education has a long history of foregrounding cognitive and psychomotor domains at the expense of the affective domain. This backgrounding of affective, with conative rarely mentioned in nursing education or practice literature, has limited curricular influence on a holistic approach to PSH development. Conative refers to the commitment to an ideal by embracing attributes, expressed as inherent incentives and willingness, to actualize one's goal (Heiland, 2018; Huitt & Cain, 2011). Integrating the cognitive, psychomotor, affective, and conative domains becomes relevant when understanding the importance of becoming, knowing, doing, and committing to fostering PSH in undergraduate nursing education. Committing to this speaks to the willingness to engage in critical reflection as an individual to enhance a life-long journey as a competent, compassionate, safe, and ethical professional (Maykut et al., 2019).

Developing PSH as a Nursing Student

PSH not only helps the student navigate the healthcare system culture but has also been noted to decrease burnout and improve patient outcomes by providing role clarity (Sun et al., 2016). The responsibility of developing and nurturing a student's PSH resides primarily with the academic institution and faculty. Formative years provide an opportunity for knowledge acquisition, role modeling, and mentoring of said PSH, which then informs ongoing professional identity strengthened by agency partners (Curtis, 2014; Macginnis & Sturt, 2018; Song, 2016; Sun et al., 2016; Tan et al., 2017; Wu, Palmer & Sha, 2020). A difficulty in PSH formation occurs when said curriculum reflects a

biomedical paradigm where nursing's voice is silent and expectations for graduation rely on interpreting and implementing medicine's work.

Body Mapping

BMap initially was an arts-based self-exploration strategy for individuals living with HIV/AIDS to bring the perspective of the sociopolitical influences on their lives (Solomon, 2002). This strategy has been adopted for diverse causes including community building for advocacy and political action (Ebersöhn, 2015; Gastaldo et al., 2013), as therapeutic (Nöstlinger et al., 2015), and as an educational (Botha, 2017; Maina et al., 2013). Gastaldo, Rivas-Quarneti and Magalhães (2018) refined the initial work and introduced BMap as a research methodology.

Nursing education and scholarship have embraced English as the dominant narrative, written or spoken word (Garone et al., 2020; Lahtinen et al., 2014) which privileges individuals who have been educated in this language. Art, as an educational strategy, provides an equitable medium for exploring and challenging this dominant narrative (Darvin, 2019). An aesthetic approach may provide insights into the influences of beliefs, values, relationships, and experiences of the student not fully captured through the dominant narrative of the English text (Darvin, 2019).

BMap as a visual depiction of exploring a phenomenon creates an opportunity to foreground the affective domain, then addressing the cognitive and psychomotor, and eventually culminating in the conative. Thereby, providing a holistic expression and another lens to understand our bodies. Therefore, embodiment (understanding how we express our corporeal reality) is fundamentally important for students as they develop their PSH and also the initial point to understand their client's journey of health (Draper, 2014; Harrison et al., 2019). The body then becomes a place of knowing and experiencing, before interpreting by the mind and expressing outwardly to others. The author developed the script below from a review of the BMap literature and her own Caring Science scholarship informed by 23 years as an educator in undergraduate education.

BMap to Inform the Development of a Selfhood

As human beings, we come to know ourselves when we interact with others and the world around us - a holistic and organic process of sense-making to interpret who we are becoming. Art speaks to parts of our being that are not always stimulated from a purely cognitive and/or psychomotor domain approach (Archibald et al., 2017; Frei et al., 2008). Arts enable us to develop relationality in which to create an identity to interact with the world around us, especially as professionals (Frei et al., 2008). Creativity helps with the unknown by planting seeds of possibility fostering an organic personal learning process. The premise of the script is to guide the nursing student's understanding of sociopolitical influences on nursing practice, enhance congruence between the visual depiction and narration and finally create questions to facilitate collective understanding.

Supplies

Originally BMap used life-size drawings to depict narratives. Certainly, life-size drawings can be utilized or as a cost-saving measure, smaller scales may be utilized on canvas or paper. Craft supplies including but not limited to: acrylics, brushes, crayons, charcoal, colored and pastel pencils, felt, glitter, stickers, sparkle, and watercolors should be provided to the students to stimulate creativity. As faculty, you will need to consider where you will store the BMap between sessions for drying purposes. The script below represents the life-size drawing process, but as earlier suggested scaled drawings may be introduced.

Session One

Body Pose. Each student should be directed to choose a pose that they feel reflects their body stance as a professional. The faculty member or their peer can then use chalk or a pencil to transfer this image onto the paper. Each student will then outline their body using their preferred art tool. Students will then create a powerful symbol and a personal slogan in preparation for session two, as a homework exercise. The script below provides the necessary instructions. Remind students to dress appropriately for the next session as their choice of arts and craft supplies may damage clothing.

Power Symbol. Draw a symbol that represents the integration of your personal beliefs and values with their Code of Ethics. For instance, the pursuit of truth or treating everyone with respect. Think about where this symbol would be located on or outside of your body and why this particular location.

Personal Slogan. Create a personal slogan (a saying, poem, song, or a prayer you say to yourself) which describes your philosophy of life and your life as a nursing student. Think about where you would place the personal slogan on the BMap. You will be asked to share the meaning of the symbol and personal slogan and their location on your body during the collective meaning-making session.

Session Two

The second session begins by providing an overview of what will be accomplished. This session may be broken into three sessions (face, body, and outside of the body) depending on your time commitment. Explanation of the different art and craft supplies (e.g., brushes, paints, and markers) should be provided, you may want to collaborate with other faculty/departments who have expertise in drawing and painting. The scripts below have been developed to facilitate self-awareness while engaging in this aesthetic expression of their professional identity. Bolded words were given more emphasis with tone and body language to reflect their importance in this guided exercise.

The Script – Welcoming. As we begin the process of BMap remember it is an act of self-expression of your physical, emotional, and social health as a nursing student. This is how you see yourself - not how others see you or how you want/wish to be seen. There are no expectations or outcomes, rules, or a particular process of completing this journey. Each one of you will create a unique expression of yourself - What matters to you. Remember, this is your story - your selfhood – all of the experiences to date which live in and on your body! This session has three distinct sections: face, body, and outside of your body. Before beginning each section, there will have a centering exercise to refocus in our body “getting out of our mind and self-talk” to stimulate those creative juices. Please remember to listen to your body and take breaks as needed. I will be circulating throughout the room to offer support and encouragement. Any questions before we get started?

Centering Exercise and Questions: Face. Close your eyes and begin to take deep breaths through your nose and out through your mouth. Our souls are who we are as human beings; this is the essence of our humanity. Soul work for nurses is about finding the sacred. It is about becoming “visible” in our pursuit of finding meaning and purpose in our practice. It’s about making a difference - contributing to humanity. You have all decided to enter a nursing program to make such a difference, to leave your mark on the world.

As nursing students creating your **Professional Selfhood** is a life-long journey that has started before today. Who you are has been shaped with many encounters in life; with family, friends, work, and hobbies to mention a few. There are moments of joy and wonder, and also sadness and defeat. Think of how both types made you feel? How does your body respond right now, thinking back and remembering these moments?

REMEMBER: This is who you are, this is your story, and this is what is important for you to tell the world! Keep taking long slow breaths. Our faces capture and reflect our humanity ... joy, wonder, shame, vulnerability, loss of connection - many emotions live on our faces. **Now open your eyes and let's begin to express ...**

1. We all have the same features (face - eyes, nose, ears, hair, chin, cheeks, eyebrows ... lines of tension) yet we all look different.
2. How do you want to represent your face - as you see it or **symbolically**?
3. Do you have a **singular face** you show the world which is congruent with your one? Or do you have two faces - one you show the world and one you keep to yourself; why?
4. What was represented on your face during the moments of joy and wonder, and sadness and defeat?
5. What **colors and shapes** would best depict these moments? Think about the particular aspects of your face - eyes, nose, ears, hair, chin, cheeks, eyebrows ... lines of tension.
6. What do you **love about your face**? What do you want people to take notice of? Why is this important to you?

Centering Exercise and Questions: Body

Sit comfortably in your chair. Close your eyes again and take long slow breaths. We ask our

bodies to do much - pull, push, carry, jump, skip ... We carry our interactions with others and our environment in our body's posture. Become aware if there are any areas of tension in your body as you relive the experiences you have been remembering. Focus on these areas sending release - giving yourself permission to identify and let go of the negative aspects. ***Now open your eyes and let's begin to express ...***

1. Returning to the moments - how did these experiences live "**visible signs**" in your body - how were they made visible to you and perhaps others? How did you come to process this experience in your body?
2. Were there **specific areas** where these moments continue to live? How do they live in your body (muscles, joints, organs, skin ...) what are the signs? What are your body cues when you are at ease and when you are uncomfortable?
3. What **meaning** do you assign to these signs - why are they still around - what purpose do they have?

Centering Exercise and Questions: Outside Your Body

As we move outside our body - we can lose control over what matters to us. Remember there is no right or wrong only what is BEST to represent your journey. You may wish to begin this process by adding your Power Symbol and your slogan to help situate this aspect of your self-expression. ***Now open your eyes and let's begin to express ...***

1. What are the **socio-political influences** on your role as a nursing student? These might include (a) family and friend dynamics, roles and responsibilities, (b) paid or volunteer work, (c) power and privilege within the classroom and/or agency. Think about how these influences are shaping who you are becoming as a future nurse.
2. How do you **manage** these influences? What are the resources (human and material) which support you: relationships, hobbies, and other activities which "feed your soul"? Where do you get your **strength** from?
3. Where do you want to go? How do you want your practice to evolve? What does **your professional life path** look like?
4. Where do you want to place your **slogan**? Where do you want to place your **power symbol**?

Stand back and review your body map ...

1. Have you **captured your journey** as you have begun to understand how the life experiences before nursing education live in your body and influence your PSH?
2. Is there anything **else you want to add** to your story - face, body, and/or outside your body?
3. What do you **want others to see** in this visible representation of self?

Session Three

Sharing of Narratives to Enhance Collective Understanding. As narratives reflect a journey of coming to know shaped by vulnerability, an opportunity not to share their work and/or engage in the process must happen as a democratic act of education (hooks, 1994). Before the commencement of this session, you may want to establish ground rules. A respectful venue for sharing of BMaps and narratives creates an opportunity for students to understand the importance of

multiple influences on PSHs – recognizing everyone has a unique story expressed in their BMap.

Depending on the number of students in your class you may want to separate them into smaller groups initially and then bring them together for a richer discussion. A suggestion of creating groups where students do not know each other very well may provide diversity in personal experiences which will enrich this educational strategy for all students. Realizing there is not ONE preferred expression but PSHs are fluid over a lifetime begins a shift to inclusionary practices necessary for nursing practice (Kagan et al., 2010; Willis et al., 2014).

1. Assign or ask for a student volunteer to transcribe notes of the discussion and one to ask the questions for collective understanding.
2. Each student will share their BMap (body, face, and outside of the body) and their slogan and power symbol.
3. Once everyone has had a turn begins the facilitated discussion.

Facilitated Discussion for Collective Understanding

1. Did you have any difficulties “living in your body” versus wanting to “think about the experiences” while engaged in the exercise? Why do you think other parts of your body (mind) like to take over and interpret the moment?
2. What are the similarities and differences in the BMaps? Do you feel there is value in having diversity in PSHs - why or why not?
3. Now that you know that understanding PSH is the birthplace of developing a professional identity, what knowledge, resources, and support (family, friends, peers, and mentors - faculty and/or healthcare professionals) will you need to continue to develop as a nursing student?

Conclusion

Critical examination of the influences of PSH must begin during nursing education as a formative process in which to inform ongoing development as a professional. Educational strategies which foreground the affective domain while also incorporating the psychomotor, cognitive, and conative domains create space for a holistic interpretation of “What does it mean to become a professional?” Faculty could adopt strategies, such as the BMap proposed, which challenge the student to integrate their personal and professional selves and recognize the diversity of PSHs as richness for nursing practice. Collective understanding of the many influences and expressions of PSH provides the student the opportunity to imagine their professional reality while supporting their peer’s journey. This journey of becoming professionally caring persons will enable the student to create and sustain a virtuous life for those they are called to care for and for themselves (Roach, 2002).

Conflict of Interest

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About the Author

Dr. Colleen Maykut, over the last 33 years of her career, has upheld the values of professional nursing and acted as an advocate for healthcare system transformation and as a knowledge disrupter for nursing education reformation. She designs relevant learning experiences which are inclusive, engaging, innovative, collaborative, and inspiring; creating opportunities for students to develop as individuals to reach their full potential. She is cognizant of the importance of challenging ideals of privilege, which influences who has power and voice and engages in liberation to address structural inequities. Integrating social justice principles of honouring diversity and creating inclusion are foundational building blocks to be mentored in the classroom to shape and influence all students' future practice.