

Meaning of Professionalism in Nursing Students

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Abstract

Nursing training is grounded in theoretical and clinical training. The study was conducted to determine the experiences of nursing students regarding professionalism in applications. A total of 103 nursing students was determined by using the maximum diversity sampling. The data were collected by using the document narrative method, which is among the qualitative research methods. The content analysis method was used in the data evaluation. As a result of the analysis, seven themes were determined regarding the experiences of students. The second question regarding the meaning of professionalism in nursing revealed seven themes. Considering the answers to two questions being asked in the study, a parallelism was determined between the professionalism perceptions of students and conditions where they felt like professionals. The common themes for both questions were determined to include behaving according to ethical principles and being well-informed. Awareness of trainers, nurses and other team members regarding the importance of their roles, their relations with students and status as a role model and organization of the clinical environment will contribute to the professional identity development.

Keywords: Nursing Student, Clinical Training, Professional Socialization, Professional Identity, Professionalism

The profession of nursing is indirectly affected by the rapid change in health services. Especially in recent years where the quality studies have increased, it has been an obligation to involve nurses, who can be attuned to the changing system and reveal themselves among different professionals, are aware of their own roles and responsibilities, behave autonomously, think critically, make their own decisions, respect individuals and are sensitive to the ethical values of the profession, in the system (Björkström et al., 2008). Thus, the nursing education is required to be in such a way to generate realistic and accessible solutions to problems and support the professional identity development of students (Ousey & Johnson, 2007).

The concept of professionalism is defined as the specialty, knowledge, skill and behavior pattern being displayed in a field (Björkström et al., 2008). On the other hand, the concept of professional identity is related to how the individual explains the meaning of her actions as a nurse. In another definition, the professional identity is explained as values and beliefs that guide the nurse, who is in an interaction with the patient and in an action (Fagermoen, 1997). It is observed that moral qualifications such as justice, human respect and autonomy are examined within the context of values (Fagermoen, 1997).

Nursing training is grounded in theoretical and clinical training. The training aims to develop the critical and creative thinking skills of students and enable them to use the acquired knowledge and skills in the care of the individual for whom they are responsible at the highest level (Björkström, Athlin & Johansson, 2008; Loëfmark, Carlsson & Wikblad, 2001). Experiences in this process develop the communication, decision-making and observation skills and professional perceptions of students (Eşer, Khorshid & Denat, 2008; Ousey, 2009). Being among the acquisitions of the training process, all these skills comprise an important milestone for the professional identity development of students (Dalton, 2005).

Training has positive contributions to the professional identity development. It should be aimed to enable students to acquire knowledge, skills and attitudes that are required for the professional nursing application by means of educational activities (Day, Field Campbell & Reutter, 2005). While adopting values and attitudes in the training process, students experience an internalization in parallel with the values of their educational institutions (Moloney & Mauksch, 1986). Students seek an appropriate role model at school in order to adopt values, attitudes and behaviors. As a consequence, they experience an integration as a member of the profession (Bang et al., 2011; Barak & Wilhelem, 2005; Day et al., 2005). Nurse trainers have the responsibility to be a role model while teaching the students, who progress to be professionals, their autonomous, intellectual, enterprising and caregiver roles (Strasen, 1992). Besides, when students are encouraged in the learning process and they participate actively, this has a great role in enabling the professional identity development (Karagöz, 2004). When the educational environment supports both learning and creativity, this has a great effect upon students to make observation and acquire a range of qualifications that are evaluated within the scope of professional identity, such as communication skills, problem-solving, prediction and decision-making skills (Ousey, 2009). In addition to this, the training process causes a change on prejudices regarding the profession, as well (Howkins and Ewens, 1999; Karagöz, 2004). In their relevant study, Howkins and Ewens(1999) revealed that students who had prejudices concerning the profession at the beginning of the training experienced some changes in those thoughts at the end of the term. It is important for students to overcome prejudices and develop a positive attitude concerning the profession in the professional identity development. Leduc and Kotzer (2009) stated that values concerning the professional identity would be acquired through self-evaluation exercises, skill trainings and duties of professionals as role models. The process of being a participant and observer within the realities of the clinical environment completes the professional identity development of the student nurse (Dalton, 2005).

Student, who progresses to be a professional, internalizes the knowledge, skills and values regarding nursing through educational experiences (DLitt, 1995). This internalization starts with acquiring knowledge and skills through a formal basic training process in line with the socialization process, which results in taking the first steps of professionalism, and continues to develop with clinical experiences following the training (Wynd, 2003). The student develops a role that matches her professional identity within the professional socialization process (Clouder, 2003; Howkins and Ewens, 1999). However, it is stated that this concept has not fully been perceived by nurse trainers yet (Howkins and Ewens, 1999; Day et al., 2005). On the other hand, especially trainers are required to perceive this process very well, which will be considered in both theoretical and clinical training, and it is required to plan the nursing curriculum and educational activities for students to become professionals with the required qualifications.

Experiences of students in educational life and comprehension of their thoughts and perceptions will contribute to the planning of educational activities (Suikkala & Leino-Kilpi, 2005). The presentation of professionalism experiences and professionalism perceptions of students in their clinical experiences with the help of their viewpoints might guide trainers to review the educational methods, clinical educational environment and nursing curriculum. This guidance is important since it not only lights the way for the theoretical and clinical training process, but also enables trainers to review their own professionalism perceptions and emphasizes the responsibility of students as role models in the professional identity development once again.

Aims of the Study

In this study, it was aimed to reveal the experiences of students regarding professionalism in clinical practices, as well as their perceptions about the concept of professionalism in nursing. In order to achieve this goal, answers were sought for the following questions:

1. Think about a special time/condition where you felt like a professional nurse at clinical practices. What was the specialty of that condition? What were the feelings and thoughts that caused you to feel like a professional nurse?
2. What is the meaning of professionalism in nursing according to you?

Methods

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Study Model

This is a qualitative and phenomenological study. Phenomenology is not only a philosophical approach, but also a research method that uses special methods to understand the perceptions, interests and experiences of the individual regarding her own life (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2006).

Study Group

191 females, 61 males and a total of 255 students received education in Adnan Menderes University Department of Nursing in the school year of 2010-2011. This study used the maximum diversity sampling, which is among the qualitative sampling methods. Maximum diversity sampling maximally reflects the diversity of individuals who could be a party to the problem being studied in this sampling by forming a relatively small sample (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2005). Accordingly, while determining the students to be involved in the sample, their gender, age, working condition and school satisfaction were taken into consideration. Students who volunteered to participate in the study formed the sample in accordance with the principle of voluntariness. Accordingly, a total of 103 nursing students, 15 females and 9 males from the first grade, 25 females and 8 males from the second grade, 16 females and 6 males from the third grade and 20 females and 4 males from the fourth grade, were involved in the sample between March - April 2011. Students had an age range of 17-24. Regarding the study participants, 73.79% (76) were female, 26.21% (27) male, 7.77% (8) went to school and worked at the same time and 92.23% (95) did not work. Regarding the school satisfaction, while 92.23% (95) were satisfied, 7.77% (8) were not.

Preliminary Application

In order to determine the comprehensibility of questions by students, a preliminary application was performed on 6 students. In this application, all students stated that questions were clear and comprehensible. The study started following this stage.

Data Collection Tools

The data were collected by using the document narrative method, which is among the qualitative research methods (Carpenter, 2003). For that purpose, we used the “**student information form**” giving general information about students and the “**question form**” involving two open-ended questions aimed at revealing the experiences and thoughts of students about professionalism. Student information form was created by examining the relevant literature and involved questions about the grade, gender and age of students, as well as the type of school being graduated from and voluntary selection regarding school. Besides, examining the literature, the following open-ended questions were formed;

1. “Think about a special time/condition where you felt like a professional nurse at clinical practices. What was the specialty of that condition? What were the feelings and thoughts that caused you to feel like a professional nurse?”
2. “What is the meaning of professionalism in nursing according to you?”

Data Collection Procedures

In order to collect the data, each grade was visited after the lessons and comprehensive explanations were made about the objective of the study. Following those explanations, an emphasis was laid on the expectations from students to participate voluntarily. Voluntary students in classrooms were firstly asked to read and sign the written consent forms and then respectively given the student information form and questionnaire form involving the study questions. They were asked to write their nicknames instead of their names on both forms. They were also asked to fill the open-ended question concerning the objective of the study without a time limitation. Students were reassured that they would be free to ask anything about questions during the practice. Students answered the questions within approximately 30 and 45 minutes. This procedure was repeated in other grades as well. The questionnaire was performed on first grade students approximately four weeks after the onset of the clinical training.

Data Analysis

Collecting data from all grades, the researcher conducted the as-cast of the data on the computer. The data were read repeatedly. After reading the data, codes were extracted from each word and sentence. Induction method was used for the content analysis (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2005).

In order to prevent possible inducements in the interpretation of findings, the data that could not be involved in any themes and showed a division were also taken into consideration. And then the data were organized, interpreted and reported by the researcher. In order to increase the reliability of the study, the same process was also performed by two experts and the data were reorganized by specialists and the researcher. The required new themes and codes were added. And then the data were organized, interpreted and reported by the researcher.

Validity and Reliability

In qualitative studies, while “validity” is related to the accuracy of scientific findings, “reliability” is related with the repeatability of scientific findings (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2005). Accordingly, some precautions have been taken to increase the validity and reliability of the study.

- a) It might help to understand the efficiency of the results being obtained by using the affirmation mechanism in representing the reality in order to decrease the possibility of reaching different results from the data being collected (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2005). Collecting and analyzing the data concerning the study questions, the study groups were presented the themes being examined and views were obtained from a total of 103 students regarding those themes. When students were asked about whether they agreed with the themes concerning the study questions or not, they stated that they agreed with all of them (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2005).
- b) In order to increase the external validity (transmissibility) of the study, the study process and activities in this process were trying to be explained in detail. In this context, the study model, study group, data collection tool, data collection process, data analysis and interpretation were defined in detail.
- c) In order to increase the internal reliability (consistency) of the study, all findings were given directly without making an interpretation. Besides, the researcher and two academic members who were experiencing about the qualitative study separately performed coding of the data that were obtained during the interview and the categories, themes and sub-themes were determined by comparing the coding with a joint resolution.
- d) In order to increase the external reliability (affirmativeness) of the study, the researcher defined the activities of the process in detail. Besides, the raw data and coding being obtained are hidden by the researcher in such a way to be examined by others.

Ethics

The required permissions were obtained from the Directorate of Aydın Health Faculty. Besides, a written consent was received from each student before the study.

Findings

Experiences and perceptions of nursing students regarding professionalism are presented within the scope of main themes and sub-themes being determined in this part. Following the data analysis, the main themes and sub-themes being determined for each question were given respectively. The primary themes and sub-themes are aimed at the question regarding the experiences of students concerning professionalism during clinical practices.

Views of Students regarding States Where They Feel Like Professional Nurses during Clinical Practices

Considering the fact that experiences of students during clinical practices might affect their perceptions about professionalism, this issue was involved in the study and determined as one of the sub-problems. Seven relevant themes were revealed based on the answers of students to this question, which are as follows; being considered and feeling important, establishing an efficient communication, managing the care alone, providing a knowledge-based care, caring for the same patient constantly, behaving ethically and feeling no obligation of keeping a task-quality record.

1. Being considered and feeling important,
2. Establishing an efficient communication,
3. Managing the care alone,
4. Providing a knowledge-based care,
5. Caring for the same patient constantly,
6. Behaving ethically,
7. Feeling no obligation of keeping a task-quality record.

Being different from the aforementioned themes, one student from the first grade answered, “I am not ready” for professionalism. This answer was not approached as a separate theme as it was not the answer of the study question. Sub-themes concerning each of these themes are as follows.

1. Being Considered and Feeling Important: Sub-themes that were determined in line with this theme were defined as student's thought about being considered in clinical practices, as well as experiences with patient, doctor, nurse and trainer and feeling important while participating in processes within the team, having a voice about the patient, doing her job willingly, realizing the importance of the profession and thinking that she represents the profession in her uniform. Students stated that they felt like a real nurse when they were considered and appreciated. They stated that they were satisfied with the job and felt like a working nurse when they received a positive feedback from the patient, doctor, nurse and trainer. Regarding this theme, a third grade student stated, *"when I took the whole responsibility of the recently hospitalized patient and made the required transactions, the nurse told me that I was had become a real and reliable nurse since I fulfilled the duties."* Here is an example to the experience of students with doctors, *"as I was caring about a patient, the doctors walked the wards. They waited the care to be over. When the care was over, the visit started and they received general information about the patient from me instead of assistants."* A third grade nursing student stated as follows, *"as I was caring about a baby whose mother was hospitalized in another section, my master liked my interest and concern very much. She/he cited me as an example to her/his friends. I felt like a professional."*

2. Establishing an Efficient Communication: Sub-themes that were determined in line with this theme were defined as listening effectively, empathizing with the patient, controlling the feelings, directing the communication by protecting the relation, recognizing the problem of the patient by observing the body expression and having a good humor towards the patient in spite of stink. Regarding the theme, a fourth grade student made the following statement, *"in the psychiatry service, my patient was introverted. According to the information obtained from my former friends, the patient refused to talk and only gave short answers like 'yes, no, I don't know...'. My patient had schizophrenia. I collected some information and got in contact with her/him. I was well aware that especially empathy would always work out. And I could see that my patient could communicate more easily with the help of these applications. When I met her/him for the first time, he had a frozen expression in her/his eyes. But that expression had decreased at the end of the apprenticeship. I could see the changes on the patient as a result of the interventions.."* While listening, which is among the theme and sub-theme of establishing an efficient communication, was only expressed by a fourth grade student, the sub-theme of controlling the feelings was expressed by students in all grades. Regarding the sub-theme of recognizing the problem of the patient by observing the body expression, a second grade student made the following statement, *"one of the patients had tracheotomy. She/he could neither make a sound nor talk. Her/his facial expressions and movements clearly showed the existence of a problem. I made a great effort to understand the problem and help her/him. Finally, I figured out that she/he had pain and sensitivity in the area that was in constant contact with the bed as the patient was bedridden. She/he asked me to put cream. When I put the cream, she/he smiled and winked. That very moment, I felt useful and realized that this profession was also a relief profession and felt like a nurse helping people."* According to this statement, the patient apparently felt like a professional nurse as she could realize the changes on the body expression of the patient and provide the required care.

3. Managing the Care Alone: In this theme, the students stated that they felt like professionals when they took responsibility of a patient alone in clinical practices and were involved in duties in the clinic, acted quickly in some special conditions, performed processes such as bloodletting and establishing vascular access alone and conducted practices on a certain purpose. All grades had the same feeling especially when they were not inspected within the team by the trainer, conducted practices on a certain purpose and performed processes on the patient alone in the clinic. A second grade student stated as follows, *"I got happy when I changed the serum set of a patient by myself. I felt like a nurse."* And a first grade student shared her experience as follows, *"when I fulfill my duty, I feel like a real nurse."*

4. Providing a Knowledge-Based Care: Sub-themes that were determined in line with this theme were defined as conducting applications outside of medical treatment, revealing and solving the problem through observation and providing the care required by the patient. While conducting applications outside of medical treatment was stated by third and fourth grade students, the sub-theme of feeling like a professional as a result of providing the care required by the patient comprised all students. Only the third grade students stated that they felt like professionals when they cared for the same patient constantly. Concerning this subject, a third grade student stated as follows, *"I felt like a nurse since I came and went at the same hour with working nurses and did things that were required to be done throughout the summer apprentice ship."* Regarding the theme of conducting applications outside of medical treatment, a student stated, *"working nurses generally do not provide care"*.

They only give medicine to a patient in pain. *“Applying relaxation and distraction techniques instead of just giving painkillers made me feel like a professional”*. A first grade nursing student stated, *“Realizing that the plaster marks on the hand of the patient disturbed her/him, I cleaned the marks and made the patient relieved.”* A third grade student expressed her feelings as follows, *“during my surgical apprenticeship, I had a patient who had gone through an operation on her/his lower extremity. I was the nurse in charge that day. My patient was receiving a very intensive treatment and she/he was in pain. And her/his family was not around. Putting myself into her/his shoes, I thought about what I would have wanted if I had had the same condition there. I fulfilled all treatments concerning my patient. I tried to be always there with her/him whenever she/he woke up. I tried to relieve my patient through making her/him feel that she/he was not alone. Even though my patient refused to talk in the beginning, she/he started to talk as I increased my visits. At the end of the apprenticeship, she/he thanked me very much and told that she/he was really happy. I became happier when she/he told me that it was because of me.”*

5. Caring for the Same Patient Constantly: This theme emerged as a result of the statements of third grade students. Regarding this theme, one of the students stated as follows, *“I was caring about the patients in the entire service during my summer apprenticeship in the internal diseases service. I felt like a professional nurse as I fulfilled and managed the whole care and treatment of patients as best as I could”*. Another student stated, *“I experienced it in the service where I worked for the summer apprenticeship. I had 30 patients in the orthopedy service. I came and went at the same hour with working nurses for 30 days. Since I was constantly in that service, I had a better communication with patients. I felt even better as they treated me like a working nurse rather than a student”*.

6. Behaving Ethically: Sub-themes that were determined in line with this theme were defined as behaving accurately, paying attention to the patient privacy, caring for patients without discrimination, behaving responsively, being able to delay self-needs and respecting the patient. Sub-themes of behaving responsively and caring for patients without discrimination were determined in all grades. Regarding this theme, the student statements were as follows, *“providing care without language, religion, gender discrimination makes me feel professional”* and *“even though I am a second grade nursing student and the nurse insistently asked me to apply a medication that was not prepared and I knew that she would give me a grade of apprenticeship, I refused to apply the medication and behaved professionally with the consciousness of professional responsibility”*

7. Feeling No Obligation of Keeping a Task-Quality Record: Sub-themes that were determined in line with this theme were defined as working without the anxiety for writing a care plan and working based on patients rather than care plan, which was required by homeworks. This theme was formed as a result of the statements of especially second, third and fourth grade students. Students stated that they could not feel like a real nurse when they were obliged to keep a task-quality record. Regarding this theme, a second grade student stated as follows, *“I feel like a surveyor while planning the care in the clinic”*. Another third grade student stated, *“when I work based on patients and treatment rather than the care plan, I feel like a nurse”*. Being different from this, a second grade nursing student stated, *“information that are received to fill the data collection form are not sufficiently used in performing applications on patients”*.

Views of Students Regarding the Meaning of Professionalism in Nursing

In the second sub-problem that was determined in line with the objective of the study, a question was asked to reveal the perceptions of students regarding the concept of professionalism in nursing. Seven relevant themes were revealed aimed at this question, which are as follows;

1. Behaving according to ethical principles
2. Being well-informed in the field
3. Providing an integrated care
4. Being sufficient in professional skills
5. Having autonomy/behaving autonomously
6. Making cooperation
7. Altruism (setting the heart on the profession, commitment)

Sub-themes aimed at each aforementioned theme and the student statements are presented as follows.

1. Behaving According to Ethical Principles: Certain sub-themes in this theme were determined as treating equally without language, religion, gender discrimination, making accurate and rapid decisions, being good-humored, tolerant and honest without telling lies, being aware of professional responsibilities, fulfilling the duties accurately without mistakes, applying the accurate treatment, discerning the profession and private life, paying attention to the patient privacy and defending the patient rights. Regarding the sub-theme of treating the patients equally, a third grade student stated, *“there should not be discrimination between patients. They should be treated equally”*. A first grade student stated, *“I think professionalism in nursing occurs when you fulfill your duty accurately just like in the training and the most important point is to do the job with a conscience. When you are able to say that you have fulfilled your duty and job to the core and you have a clear conscience while leaving the hospital at the end of the shift, this is the greatest professionalism”*. All grades mentioned the sub-themes of treating equally without language, religion, gender discrimination, being aware of professional responsibilities, having humane relations and making accurate and rapid decisions. However, the sub-themes of defending the patient rights, paying attention to the patient privacy and telling no lies comprised of only the statements of fourth grade students. Similarly, the sub-theme of discerning the profession and private life was stated by second grade students.

2. Being Well-Informed in the Field: Sub-themes that were related with this theme involved developing the self, reading research, congress and scientific texts, conducting the same duty from different aspects-creativity, questioning the self, trying to be the best in the profession and being aware of legal liabilities. Regarding the sub-theme of trying to be the best in the profession, a third grade student stated, *“being professional means dominating the branch. For instance, if you work in the emergency service, you should completely dominate that field and constantly develop yourself”*. Regarding the sub-theme of conducting the same duty from different aspects-creativity, a first grade student stated, *“professionalism requires overcoming the duty even in challenging conditions. Ordinary, standard duties could be performed by anyone, but professionalism enables the person to conduct the same duty from different aspects”*. Students from all grades expressed their experiences regarding the sub-theme of developing the self. While the sub-theme of conducting the same duty from different aspects-creativity consisted of the statements of only first grade students, the sub-themes of questioning the self, trying to be the best in the profession and reading research, congress and scientific texts consisted of the statements of only third grade students and finally, the sub-theme of being aware of legal liabilities consisted of the statements of fourth grade students.

3. Providing an Integrated Care: Sub-themes that emerged from the student statements regarding this theme were determined as providing an integrated care and knowing and helping the patient very well. Emphasizing the importance of the integrated care, a second grade nursing student stated, *“I think a nurse will be a profession condition that she handles her patient from all aspects (integratedly) and reflects this on practices”*. A fourth grade student stated, *“nursing requires helping and supporting the patient as an individual rather than a patient in terms of her/his needs, feelings and thoughts. Conducting the treatment does not necessarily mean that the patient recovers. It is required to consider the patient as a whole”*.

4. Being Sufficient in Professional Skills: Sub-themes that were involved in this theme were defined as communicating with the patient, showing empathy, observing the patient and having a manual skill. Regarding the sub-theme of communicating with the patient in this theme, a first grade student stated, *“you should have a very good communication with the patient. Since they commend to you, you should understand and always try to make them happy. Because we could also be there one day, which should never be forgotten. Unless we make a change, the next generations might do the same thing to us”*. Regarding the sub-theme of having a manual skill, a second grade student stated, *“I think if a person has sufficient theoretical knowledge and manual skills, she is a professional nurse...”*. Sub-themes of communicating with the patient and showing empathy in the theme of professional skills were mentioned in all grades. While the sub-theme of observing the patient was stated only by a first grade student, the sub-theme of having a manual skill was stated by first and second grade students.

5. Having Autonomy: Sub-themes that were involved in this theme were determined as giving an account, having self-confidence, self-awareness and self-respect, making knowledge-based decisions, discerning feelings and logic, controlling the feelings, keeping tranquil and defending the rights. Regarding the sub-theme of giving account, a fourth grade student stated, *“a professional nurse should act according to patient benefits rather than her own benefits and be able to write her own report in case of applying wrong medication”*.

Regarding the sub-theme of controlling the feelings, a second grade student stated, *“being professional in nursing means that even if the patient gets angry with us, this condition should not prevent us from providing care for her/him and conducting the treatment.”* Regarding the sub-theme of self-confidence, a second grade student stated, *“if she sees that an application that is required to be conducted when necessary will be harmful to the patient, she can refuse to conduct it and explain the reason”*. While the sub-themes of having self-confidence and discerning feelings and logic in the theme of autonomy were mentioned by all grades, the sub-theme of giving account was only mentioned by fourth grade students.

6. Making Cooperation: This theme was explained with the sub-themes of cooperating in the study with the team, cooperating with colleagues and organizing. A fourth grade student stated, *“a professional person should be well aware of the rights and responsibilities of her own, the team and individuals, and use her autonomy accordingly”*. A second grade student stated, *“professionalism in my job is to paddle my own canoe and reveal my knowledge and skills in attaching to another health team without hesitation”*. One statement regarding the sub-theme of organizing in the theme of cooperation was used by a fourth grade nursing student. That student stated, *“in order to be professional and train professional nurses, we should primarily become integrated and teach how to organize. Or else we will get lost in this structure, as well. If we provide this, our nurses will easily fulfill other roles”*.

7. Altruism: The sub-theme concerning this theme was determined as loving the profession and devoting the self. A third grade student stated, *“devotion to this profession is professionalism”*. Regarding this theme, a fourth grade student stated, *“being in right mind means to fulfill the duty for the benefit of the patient rather than the self”*.

Regarding the sub-theme of loving the profession, a first grade student stated, *“one of the most important rules is the ‘humanity’*. *It is a profession to be conducted with love rather than obligation. Every nurse that adopts these feelings, appreciates humanity, people and rights and takes her duties seriously is professional”*. The theme of altruism was mentioned by all grades.

Discussion

This section discusses about each question and relevant findings separately.

The first question being posed to the students was, *“think about a special time/condition where you felt like a professional nurse at clinical practices. What was the specialty of that condition? What were the feelings and thoughts that caused you to feel like a professional nurse? Can you write down your experiences?”*

Experiences of students regarding professionalism during clinical practices were discussed within the scope of certain themes and sub-themes.

The first theme that was obtained from the student statements was **being considered and feeling important**. Concerning this theme, especially students from all grades emphasized that they felt special as a professional nurse when they received positive feedbacks from patients, nurses and trainers. According to a study, positive feedbacks from trainers aimed at student performances increase the self-confidence of students and enable them to feel more independent and professional (Anderson & Kiger, 2008). Inclusion in the team and participation in processes like a working nurse comprise another concept that is important in professionalism experiences of students. Papp, Markanken and Bonsdorff (2003) stated that students needed to be appreciated especially by the nurse team during their clinical experiences and were considerably affected by the attitudes of nurses. Another study finding emphasized the importance of receiving and giving feedbacks and supportive approaches of the nurse in the development of the relation between students and patients (Suikkala & Leino-Kilpi, 2011).

The second theme emphasized by students was **establishing an efficient communication**. All students in the study stated that they could control their feelings while approaching to the patient. Students also stated that they considered the significance of empathy in controlling their negative feelings and could reflect this concept on the condition of that moment. On the other hand, Anderson and Kiger (2008) stated that students caring for individuals being hospitalized in nursing and rehabilitation centers for old persons were affected by the condition of patients. This condition is related with the concept of empathy. Empathy is the skill of individuals to comprehend the feelings of another person without mixing them with her/his own. It is thought that when students control their feelings accordingly, this might enable the skill of showing empathy and the behavior of supporting.

Managing the care alone is another important theme being emphasized by all students who participated in the study.

Especially when they meet all the needs of patients without the supervision of the trainer in the clinic, this enables them to feel more competent and professional. Anderson and Kiger (2008), emphasized that when students worked independently from trainers, they felt like a real nurse and had a better communication with the patient at the end of the application. Taking responsibility enables the student to feel more competent and powerful (Bradbury-Jones, Sambrook, Irvine, 2011). In the study, some of the students stated that they felt obstructed and consequently unprofessional when they were under the constant supervision of the trainer. However, the trainer has the responsibility of being a role model in clinical practices (Andrews et al., 2006; Çimete, 1998). In the studies, the basic problem is asserted to be caused by the fact that trainers consider themselves as evaluators for students rather than a role model or facilitator (Andrews et al., 2006).

As well as managing the care alone, **providing a knowledge-based care** is another important experience for students that supports their professionalism perceptions. In this context, the sub-theme of conducting applications on purpose is important for all grades. Kapborg and Berterö (2003) stated that when students were informed about the application being conducted, this enabled them to consider themselves more sufficient. Andersson (1993) asserted that the power of knowledge was very valuable in the professionalism perceptions of students. Similarly, the sub-theme of caring and relieving according to the needs of patients in this theme was found significant in terms of all grades. In their study, Day et al. (2005) also stated that third and fourth grade students had a knowledge-based and integrated sense of care in meeting the needs of patients. In the study, the fact that first and second grade students do not have sufficient clinical experiences and have not internalized the professional identity yet makes us think that this is due to the fact that they evaluate the care within the scope of concrete treatments being performed on the patient in clinical trainings.

Another theme that emerged from the student statements is **caring for the same patient constantly**. Continuity of care is important in improving the quality of care. Extension of the time being spent by the student with the patient enables her to feel like a professional nurse. In a relevant study, it was stated that spending a long time with the patient in the clinic improved the relation between the student nurse and patient positively (Suikkala & Leino-Kilpi, 2001). Caring for the same patient for a long time might improve the trust relationship between the student and patient and increase the share of mutual feelings and satisfaction level. Another important point in care is behaving ethically. In a study that was conducted in relation with the theme of behaving according to ethical principles that emerged from student statements, it was emphasized that approaches such as students' respect of patients and support of their autonomy were defined as ethical behaviors (Kapborg & Berterö, 2003). Respecting and behaving respectfully comprise an important sub-theme in the theme of behaving ethically. One of the important findings in the study is that all senior class students expressed their thoughts about this theme. In the relevant literature, it is stated that while first grade students perceive the concept of ethics more superficially, senior class students could make deeper evaluations regarding how activities care and their consequences would basically affect individuals (Bolan & Grainger, 2009). The fact that senior class students approved all sub-themes of the theme of behaving ethically could be evaluated as the consequence of the socialization process of nursing training.

Being different from the aforementioned themes, the theme of **feeling no obligation of keeping a task-quality record** is also among the important results of the study. Some of the second, third and fourth grade students who participated in the study stated that both data collection forms and the study were ineffective. Among the student statements, the most remarkable one is that the student regards herself as a surveyor while posing the questions in the data collection form to the patient. On the other hand, the data collection form functions as a means in enabling the care between the student nurse and patient and developing their relations. In a study supporting this finding, first grade students stated that they spent less time with patients due to the abundance of documents being given to them to be filled at the clinic, which disturbed them (Pearcey & Draper, 2008). Data collection forms, which are used by student nurses to be acquainted with their patients and provide a systematic care, but are perceived by students as an obstruct in caring for patients, are also used by trainers as a means of evaluating the student performances. Methods that are used in clinical training are required to increase the student motivation and develop the creative thinking. This condition will also enable the student in the socialization process to develop the skills of communicating, observing, problem solving and decision making in the professional identity development (Laitila, Elina, Riitta, Kirsi, Leena, 2007; Ousey, 2009). In this study, students emphasized that forms that were filled to collect data from patients caused them to be estranged from patients.

Being independent from the aforementioned themes, a first grade student stated that she did not regard herself as a professional nurse in the first month of clinical practices. This condition is important as it shows that the student does not have clear opinions about the professional identity. This result shows a parallelism with the professional socialization process.

The second question being posed to the students was “*what is the meaning of professionalism in nursing according to you?*” The discussion about each theme and sub-theme aimed at this question is below.

Examining the professionalism perceptions of students, it was observed that the majority of them was formed as a result of experiences. All students perceive the theme of behaving ethically within the concept of professionalism as an important value. Leduc and Kotzer (2009) stated that students who had just started the educational process had no answer to questions such as “Who is a professional nurse? What does it mean?” yet and additionally, they had a lower sensitivity to the ethical dimension of the profession. However, it was observed that first grade students developed some basic thoughts and concepts regarding professionalism in this study. The fact that all grades agreed with the sub-theme of treating equally without language, religion, gender discrimination under the **theme of behaving ethically**, which is among important values in professionalism, could be evaluated as an important finding. The sub-theme of defending the patient rights was only expressed by fourth grade students, which is remarkable. The literature emphasizes the importance of defending the patient rights that is depicted among the responsibilities of professional nurses (Wade, 1999). Another theme that is correlated with professionalism by students is **being well-informed in the field**. Students emphasized the necessity for nurses to have knowledge and develop themselves in both educational life and then afterwards in order to represent a professional job. According to Idczak (2007), students stated that knowledge was among the most important criteria in the professional development of the job. Another important sub-theme being examined within the scope of this theme is questioning the self. This theme, which was only expressed by a third grade student, emphasizes the importance of critical thinking for the individual to be open to new ideas and to change. A study emphasized the importance of self-evaluation studies in bringing professional values in students (Leduc & Kotzer, 2009). The sub-theme of being aware of legal liabilities was only expressed by fourth grade students. However, one of the most important dimensions of professional nursing involves being aware of legal liabilities (Kapborg & Berterö, 2003).

Another theme being emphasized within the context of professionalism is **providing an integrated care**. This theme was expressed by second, third and fourth grade students. Ousey (2009) stated that while an occupational expectation anxiety was observed in first grade students, the senior class students experienced a repeated anxiety due to transition to profession, which resulted in the fact that only second and third grade students could evaluate the patient according to the integrated viewpoint during practices. Being different from the literature, the senior class students who participated in the study also used statements about the integrated viewpoint. It was stated that the director had a very important role in bringing the sense of integrated care in all students starting from the first grade (Ousey, 2009). A professional nurse is also required to be competent and sufficient in professional skills while providing an integrated care. Within the scope of the **theme of being sufficient in professional skills**, especially the sub-theme of having communication and empathy with the patient is among the important professionalism criteria. The fact that the concept of empathy is among the professionalism criteria for all students is thought to contribute to receive the course of communication skills for two subsequent years. What is remarkable in the professionalism perceptions of students is that the sub-theme of observing the patient was only expressed by first grade students. However, aside from being a skill, observation is expected to be obtained in line with the educational process. When a first grade student brings this skill in the ground of professionalism, this generates a positive and important detail.

Another important criteria of professionalism is the autonomy. Within the scope of the **theme of having autonomy/behaving autonomously**, the sub-themes of having self-confidence and making knowledge-based decisions were expressed by students from all grades. Howkins and Ewens (1999), emphasized that students especially expressed the importance of autonomy, political awareness and teamwork in their definitions about professionalism. The sub-themes of discerning feelings and logic and controlling the feelings were expressed by students from all grades. In a study examining the well-being of students and their states of coping with stress, an increase was determined in the stress and anxiety levels of students having an insufficiency in controlling their feelings during clinical practices (Por, Barriball, Fitzpatrick, Roberts, 2011). The sub-theme of giving account in the theme of autonomy was similarly expressed by a senior class student.

Giving account has a particular importance since it develops within the scope of self-criticism. Self-questioning and self-criticism are very important in the professional identity development. Day et al. (2005), stated that students could only internalize the values in the senior class. The fact that this sub-theme was only involved in the expressions of senior class students could be explained with the fact that students of that level might have internalized the values. Another criteria of professionalism that is as important as autonomy is cooperation. It is an important sub-theme for students from all grades that could cooperate in the team work. A profession member who has self-confidence and autonomy and balances her relation and communication with other people is required to be involved in teamwork and a compatible study process. It is important for students from all grades to state that the sub-theme of cooperation is directly related with professionalism in team work. In a relevant study, it was determined that inclusion of students in both nurse team and the whole team caused them to feel stronger (Bradbury-Jones et al., 2011).

The last criteria that is considered by students to be involved in nursing-specific professional values is the **theme of altruism**. This theme was emphasized by students from all grades. The students explained the concept of altruism as abandoning the benefits for the patient and behaving on behalf of the patient. This concept is a basic value in the professional identity (Björkström et al., 2008). This theme is also involved in ethical values (Fagermoen, 1997). From a different viewpoint, the theme of altruism is a primary source of motivation for individuals who are new in professionalism. It is suggested to discuss about this concept on the basis of sample cases that are encountered during the practice, since it will contribute to students (Shaw & Degazon, 2008).

Conclusions

Examining the professionalism criteria, it was observed that students failed to express some concepts such as bringing service to the society, critical thinking and being aware of the political power. Critical thinking is among the features of professionalism. The skill of critical thinking is also related with the skill of problem solving and creative thinking (Yıldırım, 2010). Questioning will bring along more changes and innovations. Apart from that, there is no mention about the function of bringing service to the society in professional identity perceptions of students. However, the profession of nursing plays a role not only in curing the sick individual, but also improving the welfare level of healthy individuals and the society (Leddy & Pepper, 1998). This condition is thought-provoking since it reveals the perceptions of students regarding the profession.

According to the findings that were obtained from the study, it could be asserted that conditions where students feel like a professional nurse correspond to the professionalism criteria. Accordingly, students stated that they felt like a professional nurse when they were regarded by patients, nurses, doctors and trainers, established an efficient communication, managed the care alone, provided a knowledge-based care, cared for the same patient constantly, behaved ethically and did not have to keep a task-quality record. Professionalism perceptions of students in nursing were examined within the scope of seven themes as behaving according to ethical principles, being well-informed in the field, providing an integrated care, being sufficient in professional skills, having autonomy, making cooperation and altruism. Professionalism perceptions of students do not involve the concepts of critical thinking, bringing service to the society, improving the health and being aware of the political power. Thus, it is suggested to determine the activities to develop these skills and dimensions and aspects to be improved in the nursing curriculum and practices.

As a consequence, we can see the importance of clinical experiences for students to perceive and learn the professionalism. When trainers, clinical nurses and other members of the team become aware of the importance of their roles, have good relations with students, become role models and organize the clinical environment, this will contribute to the professional identity development. Thus, it is suggested to make the required arrangements in order to provide the nursing training on solid bases according to the cooperation of school and hospital.

It is suggested to repeat this study in different schools by using qualitative methods such as interview and focus group, reveal the condition, conduct curricular studies to develop the professional identity in nursing throughout the country and evaluate these studies constantly.

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