

Original Article

Opinions of Nursing Students on the Art of Nursing: A Qualitative Study

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Abstract

Introduction: Nursing is commonly accepted as a science and an art.

Aim: To determine the degree to which nursing students perceived the artistic aspects of nursing.

Methodology: A qualitative approach was used and the study conducted at the Health Sciences Faculty, and Nursing Department (n=54). The instrument of data collection consisted of two parts, the first one questions regarding the sociodemographic characteristics of the students and the second part a semi-structured interview form with questions targeting to elicit information on the students perception of the artistic aspects of nursing. The interviews were conducted face-to-face using an in-depth interviewing technique and content analysis was used data analysis.

Result: The average age of the students was 19.35 ± 1.2 . The data analysis resulted to three themes: interaction, professional values and using professional knowledge. Some of the students stated that applying the knowledge obtained through science to patient care defines the artistic aspect of nursing.

Conclusion: In nursing education, a variety of art forms, such as drama, literature, music, and painting, could be used to help students grasp the significance of certain topics, such as human emotions, as they relate to nursing.

Key words: Art of Nursing, Nursing Students, Qualitative methodology, Turkey.

Introduction

Initial perceptions of nursing held by nursing students gradually become replaced with a real understanding of nursing throughout their education. This process requires nursing students to internalize the knowledge, skills, attitudes, values and ethical standards of nursing and to make them a part of their professional behavior (Karaöz, 2002). The definition of nursing specifies who the nurse is and what the nurse does. A generally accepted definition provides a framework for nursing practices, specifies the limits of nursing, defines the purposes and functions of nursing, and provides a framework for nursing education, research and laws (Chitty, 2001). Nursing is commonly accepted as a science and an art (Finfgeld-Connett, 2008a; Yam & Rossiter, 2000; Jenner, 1997). The scientific aspects of nursing involve the analytical, systematic processes used in practice to solve clinical nursing problems using

established principles. Irrespective of the approach that nurses take, care for the well-being of humans is inherent in all aspects of nursing (Yam & Rossiter, 2000). While much emphasis has been placed on the scientific aspects of nursing, the art of nursing is less well understood (Price et al. 2007; Jenner, 1997). According to Finfgeld-Connett (2008b), since the time of nurse Nightingale (1859–1946), nurses have struggled to define their practice. Early definitions suggested that nursing should be considered one of the fine arts, which pegged nursing as a craft (Edwards, 1998). However, intense discussions concerning the legitimacy of art vs. science in nursing have added to the disagreement regarding the definition of nursing (Darbyshire, 1999). For a clear conceptualization of the art of nursing, one must heed the call of past and present leaders in nursing who appeal for greater emphasis on the artistic aspects of nursing (Jenner, 1997). According to Wiedenbach (1964), a theorist who emphasizes the

artistic aspects of nursing suggests that “the nurse is a functioning human being who acts, thinks, and feels”. Another theorist who describes nursing as an art, Rogers has defined nursing as “a learned profession that is both science and art. The professional practice of nursing is creative and imaginative and exists to serve people.” Furthermore, according to Watson (1979), nursing is “a human science of people and human health-illness experiences that are mediated by professional, personal, scientific, aesthetic, and ethical human care transactions” (Craven & Hirnle, 2003).

The linguistic definitions of art as identified in Webster's Third International Dictionary are as follows:

- 1) Power of performing certain actions . . . acquired by experience, study or observation;
- 2) skill in the adaptation of things in the natural world to . . . human life;
- 3) human contrivance or ingenuity;
- 4) one of the humanities . . . the fine arts;
- 5) occupation. . . requiring knowledge or skill;
- 6) application of skill and taste to production according to aesthetic principles;
- 7) conscious use of skill, taste, and creative imagination in the . . . definition or production of beauty; and
- 8) in its most distinct sense art contrasts with skill, artifice, and craft in putting stress upon something more, in employing a personal, unanalyzable creative force that transmits and raises the art or product beyond a skill, artifice, or craft though it may involve the essential elements of all three (Jenner, 1997).

Jenner (1997) indicated that some authors of nursing literature provided a definition of art. Indeed, a variety of terms have been consistently found in common between "art" and nursing suggesting a degree of unanimity. The six most often stated attributes that seem to reflect art across both nursing and aesthetics are creative, expressive, communal, interpretive, subjective, and evocative.

The art of nursing develops from the humanness of the nurse and the patient. The essential core, the heart of nursing, is the nurse/patient interaction, in relationship with or being with a patient (Idczak, 2007). The art of nursing is to create a significant relationship with the patient, to understand the meaning of being together with the patient, to fulfill the nursing practice skillfully, to logically determine the ranking of the nursing practice and to practice ethically (Johnson, 1994).

The artistic aspect of nursing includes the creation of good and effective communication, honesty, reliability, autonomy, empathy, aesthetic acumen, creativity and altruistic interest in addition to maintaining the mental and physical wellness of the patient and mental wellness of the nurse based on their values (Arslan, 2008; Finfgeld-Connett, 2008a; Finfgeld-Connett, 2008b; Wikström, 2001; Yam & Rossiter, 2000).

It has been stated that nursing has becoming more and more technical at the expense of the human qualities of empathy, love and compassion. Within the current climate of evidence-based practice, clinical outcomes and national standards, the value of human relationships (which is not necessarily a measurable phenomena) and the associated emotion is lost (Freshwater & Stickley, 2004).

Nurses must consider what is meant by art as it relates to nursing. Nursing students require a thorough understanding of the art of nursing, not just the scientific aspects involved in nursing (Jenner, 1997). Integrated and effective patient care is possible only through a combination of science and art.

Therefore, nursing students must firmly grasp the artistic aspects of nursing. Studies analyzing the opinions of nursing students regarding the artistic aspects of nursing cannot be found in the current literature, underscoring the importance and novelty of this study. This study was based on a qualitative method, which is generally considered to more accurately convey the opinions and thoughts of students in Turkey.

Aim

The aim of the present study is to determine the degree to which nursing students perceived the artistic aspects of nursing.

Research question

A qualitative study was conducted to answer the following research question: *What is nursing students' opinion about the artistic aspect of nursing?*

Methodology

Design

The qualitative method was used in this study. Nursing education is eight semesters in Turkey. Students take the “fundamentals of nursing lesson” as well as optional artistic lessons such as painting,

music in first year. The student experiences clinical practice all of the education sequentially 14 days in first year, 46 days in second and third year, 84 days fourth year.

Setting

This study was conducted at the Health Sciences Faculty, and Nursing Department in Turkey. The research data were collected between May 2012 and June 2012.

Research ethics

All students participated in the research voluntarily and the opinions of all students were respected. All students were selected according to their desire to commit time to the research. The students were informed that they could withdraw from the study at any time without consequence. Student names were not used in the presentation of the results. Students were given participant numbers and their confidentiality was provided. The opinions of all students were respected.

Participants

A close number of students (about 13-14 students) from each class year were selected by purposive sampling. There were a total of four classes. Fifty-four students were included in the sample group (23 male students, 31 female students). Female or male students, who were voluntary to participate in the study, established the inclusion criteria for sample group of the study. Exclusion criteria was to be reluctant to participate in the study.

Data collection

The data collection were conducted face-to-face using an in-depth interviewing technique. The data collection method consisted of two parts: an information form including the sociodemographic characteristics and a semi-structured interview form.

Students completed an information form consisting of eight questions about their sociodemographic characteristics.

The interview started with questions about sociodemographic characteristics. The interview guide questions consisted of questions relevant to the artistic aspects of nursing by researchers. Interview questions involved questions such as "Based on experiences and observations you have ever had, how could you define the artistic aspect of nursing? How should the artistic aspect of nursing be?".

A pilot study involving two students was conducted to ensure the validity and reliability of the interview form. Pilot test questions are above-mentioned. Pilot test results were excluded from the study. The results of the pilot test confirmed that the questions in the interview manual were clear and understandable.

Each interview lasted approximately 40-45 minutes. The interview was recorded by using an audio recording device. After the interviews, the tape recordings were listened to repeatedly and transcribed into a typed format using a computer.

Data Analysis

Content analysis method was used data analysis in this study. Based on the interviews, the researchers used a code and categorize methods for the responses received. Two different researchers carefully listened to recorded interviews and wrote down every word; each sentence was analysed; meaningful sentences were generated, were described and organized into categories; and themes with the same features were formed and defined according to these categories.

All findings were analysed and confirmed according to the purpose of the study. Statements were organized under three major categories and seven themes after content analysis. All statements within each theme were cross-checked for accuracy.

Validity and reliability

To increase the reliability and validity of the study, the participants were asked whether they would like to add or remove any topics, and then the data were reviewed again. A detailed description of the topics is provided below, and often, direct quotations are included.

Results

The average age of the students was 19.35 ± 1.2 . There was number of about 13-14 students from each class year (total of four classes). Fifty-four students were included in the study (23 male students, 31 female students). Reviewing the data identified three themes: interaction, professional values and using professional knowledge.

Interaction

The essential core, the heart of nursing, is the nurse/patient interaction. Most of the students stated that they considered the art of nursing to consist of *communicating positively with the patient, approaching the patient with empathy, and*

complementing the patient and other nurses. Some of the students expressed that the art of nursing care could be conveyed to the patient through positive communication. Statements regarding this section are as follows:

“Positive communication could be considered to be important in the art of nursing. A nurse carries out her art by building the best physical and verbal relationship with the patient similarly to how a sculptor carries out his art by shaping marble or to a painter who fills a canvas by using his brush and paint (p 2, class 1, male).”

“Because the nurse is a person who is in communication with humans, the nurse tries to meet their needs. However, the nurse understands the problems of the patients and listens to them by using communication skills (p 1, class 1, male).”

“The art of nursing involves good communication to better understand people. A nurse with poor social interaction skills cannot fulfill the needs of her profession (p 50, class 4, female).” “I think that the gentleness of the nurse while communicating with the patient is a form of art (p 12, class 1, male).”

“One cannot be a nurse by only carrying out their nursing job. A nurse must be a child, a mother, and a friend when needed. The nurse must care for patients with a smiling face similarly to a painter who meticulously paints on paper. To establish effective communication with people is an art (p 45, class 4, female).”

The majority of the students stated that the patient could be assessed very well by developing empathy, which is the other dimension of the interaction, and by this means, the art of nursing care could be provided better. Statements regarding this section are as follows:

“If a nurse genuinely cares for the patient, approaches the patient with empathy, and knows the patient from all aspects, then nursing becomes an art (p 47, class 4, female).”

“As Tolstoy stated, ‘The art is the work of people who can see the truth, who understands the community.’ The overlap of this opinion with the nursing profession is striking (p 19, class 2, female).”

“Nursing involves focusing one’s attention on the feelings, thoughts and wishes of the patient. We

respect privacy as we develop empathy with the patient and understand his/her feelings. We want to provide the patients, whom we treat and care for, with mental therapy to encourage the expression of the patient’s feelings and thoughts; we try to understand the patient, so that we may care for them to the best of our ability. We develop the nursing procedures to best accomplish patient care (p 35, class 3, female).”

Students also expressed that when the nurse and patient integrate, this creates the artistic aspect of nursing. Statements regarding this section are as follows:

“The patient and the nurse complement each other, which resembles art. Nursing is similar to the rendering of paint into paintings (p 6, class 1, male).”

“Nursing has an artistic structure due to its human-based nature. There must be integrity between the individual and the nurse (p 11, class 1, female).”

“However, if the painter sees the painting as a piece of paper, the painting loses itself. The painter must relate to his painting. In fact, he must reflect the same colors and the same feelings with the painting (p 18, class 2, female).”

Professional Values

The nurse who tries to understand patients with the assistance of their values and beliefs benefits from artistic values in many respects.

Most of the students referred to professional values to address the art of nursing including statements about concepts such as *respect-love, aesthetics, creativity, ethical values, and improving health* and they also emphasized that the art of nursing is fulfilled by showing love-respect-appreciation to the human. It is thought that love-respect to the human is a must for the fulfillment of the art of nursing. Statements regarding this section are as follows:

“The famous philosopher Freud stated that ‘Everything begins with loving himself’. One should love himself first to love his job and to be beneficial for the treatment of human patients (p 52, class 4, male).”

“Nursing is a job that can be performed with health and gentleness. The art of nursing is manifested in the context of love and respect for the patient. Treating the patient and the family

with respect constitutes the art of nursing (p 3, class 1, female).” “Most importantly, to love herself and to love the human constitutes the art of nursing (p 51, class 4, female).”

Some of the students stated that aesthetics is as important in the art of nursing as in other fields of art and this should be reflected on practices to be performed. Statement regarding this section is as follows:

“I think that there is art in nursing. Doing everything correctly and nice is of importance for the appearance (p 8, class 1, female).”

Some of the students emphasized the importance of creative thinking in the disclosure of the art of nursing. Statement regarding this section is as follows:

“The artistic aspect of nursing, which is based on skill, experience, feelings, and understanding others, involves the use of creativity (p 19, class 2, female). Using knowledge in art and developing unusual methods defines the artistic aspects of nursing (p 40, class 3, female).”

It is required to use the ethical values as a guide and shape the care in accordance with these values in the fulfillment of the profession of nursing. Most of the students emphasized the necessity of ethical values in the art of nursing. Statements regarding this section are as follows:

“The artistic aspects of nursing are based on professional ethics rather than manual skills (p 16, class 2, male).” “The art of nursing involves the skill of using ethics as a guide in nursing practice (p 19, class 2, female).” “If you do not use your hands correctly, then you cannot imagine the harm that may come to the patient. Nursing maintains an artistic aspect in this respect (p 2, class 1, male).” The artistic aspects of nursing are conferred on the individual patient. Nursing is interested in the entirety humankind, including art, religion, language, race, and gender, without discriminating between the poor and the rich (p 20, class 2, male).”

The nurse will fulfill the art of nursing by making the patient, for whom she gives care, feel better through improving her/his health. Majority of the students stated that improvement of health is a dimension of the art of nursing. Statements regarding this section are as follows:

“Nursing involves art from birth until the death of the patient. A nurse produces art by maximally improving the health of their patients (p 29, class 3, male).”

“One can observe the peaceful aspect of the art in nursing. Comfort and peace are provided by staying healthy and maintaining one’s health. Nursing best demonstrates its artistic aspects based on the fact that the main mission of nursing is the maintenance of health. The nurse applies this aspect to human life anywhere they encounter patients and continues to promote human health until the end of human life (p 30, class 3, male).”

“The human body is a masterpiece. Maintaining and improving the health of the individual, the family and the community reveal the artistic aspects of nursing (p 54, class 4, male).”

Usage of Professional Knowledge

Another key attribute of the art of nursing is that professional knowledge transferred to care.

The students discussed issues such as holistic care, helping behavior, using professional skills, using theoretical knowledge for care and using observational skills in the transformation of professional knowledge to the practice of nursing.

Along with the features of the open system, the approach of holistic care involves five major variables of the individual, which are physiological, psychological, sociocultural, spiritual and developmental. In the current nursing sense, the aspects that address systematically the human, environment and the care which is required in case of health/disease are added to the artistic aspect of nursing with a holistic view. Most of the students had expressions that would reflect these views. Statements regarding this section are as follows:

“The artistic aspect of nursing is to think critically and to give care for physiological, biological and psychological needs (p 21, class 2, female).” “Nursing is a job involved with managing the patient in all aspects (p 46, class 4, female).”

Nursing includes assistance to the individual to gain independence as soon as possible. Most of the students stated that the nurse fulfills the art of nursing by showing the helping behavior. Statements regarding this section are as follows:

“Nursing is an occupation intent on assisting individuals that are isolated from the community, have lost their functionality and possibly have given up hope of life due to illness to gain their joy of living again. This definition describes the artistic aspect of nursing (p 54, class 4, male).” “Nursing begins with the healing role of the woman (p 38, class 3, female).”

In the profession of nursing that is comprised of science and art, the use of skills has a great importance. Being aware of this importance, students thought that the use of professional skill had an artistic aspect. Statements regarding this section are as follows:

“The artistic aspect of nursing determines the level of her professional skill. The nurse must exhibit her art in its best form. This requires experience and manual skill (p 41, class 3, female).” “ The artistic aspect of nursing is the manual application that she ethically makes in practice (p 49, class 4, female).”

In the profession of nursing, the individual is provided with care in the light of certain theoretical information. Students, on the other hand, think that the conveyance of the theoretical information of nursing to the individual is the artistic dimension of the nursing. Statements regarding this section are as follows:

“The art of nursing involves taking the knowledge obtained through science, evaluating that knowledge and using that knowledge for patient care. For example, the nurse learns theoretical knowledge about wound care, evaluates a patient’s wounds and performs wound care based on his/her previously acquired knowledge of wound care. Research, practice, and quality development are among roles and duties of nursing and are important factors for understanding the artistic aspects of nursing. The nurse investigates the patient (as part of scientific research) and obtains results. In summary, the art of nursing is to evaluate the current knowledge of nursing and to present this knowledge from different points of view (p 40, class 3, female).”

“ A painter must have knowledge for painting, and he generates paintings using his observational and mechanical skills. Nursing is similar to the painting of the painter. The nurse chooses the most appropriate knowledge for her

patient and then conducts her work. The real knowledge of a nurse is valid, and as she applies this knowledge to her patient, then her knowledge becomes an art (p 22, class 2, male).”

It is required to use the skill of observation in order to provide an efficient and complete care to the individual in nursing. Some of the students expressed that providing care to the individual through the use of information obtained by the nurse from the individual with the help of observation constitutes the artistic aspect of nursing. Statement regarding this section is as follows:

“Nursing is entirely an art because nursing includes all of the properties of art. For example, the artist is a good observer, acumen skills have been developed, he is sensitive to his environment and transfers the knowledge obtained from the environment to his work of art. Similarly, the nurse is a good observer with respect to human health (p 24, class 2, male).”

Limitations of the study

This study was limited in some ways. Qualitative research provides a sophisticated methodology to understand how and why people act in particular ways. The participants came from only same school and results may vary in other nursing student. Thus, the findings generated by a qualitative method cannot be generalized across the whole population. In addition, the study included only students in one Turkish region. However, the number of interview questions was small and the question protocol can be further developed.

Discussion

In this study, the opinions of Turkish nursing students regarding the art of nursing were qualitatively evaluated. It was determined that the students concentrated on three general themes on the artistic aspects of nursing, a) interaction, b) professional values and c) usage of professional knowledge. When responses were evaluated, no differences were found between the different classes.

Earlier studies support our findings. Ay, (2006) stressed that one of the important skills for establishing a therapeutic relationship with patients is the ability to communicate, while others argue that characteristic of the art of nursing is ‘relation-centered’ practice, which entails the in-depth sensing of a patient’s health status seeking out underlying issues and fully understanding the individual needs of the patient (Finfgeld-Connett, 2008b; Mccaffrey &

Purnell, 2007; O'Brien, 2001; Chinn & Watson, 1994; Rose & Parker, 1994).

Yam and Rossiter (2000) stated that Watson et al. (1979) view caring as instrumental and expressive activities. Instrumental activities focus on the physical and therapeutic needs of the patient, whereas expressive activities are more psychosocially focused behaviors such as offering emotional support, empathy, being sensitive to the needs of the patient, and respecting the privacy and personal needs of the patient. Moreover, Yam and Rossiter (2000) stated that nurses tend to emphasize that effective communication and interpersonal communication skills are very important for effective care giving, while Johnson (1994) found that communication, sense, knowledge, and expertise or ability is essential characteristics of the art of nursing. Similar to the literature, our study found that students think that effective communication and empathy are very important and comprise the artistic aspect of nursing.

According to our results, nursing students also associate professional values with artistic aspect of nursing. According to Craven and Hirnle (2003), values serve as standards for decision making that endure for a significant time in one's life and Blondeu (2002) argues that nursing is fundamentally a moral art. The values listed by the American Association of Critical-Care Nurses is altruism, equality, aesthetics, freedom, human dignity, justice, and truth (Craven & Hirnle, 2003; Chitty, 2001; Wilkinson, 1997). According to Finfgeld-Connett (2008a), the art of nursing involves the use of one's expertise and the adaptation of experimental and metaphysical knowledge and values to patient care. Values and beliefs serve as the foundation driving the nature of the service given (Babadağ, 2010; Ausgard, 2006).

Andrist et al. (2006) stated in Denver's study that most nurses said, "It is not what you do, but how you do it". The results of our study revealed that some of the students believe that providing patient care correctly and hospitably comprised the artistic aspect of nursing. However, in literature, aesthetic values tended to be emphasized more (Ausgard, 2006; Finfgeld-Connett, 2008b; Jenner, 1997). Furthermore, Fagerberg (2004) and Naden (1998) indicated that nurses use their creativity to find new ways to meet the individual needs of their patients, which can also be considered relevant to the art of nursing. Nurses were reported to demonstrate the art of nursing by using their creativity in caring for

patients (Jenner, 1997; Rose & Parker, 1994; Price et al., 2007). Similar statements were also observed in our study. In addition, some students stated that the ability of the nurse to maintain and improve the health of patients based on the patients' values consisted the art of nursing, which can be compared to a painter painting a portrait.

Art was the product of a deliberate action, requiring relevant knowledge and skill. Some important features of the art of nursing were knowledge and the effective use of one's expertise or skill (Jenner, 1997). In previous studies, some authors have concluded that transferring the knowledge of nursing to patient care demonstrated the artistic aspect of nursing (Finfgeld-Connett, 2008a; Finfgeld-Connett, 2008b; Jenner, 1997). Furthermore, similarly to a report by Edwards (1998), some of the students included in our study believed that the artistic aspect of nursing is a manual skill or craft. Finfgeld-Connett (2008b) stated that artful nurses were experts at conducting assessments, making decisions and carrying out interventions. Artful nurses are able to provide care that cannot always be directly inferred from experimental evidence. In contrast to this finding, some students interviewed in our study stated that using only scientific knowledge consisted the artistic aspect of nursing.

Nursing is primarily helping people (sick or well) in the performance of those activities contributing to health, or its recovery or to a peaceful death that they would perform unaided if they had the necessary strength, will, or knowledge (Henderson, 2006). It's likewise the unique contribution of nursing to help people to be independent of such assistance as soon as possible are the basic principles of nursing care explained by Henderson (Henderson, 2006). Some of the students stated that applying the knowledge obtained through science to patient care defines the artistic aspect of nursing. The embodied activity of beholding art is an analogous activity to nursing observation (Wynn, 2006). Some authors mentioned about the importance of using observation in patient care (Ausgard, 2006; D'antonio & Ellen-Rinker, 2006; Rose & Parker, 1994). Similarly, students stated that using observation in nursing care demonstrates the artistic aspect of nursing. Thus, observation appears to be critical in fulfilling the artistic aspects of nursing. It was determined that students had several positive opinions about the artistic aspects of nursing, which offered an array of different perspectives.

A better understanding of the aspects of nursing is of great importance in nursing education. The results of this qualitative study are consistent with previous studies and could help explain the relationship between nursing and characteristics of art, such as form, representation, and creativity. Based on the results of this study, the opinions of the nursing students regarding the artistic aspects of nursing may serve as a guide for the definition of nursing. Our results support a clearer conception of the art of nursing. Furthermore, our results may serve as a source for other researchers within the field of nursing.

Conclusion

Nursing education must be restructured to include a balance between the art and science of nursing. If nursing students learn from the intertwining of the art and science of nursing, then curricular structure must parallel how nursing students learn. In nursing education, a variety of art forms, such as drama, literature, music, and painting, could be used to help students grasp the significance of certain topics, such as human emotions, as they relate to nursing. It is recommended that this study should be repeated in other parts of Turkey and in the world. In addition, this study can serve as a guide to quantitative studies in other communities. This topic is very important in nursing care. Therefore, it is recommended that this study should be repeated in nurses working in other cultural contexts.

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