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Identifying Professional Values in Nursing: An Integrative Review

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ABSTRACT

No clear standard of reference has existed to evaluate student competency in relation to professional values. Analysis of literature between 2008 and 2016 revealed organizational policy publications documenting and research reports evaluating and documenting a variety of professional values. Altruistic professional values were consistently evident in organizational policy and research publications. However, limited empirical evidence existed in relation to the values of quality improvement, social justice, personal authority, and self-care.

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The development of professional values is an essential learning outcome in undergraduate nursing education. *Professional values* have been defined as beliefs about the worth or quality of concepts and behaviors in a particular discipline (Leners, Roehrs, & Piccone, 2006). These common beliefs bring together individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds and are considered central to forming a standard professional identity and ideology (Weis & Schank, 2009). Professional values are derived from personal and societal values and modified and expanded through educational, clinical, and personal experiences (Parandeh, Khaghanizade, Mohammadi, & Nouri, 2015). As such, an undergraduate education is instrumental in informing an awareness and internalization of the values inherent in the profession of nursing.

Despite the importance, evaluation of professional values in nursing education has been a challenge because no clear standard of reference exists to evaluate student competency. *The Code of Ethics for Nurses with Interpretive Statements (The Code of Ethics)*, published by the American Nurses Association (ANA, 2015) outlined nine provisions and 39 subprovisions to guide ethical nursing practice. However, the use of *The Code of Ethics* to evaluate student competency in relation to professional values has been a challenge as a result of the broad range of ethical issues addressed in the document. *The Essentials of Baccalaureate Education for Professional Nursing Practice (The Essentials)* published by the American Association of Colleges of Nursing (AACN, 2008) listed five professional values in nursing. The limited list of professional values identified in *The Essentials* was based on expert opinion rather than empirical evidence. A list of professional values documented in organizational policy publications and those evaluated and documented in research is of value as a

standard of reference for nurse educators. The list of values could contribute to curricular evaluation and teaching and learning practices.

Method

An integrative review of the literature was the method chosen for an analysis of professional values evaluated and/or documented in nursing literature. Whittemore and Knaff's (2005) five-stage methodology was followed in the review of the literature to minimize bias and augment rigor. These five steps are problem and purpose identification, literature search, data evaluation, data analysis, and presentation of results (Whittemore & Knaff, 2005).

Problem and Purpose

The integrative review was conducted to identify, analyze, and synthesize literature related to the evaluation and/or documentation of specific professional values in nursing. A synthesis of literature related to determining which professional values have been evaluated and documented in research publications or documented in organizational policy publications may act as a standard of reference to inform and facilitate the evaluation of student learning related to professional values. The two questions guiding this integrative literature review were the following:

- What are the professional values documented in organizational policy publications and evaluated and documented in research reports in the United States?
- How do the values identified in organizational policy publications compare to those documented reports of research in the United States?

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Literature Search

A search of the literature was completed in May of 2016 (see Fig. 1). CINAHL®, ERIC™, MEDLINE®, and PsycINFO® databases were searched for English language articles and published dissertations. The search included professional values and nursing as general search terms. The initial database search for the literature review was refined for methodology related to quantitative ($n = 65$) and qualitative ($n = 84$) methods for a total of 149 publications. Titles and abstracts were skimmed for detail and compared for relevance to answering the research question. Seven articles were identified from the initial skimming search as relevant. Ancestry searches of reference lists contributed an additional five reports of research evaluating and documenting and two organizational policy publications documenting specific professional values in nursing. The full text of these 14 publications was reviewed and compared with inclusion and exclusion criteria.

Inclusion criteria were research publications describing qualitative, quantitative, or mixed methods research related to the evaluation and documentation of professional values determined in nursing students or in professional nurses. Organizational policy publications cited in research studies meeting inclusion criteria were also included. The publications included in this integrative review were eventually limited to those published between the years 2008 and 2016. The beginning date coincides with the most recent revision of *The Essentials* (AACN, 2008), a primary publication used for the evaluation of baccalaureate nursing curricula.

Exclusion criteria included gray literature (poster presentations, conference presentations, and Web sites), literature describing professional values evaluation for graduate or specialty nursing

(midwifery, palliative care, etc.), and literature exploring teaching practices for professional values that did not detail the evaluation of professional values. Publications evaluating professional values of nurses from nations other than the United States were also excluded from this integrative review as professional values were considered to be unique to each region and ethnicity (Parandeh et al., 2015).

Data Evaluation

After comparison to inclusion and exclusion criteria, the final sample included the evaluation of seven publications. Five research reports evaluated and documented specific professional values in nursing. Of these five reports, one detailed quantitative, two detailed mixed methods, and two detailed qualitative research. In addition, two organizational policy publications identifying professional values in nursing were analyzed. *The Essentials* (AACN, 2008) was included after it was referenced in ancestry searches of two research reports analyzed for this literature review (Lawler, 2008; Schmidt, 2014). *The Code of Ethics* (ANA, 2015) was also analyzed for this integrative review as an earlier edition was discovered in ancestry searches in four research reports (Clark, 2009; Dever et al., 2015; Schmidt, 2014; Weis & Schank, 2009). The most recent edition of *The Code of Ethics* was chosen for inclusion in this review to reflect the evolving perspective on professional values.

Data Analysis

Data analysis involved four additional stages: data reduction, data display, data comparison, and conclusion drawing and verification

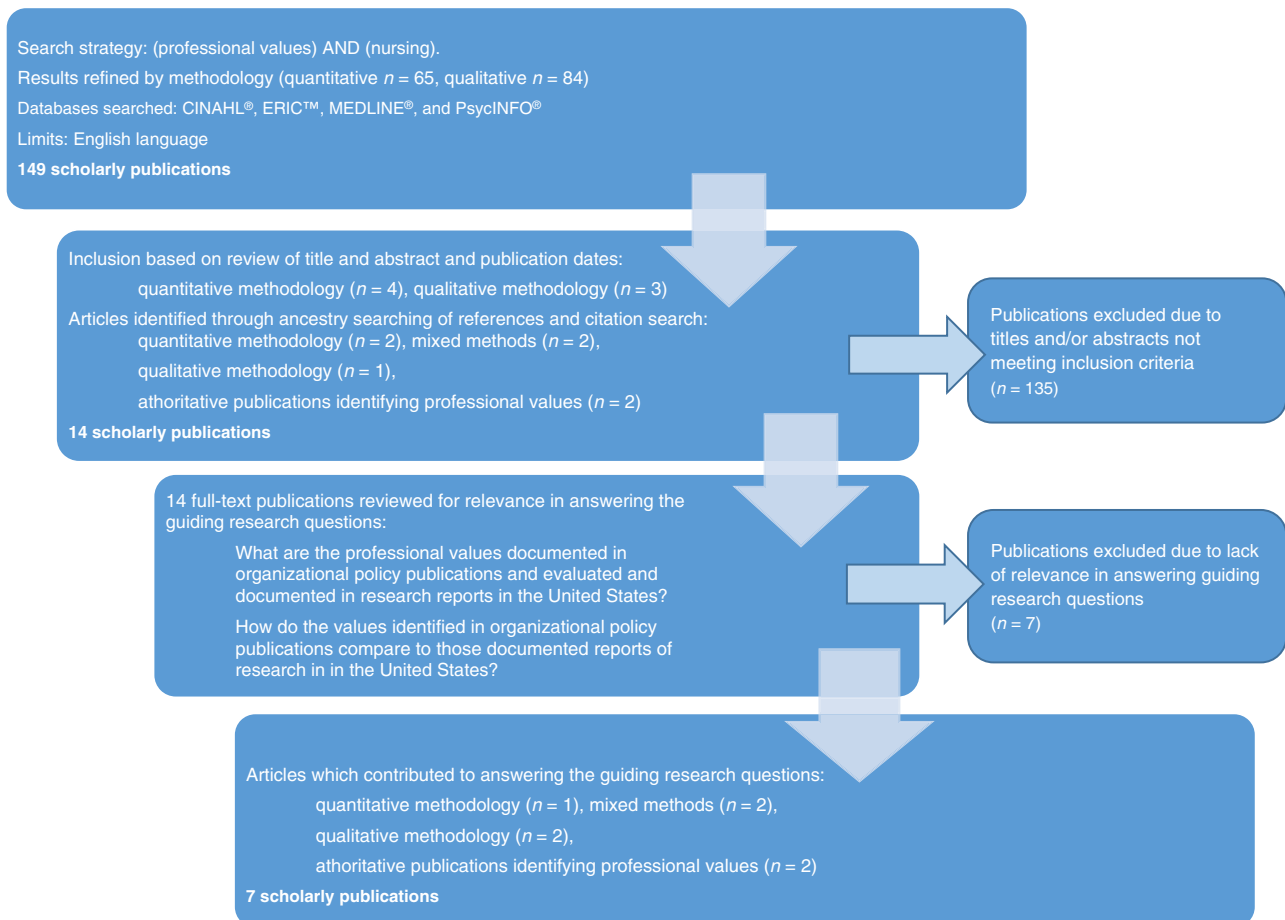


Fig. 1. PRISMA: (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analysis) literature search flowchart.

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