

Title of Submission:

Exploring Professional Identity through Personal Narratives of Two Nurse Teachers

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ABSTRACT

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Historically nursing has struggled to search for a distinct understanding of its professional identity within the health-care realm. For better part of its former existence nursing has followed a traditional medical model. However, this scientific, technologically based health-care practice, with the emphasis on efficiency and effectiveness, has resulted in

boundary confusion between nursing and other health care professions. Consequently, there is a movement in nursing towards finding a clear definition of what nursing is and what role it plays on the social and political stage today.

As nurse teachers and researchers, we too live within this changing landscape of nursing profession. We believe that one way to approach the task of delineating our professional identity as nurses is through individual self reflection on personal narratives. By sharing stories and reflecting upon them we gain deeper meaning of who we are as individual nurses. And, not unlike a woven rug, knowing what each strand is made up of helps us gain a more accurate picture of the whole. So in nursing, by examining what each of us brings to the profession we become clearer on what nursing is and what it does.

We believe that this exploration may be attained in the research field through the use of Narrative, a qualitative research methodology, which is at once the method and the phenomenon of study. It is based on Dewey's notion that life experiences are the building blocks of who we are in the world. It is through the telling and retelling of these life stories that we are able to gain deeper meaning of our own way of being. Connelly and Clandinin build further on Dewey's idea by suggesting that we bring all of our personal life experiences into our professional life. Consequently by exploring our personal and professional life narratives for our own identity, we move closer towards defining and understanding our own meaning perspectives of nursing. Through listening to each other's understanding, we also create the possibilities for new meaning of nursing as a practice profession to emerge.