Performance and the Power of Midwives’ Voices: Exploring Professional Identity

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Emergent Themes

Power
language hierarchy

Women
protection connection

Respect
honesty confidence

Professionalism in the curriculum
This is a time of change: frameworks for maternity care are being refreshed in Scotland and across the UK and UWS is refreshing its midwifery curriculum. In this project, student voices have emphasised tacit learning and peer pressure to conform to established norms, as strong influencers in the acquisition of professional values and identity. They also call for closer communication between university and practice.

Research topic
Professionalism is multidimensional and socially constructed (Martimianakis et al. 2006). Within healthcare it is often described as an “art” complementing science (van de Camp et al. 2006). Despite its complexity, educational programmes often frame professionalism as a list of individual attributes and behaviours: are there more effective approaches for teaching professionalism?

Theory and method
Semi-structured conversations with final year student midwives about professionalism within the theoretical and practical elements of their programme were facilitated by the midwifery researcher. Contributions were recorded for full transcription and thematic analysis. Visual images were used to initiate and support the conversation. Drawing on theories from Schegchner (1988) and Goffman (1959), performance was used to facilitate ‘reinterpretation’ and, thereby, deeper discussions around professionalism. In this poster we present outcomes from the first group of three students.

In practice
Students stand at the door
In University you’re told you’re important
But in practice you’re not
Senior midwives sit
Junior midwives stand
Students stand at the door

"In my experience everybody knows your name"

Nurturing environment
What is that bubble
Why have they got it
That particular dynamic
That nurturing environment"

The fast midwife
Ticking those boxes
Getting it all sorted
That’s not what’s best for the women"

"I think I get a negative
Image of what professionalism is
This one's quite an
Aggressive and angry person
And I think
To be professional
You need to be
Calm and collected"

Performance
Conversations were transcribed ‘in the moment’ by one of the researchers and performed immediately after as poetry. This interpretation was then discussed and further discourse around the topic encouraged. Hearing their own words, students reported that this format facilitated deeper reflection and re-interpretation. It was also suggested that the emerging ‘poetry’ could be presented to other students as a starting point for discussion.

Power in the curriculum

I’ve learned more about bad professionalism. All I can do is take it on board and say it’s never going to be me*

Being unprofessional....

Unprofessional behaviour is recognised but not always challenged by students in practice settings:

*I’ve learned more about bad professionalism. All I can do is take it on board and say it’s never going to be me*

Informing Curriculum Development
An exploration of how student midwives define the concept of ‘professionalism’ and how they develop their professional identity during the midwifery programme.

References: