Reflective Dialogue on Caring: A Research Practicum Experience

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Introduction/Purpose: PhD students are usually required to complete research practicum hours with a faculty member. Part of my experience was to analyze qualitative data and prepare a co-authored manuscript with a faculty member. The qualitative data was from in-depth interviews with grandmothers who cared for the children of mothers with substance use disorders (SUD). The experience taught me a great deal about caring in multiple relationships: Parent/child, faculty/student, and researcher/participant. This experience of being a student, co-author, and caring colleague with a faculty member is explored in this paper. Our shared and unique appreciation of how caring is expressed in ethnographic emic and etic views resulted in the publication of a manuscript. Our convergent and divergent views of how to interpret the data created a collegial bond of trust, patience and mutual respect as community nurses. This paper is a reflective dialogue between caring colleagues and how living caring influences education, research and practice.

Theoretical Lens: Leininger’s ethnonsuring method is the framework to understand the domain of caring. The focus of the study was on how grandmothers care for themselves, their daughters and their grandchildren. Leininger’s method was a good fit for the study as it was a naturalistic approach that allowed the participants to share their experience from their emic (generic) view, within the context of the social structures in community. The emic view of caring for self is represented in Leininger’s three modes of care: Preserving/Maintaining, Accommodating/Negotiating and Repatterning/Restructuring.

Application: Leininger’s enabler from “stranger” to “trusted friend” is reflected in the relationship of the PI with the participants, and in the relationship between student and faculty mentor. The caring relationship between student and faculty mentor fostered an authentic and meaningful engagement in working with the data. Three months were spent independently and collaboratively exploring the data. Reviewing, coding and analyzing the interviews was a process of coming to know the participants and what mattered to them in how they cared for themselves and others. The caring presence demonstrated by the PI during data collection and participant observation in the field added a dimension of humanness to the transcripts.

Implications: This experience reinforced the value of studying caring from an emic perspective in order to understand and support what matters to persons, and inspired me to focus my doctoral dissertation on how parents manage caring for their child after traumatic brain injury. The relationship with my faculty mentor also gave me a greater appreciation for reflexivity and the importance of understanding as a researcher how one is situated in context. Faculty who model caring in research practicum experiences can inspire doctoral students to appreciate their own growth as a caring scholar.