Tapping the Power of the Hermeneutical Mystery of “Evidence” in Developing Caring Knowledge

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Science, Nursing, and Evidence

- Sense of the world has historically been made by:  
  ✓ Logic  
  ✓ Reasoning  
  ✓ Experimentation  
- Nursing as a unique discipline:  
  ✓ Requires its own knowledge  
- Ambiguity regarding evidence about nursing  
  ✓ Hermeneutical definition of evidence provides clarity about what can be considered evidence in nursing

Impact of Philosophies of Science on Nursing Knowledge

- Basic laws of science (biology, physics, etc.) led to:  
  ✓ advancement of scientific disciplines including nursing  
  ✓ inferences of the laws to nursing science  
  ✓ application of the laws in nursing practice  
- Philosophies of science have:  
  ✓ shaped the nursing profession  
  ✓ guided its evolution through research findings  
  ✓ generation of knowledge about health, illness, and the improvement of patient care (Risjord, 2010)
Disciplinary Considerations

The uniqueness of the nursing profession requires the development of scientific evidence about:
- holistic patient care
- the nursing process
- moral values (Risjord, 2010)
- caring as the essence of nursing
- effective nursing interventions
- interpersonal aspects of nursing situations
- anything else that impacts or is impacted by nursing

Roots of Hermeneutics

- Originated in ancient Greek philosophy
- Interpretation of language
- Interpretation of religious meanings found in biblical texts
- Became popular after the Protestant Reformation
  - Martin Luther’s *sola scriptura*, “scripture alone”
  - Minus oral traditions passed through apostolic succession
- Aided understanding of scriptural language that was heavily influenced by ancient histories and cultures (Ramberg & Gjesdal, 2009)

Hermeneutics According to Hans Georg Gadamer (1975)

- Philosophical hermeneutics seeks understanding:
  - through the historical interpretation of words
  - through the analysis of how words are placed together in verbal and written language
- A means for interpreting the significance of lived human experiences communicated through language as the representative expression of:
  - Ideas
  - Knowledge
  - Emotions
  - Storied retelling of events
Hermeneutical Insights

- Gadamer believed that the exploration of topics using conversation had the greatest potential for revealing truths about human phenomena (Binding & Tapp, 2008)
- Viewing human experiences through the eyes of the persons who experienced the studied phenomena and used language to tell the stories provides rich detail from a humanistic perspective.
- Careful hermeneutical interpretation of the language leads to greater understanding of true meanings as the core of understanding human phenomena.

Albert Einstein’s Two Cents

- “Not everything that counts can be counted, and not everything that can be counted counts.”

A Hermeneutical Explication of Evidence

- “that which justifies belief” (Kelly, 2008)
- A guide for the discernment of truth through:
  - Tangible proof
    - fingerprints, video footage, and DNA
  - Intangible proof
    - testimony from witnesses and experts
    - Usually communicated through language
- Found in the ideas, viewpoints, and reflections of persons providing testimony (Polkinghorne, 2005)
“…Clothing Thoughts into Words”

Setting the Stage……

“Evidence as a concept pertains to the truth, reality, and being in the world; it involves seeing, realizing, making visible and clothing thoughts into words.”

(Erikson & Martinsen, 2012, p. 625)


Katie Eriksson (2010)

Evidence: To see or not to see

- Fostered depth and understanding of the term “evidence” by clarifying hermeneutical meanings
- Delved beyond the term’s superficial meaning
- The historical, hermeneutical interpretation of the word “evidence” had four consistent elements:
  - “to see and realize
  - to know
  - to attest
  - to revise” (p. 276)

Truth and Reality

- The truth is present in reality, and both truth and reality encompass evidence in relation to the tangible, observable, and unobservable qualities found naturally in the world. (Eriksson, 2010)
- Evidence is
  - a form of truth and reality
  - necessary for building the body of nursing knowledge

Evidence about Caring in Nursing

- Caring becomes evident in the beauty of the caring encounters among persons in nursing situations.
- The caring between that is seen, known, and attested by the witnesses becomes the contextual and ontological evidence of the caring encounter.
- The knowledge formed is the evidence that is:
  - illuminated by the testimony of the participants
  - revised according to what is already known
Theoretical Underpinnings

Boykin and Schoenhofer (2001)

- All persons are caring
- Caring: active expression of love
- Caring: a process of living and growing as caring persons
- All knowledge about nursing can be found within nursing situations
- Meaning of caring is elucidated:
  - actively during the caring encounter
  - when reflecting on the caring that occurred in the nursing situation
  - through stories about the encounter

Development of Caring Knowledge

- The hermeneutical interpretation of “evidence” includes data gathered from:
  - philosophical insights
  - qualitative research
  - stories
- As forms of “evidence”, testimonies about caring in nursing impart:
  - meanings through language
  - relevance of caring for persons and nursing
  - connections realized by enlightenment of concepts

Impact on Caring Science

- The potential impact of the hermeneutical interpretation of the word “evidence” includes:
  - revealing the full, historical meaning of “evidence”
  - expanding what is considered credible evidence in nursing research
  - elucidating data about caring through lingual means
  - providing credibility to qualitative research findings
  - building the body of caring knowledge
  - furthering the discipline of nursing and caring science
References

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