

Enhancing esthetic knowledge: A teaching strategy

This article describes a teaching strategy that has been used with graduate students to enhance their esthetic knowing through representing, interpreting, and envisioning the lived experience of a caring presence in nursing practice. As students engaged in reflecting, writing, and discussion, the explicit and tacit meanings associated with a caring presence unfolded in esthetic knowing in nursing.

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LEARNING IS purposeful, active, and personal. What one comes to know through the process of learning evolves from the thought that goes into efforts to construct meaning. Kraft¹ believes that learning comes when there is reflection on the connection between self and a particular situation. In the personal reflection, there is active engagement in the quest to resolve issues, unravel puzzles, and figure something out. The more centrally students are engaged in the learning process, the more personally they are involved with it.² It is recognized that keeping the student's experience at the center of the learning process sparks the quest for learning.³ This article describes a teaching strategy that has been used with graduate students to enhance their esthetic knowing and understanding of the meaning associated with living a caring presence in nurse-client process.

Carper⁴ described four fundamental patterns that unite to form a structure of knowing in nursing: empirical, ethical, personal,

and esthetic knowing. Each pattern portrays a unique feature of the structure of knowing. Empirics, the science of nursing, describes, explains, and predicts. The science of nursing is found in the assumptions and principles of nursing models that focus on promoting health in the person-environment process. Ethical knowing is about duty, rights, obligations, and moral imperatives. Personal knowing centers on self and understanding of self in relation to others, and esthetic knowing is particular knowing about specifics that tie together to form a unified pattern. Esthetic knowing happens in nurse-client process as a direct encounter with the significance in the situation revealed through experience. Esthetic knowing can be described as an all-at-once glimpsing of the beauty in nurse-client process. May's description of beauty illuminates the all-at-once glimpsing:

Beauty is the experience that gives us a sense of joy and a sense of peace simultaneously. Other happenings give us joy and afterwards a peace, but in beauty these are the same experience. Beauty is serene and at the same time exhilarating; it increases one's sense of being alive.^{5(p20)}

Esthetic knowing is the art of creating beauty in practice and research endeavors. Creating beauty overcomes the dilemmas in the situation by searching for, seeking, and finding form amidst chaos. Structuring form is creating meaning. Esthetic knowing comes in moments of enlightenment arising out of creating a structure that reflects unity, clarity, and completeness.⁶ In the experience of beauty comes a sense of unity "which transcends, however temporarily the grim paradoxes of life."^{5(p33)}

Caring is a human experience grounded in esthetic qualities. The creative act of caring

actualizes beauty in nurse-client process. According to May, "beauty wipes away boundaries and inspires us to realize our common humanity."^{5(p225)} Reflecting on caring in nurse-client process enhances one's awareness of the world and excites a deepening sense of esthetic knowing that leads to a further realization of qualities at the heart of interhuman connectedness.

Chinn and Jacobs⁷ elaborate on Carper's esthetic pattern of knowing as expressed in the art/act of nursing. Esthetics is created in nursing practice through the dimensions of representing, interpreting, and envisioning.⁷ This means that coming to know esthetics in nursing involves describing the nurse-client process in all of its many dimensions (representing), elucidating the meaning of the nurse-client process (interpreting), and looking beyond the situation to focus on what might be (envisioning). It is proposed that living a caring presence with another touches all dimensions of knowing and exemplifies the art/act of esthetic knowing. The teaching strategy described in this article incorporates the processes of representing, interpreting, and envisioning to guide students in enlarging their view of caring. Bevis and Murray⁸ call for the selection of liberating teaching strategies that rely on connoisseurship, critical consciousness, and scholarly collaboration. Tanner⁹ strongly encourages caring as a core value in nursing education. Norris states, "As a nursing art it (caring) has been largely taken for granted. It has been developed by individual nurses as a personal learning experience rather than something taught."^{10(p546)} It is generally agreed that students do or should develop caring behaviors as part of their education in nursing, yet there is little in the literature describing strategies for en-

hancing an understanding of esthetic knowing and of caring.

TEACHING STRATEGY

Students are invited to tell their story of living a caring presence in a nursing practice situation. Each story is a particular, unique, and actually lived caring-presence encounter. According to Krysl, "It is story and only story that conveys truth."^{11(p31)} The stories described by the students touch human qualities of caring for another and so ring true for all who write and hear them. Through representing their story of living a caring presence, interpreting the deeper meaning inherent in the story, and envisioning beyond, students are engaged in the teaching-learning process and are walked through the following strategy.

Representing

On the first day of class students are given a blank sheet of paper and are asked to "describe a situation where you experienced yourself living a caring presence with a client." Students are asked to write their story and bring it with them to class the next week. Outside of class, the teacher reads each story carefully, then talks with each student about his or her situation, and seeks further description as needed. The students are asked to elaborate on particular areas and to return the completed story in the next weeks.

Interpreting

Upon collection of the completed stories, the teacher underlines specific elements the student used in describing a caring presence. A listing of the elements in all of the stories is given to the students, and they are

guided through the process of identifying clusters of elements that group around a central theme. Patterns are identified, and the clusters are synthesized into an ordered arrangement of themes that define a caring presence.

An example of elements identified in the students' descriptions as well as a set of themes is presented in Table 1. The synthesized themes found in students' descriptions of a caring presence are (1) happens in the context of human suffering, (2) involves a shift in the rhythm of the everyday, (3) takes place when the call of the other is wholly heard, (4) is immersed in the expanded present, and (5) leads to an experience of fulfillment.

Envisioning

Envisioning occurs through a discussion of the synthetic definition. A synthetic definition is the interrelating of the clustered themes into a meaningful whole that describes a caring presence. A synthetic definition of caring presence congruent with the synthesized themes follows. Caring presence is extending self to go beyond the ordinary to be completely immersed in an intense process with another. The occasion is remembered with fondness and fulfillment.

Students participate in a discussion of the synthetic definition of caring presence. Reflecting on engaging in an intense process

Caring presence is extending self to go beyond the ordinary to be completely immersed in an intense process with another. The occasion is remembered with fondness and fulfillment.

Table 1. Examples of themes and elements derived from student descriptions of a caring presence

Context of human suffering	Shift in the rhythm of the everyday	Call of the other is wholly heard	Immersion in the present	Feelings of fulfillment
She lay there slowly dying alone. This young man was very ill. I was told the child cried at school and no one could identify the reason. The client was very weak and had severe abdominal pain. Not only did the client have emotional problems but physical and financial difficulties as well. This couple had not had childbirth classes and did not know what to expect in labor. They were both very anxious.	In the midst of the confusion, a peaceful relaxation came over us. Although we were very busy, I took time and sat on her bed and talked. As I was talking with one family member, others gathered around and began asking questions. Over a period of two months, a change in our relationship occurred. I was busy doing the routine work when two assistants came flying into my office. The client's condition was quickly becoming worse.	I felt like the client needed a hug. I sensed the client had a need to discuss things further. I felt as if I was living the experience with her. I came to understand his true concerns. We felt each other's feelings and heard each other's words. I could readily grasp the gravity of the situation.	I was able to be with the client without any expectations or reservations. I was calm and unhurried and felt no need to leave. We were united in a process that had little preplanned direction. I was totally unaware of time.	Recounting this experience makes me feel warm and good in ways I cannot describe. The experience was rewarding for me and for the client. I felt truly satisfied. A special joy remains in my heart today. I had come to love this cantankerous old lady. Situations such as this makes it all worth while. I felt satisfied that I had engaged in the essence of nursing. To this day I think of the client in a caring, warm way.

that happens in the midst of human suffering reveals that these intense situations involve life, death, pain, loss, sadness, and joy. Students talk about what it is like to live these situations with another where there is a sense that the moment is ultimate. In this discussion the nurse's focused centeredness emerges, and students talk about what it means to be centered with another during an intense moment. They relate that focused centeredness is a way of creatively structuring meaning in the situation.

Students are asked, "What does it mean to go beyond the ordinary?" "How does a shift in the rhythm of the ordinary change the flow of events?" Points of discussion include a letting go of rules and shoulds. Students come to see that the spontaneous shift in meaning is recognized at some level by the nurse. In other words, the nurse is aware of the shift and chooses to go with the shift. Discussion centers on how one can look at a situation day after day and then all of a sudden see lightness and brightness that were not there before. Shifting perspectives is a moment-to-moment choice that one makes in transforming a situation. There may be many opportunities for shifts; however, it is when one chooses to go with the shift that opportunities for creativity happen. Flowing with the creative enriches one's view and enlivens the caring presence situation. When the call of the other is wholly heard, there is spontaneous attending and listening. Students talk about how one extends self to another so that there is a hearing of the other by truly relating rather than judging and reacting.

The occasion of a caring presence is remembered. Students are asked, "Is living a caring presence an occasional happening?" The discussion centers on the risk involved

in choosing to live a caring presence with another in light of the value for caring in health care systems where skills and technology are valued. Creating a caring presence involves transcending this paradox in a creative way. Students are asked to elaborate on their feelings about the essential qualities in the described situations. A discussion of the esthetic ensues as a manifestation of caring. Students describe feelings of fulfillment and joy associated with a caring presence.

When asked to describe a situation of having lived a caring presence, most students write detailed stories. The teacher selects several and reads them to the students. It is believed that hearing another's story after the interpretive discussion is helpful in expanding one's view of caring presence. An example of one student's story follows.

It was a week of hectic tasks and an overloaded primary patient assignment. Many of my primary patients were in various phases of terminal cancer. Mrs B was one of these patients. She was a stern woman. I never saw her smile, yet she called me the "sour nurse." She would not talk much about her cancer or her family. As time went on, I learned she didn't believe ladies talked about such things as cancer. When she called me the "sour nurse," I thought she projected some of herself to me. I never thought of myself as sour but perhaps serious at my work. Somehow this drew me to her.

On this particular day I went in and asked if I could do anything for her. It was Sunday. She asked me to read her some scriptures. So I began to read to her from the book of John. The others in the room asked me to read louder. I felt like a preacher. Mrs B and her roommates cried. She told me she knew her time was near and asked me to call her son. Her son could not be there for several hours. She asked me to stay. I told her I would stay with her until the arrival of her son,

after my shift. She squeezed my hand. I sat, we didn't talk; she was too weak. Occasionally she would reach up and pat my hand. I cleaned her mouth and gently turned her when needed. I thought of my husband's reaction when he would learn I stayed. But I didn't care about how he felt at this time. The nurse on evening shift came in and lectured me: "You'll never make it as a nurse if you get involved with all your patients like that."

The patient in the next bed responded, "at least she cares." Then I wondered why I was sitting with a woman whom I hardly knew, but I felt she was like my own grandmother. She lay there slowly dying alone, except for me, the nurse she hardly knew. Yet she felt comfort in patting my hand and opening her eyes as if to see if I was still near.

Time passed quickly, her son came in, tired from his drive and confused at his mother's condition. They kept in touch by telephone. He knew she was in the hospital but did not know she was dying of cancer.

We talked for some time. He told me she was a private woman and would not let him help her after his father passed away. He said the distance and his job and family kept him from visiting as he wanted, and she would not live with him. My day came to an end. There was more caring than met the eye in the room that day. The feeling lingered into the next day. I called to find that Mrs B had passed away a few minutes before. This situation still stands out for me as a time of caring, and I feel good about it.

EVALUATION

In an evaluation of the method, students indicate that discussing caring in class led them to realize, many for the first time, that others have lived similar caring experiences. They found that representing, interpreting, and envisioning a caring presence situation helped them to gain a different per-

spective on caring, one that they can now discuss more comfortably with other nurses. Hearing stories of caring from their classmates was enlightening. For most students, recalling and writing about a caring presence situation were not difficult. The details of the story flowed from what they were experiencing at the time of the caring encounter. Part of recalling a caring presence was labeling the situation as caring, which required reflecting on nursing practice. In the written descriptions, students put words to their experience, leading to further introspection on the caring situation. Students agreed that once into the situation, writing about it flowed smoothly. Class discussion helped students realize that although their situation was unique and different from others, the structure of the process as extracted from their stories was that of an esthetic encounter. Recalling a caring presence engendered feelings of joy. Students who found joy in the experience viewed the caring presence situations as special moments in which they grew as persons. Recalling the situation and writing the story led to feelings of warmth, love, and an appreciation for living a caring presence with another.

"When we tell a story, energy flows out of us toward the hearer and back from the hearer."^{11(p36)} It is proposed that uplifting values and goals related to nursing come to the storyteller and story hearers as they participate in the learning experience. Some students believed that their stories did not reflect the deep levels of caring that could be heard in the stories that were read in class. They reported that at the time they wrote the assignment, they were not sure about what it was they were requested to write. As they engaged in thinking and talking about caring presence, a value for the

importance of caring as a nurse and a human being emerged.

Specific student comments about the value of the caring-presence learning experience follow:

I have become more aware of the process and the importance it plays in nurse-client interactions. Everyone has the potential to develop caring. It must be nurtured and allowed to blossom. Once experienced, it is something you cherish forever.

I am beginning to see that a caring presence can take place more times than the person is aware. Prior to class, caring presence was an occurrence not fully understood. I have broadened my view of what constitutes a caring presence situation and am looking more carefully at interactions to observe and to appreciate them when they occur.

I have changed in my thinking about caring presence by taking more chances to open myself to be with clients. So often I have avoided caring situations because there is not enough time.

I value a caring presence and realize the many opportunities to participate in this process. I will now look for the call from others. The experience is a valuable one, and seeking it out can only enhance my feelings of well-being within myself.

I now know that I am capable of showing others that I care and that I can do it well.

I definitely have changed in my thinking of a caring presence. I realize now that it is truly my choice. I've always felt it in the back of my mind but never really paid attention to it. I hope to organize my practice so that I can incorporate more caring presence situations.

When the descriptions of caring presence were read, it made me feel proud to be a nurse. Very often we become tied up in paperwork, power struggles, and red tape in our own struggle to give good nursing. It's these types of problems that make me want to leave nursing. When the situations were read in class, it made

me recall my own caring presence situation and made me feel good.

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This teaching strategy helps students explicate and expand on their understanding of living a caring presence in coming to know esthetics in nursing. Roberts believes that caring in nursing practice often lies hidden and that the characteristics of caring need to be uncovered so that they can be taught, rewarded, and recognized as contributing to successful nursing.¹² The teaching strategy described in this article uncovers the living of a caring presence for students through representing, interpreting, and envisioning. The method enables students to grow in their understanding of caring and to appreciate the importance of a caring presence in nursing practice.

Dickelmann¹³ identifies three conversations central to a revolution in nursing education as care, dialogue, and practice.¹² The described strategy is grounded in the student's lived experience of caring for another in a nursing practice situation. In the dialogue, students were actively involved in seeing, hearing, and feeling what was represented in their own and in their classmates' caring-presence stories, seeking to understand the meaning interpreted about a caring presence and open to the many possibilities in envisioning the not yet in nursing practice. In walking with the students into and through their stories, the teacher-student learning process became an open exploration of what it means to live a caring presence with another. May states, "The transformation of the other is also a transformation of ourselves."^{5(p145)} In the rhythmical, open interchange, both students

and teacher came to know the explicit and tacit meanings associated with a caring

presence that unfolded in the enhancement of esthetic knowing.

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