

## Article

# Art And Science in the Practice of Nursing

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### Abstract

*Nursing is an art and a science. Issues derived from this statement stems from the definitions and descriptions of the terms “art” and “science” Historical and contemporary contexts dictate their meanings influencing its value in the practice of nursing. Advancing the concept of art and science as a unified formula for understanding nursing and its practice is crucial to the appreciation of nursing practice as a valuable aspect in the attainment and maintenance of human health and well-being.*

**Keywords:** Art; Science; Nursing

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Art arises from the immediate embodied grasp of the situation, the tools or instruments with which the artist works, and the intuitive knowing of what is to be created in the act. Original art/act arises from a non-discursive, aesthetic knowing that is unique to the moment (Chinn, 1994, p. 24-25).

### Introduction

Nursing is an art and a science. As descriptors of professional nursing, the reference to art and science is often uniquely understood as the visualization of practice reflecting human care. These views influence many truths about professional nursing practice grounded in nursing science. Science and art are inseparable. Truths about human beings as persons are often known through art.

From a positivistic and empiricist view, the reality about human beings is known from truths that are realistically presented. These truths are objectified and communicated through visualizations - as artwork and through sounds as music. Artists have long demonstrated the values of communicating the truth. Versions of human beings are visually illustrated to 'look alive and like the original' even in death (as expected of bodies for viewing as part of the funerary ritual) all because of the expertise of artists. Similarly, musicians allow us to reach the deep recesses of our emotions through their music - the artful engagement of communicating without words.

In nursing, however; the historical understanding of nursing arts has been otherwise. For example, nursing arts were traditionally exhibited as maintaining balance when using

body movement particularly when replacing patient's bed linens, holding equipment such as bed pans, or the use of technological materials such as the preparation of adhesive tape strips to anchor intravenous needles, etc. Nursing arts were studied in Nursing Arts Laboratories or Rooms, where nursing procedures were demonstrated and honed. This was where artistic illustrations of nursing arts were learned and the mandate to demonstrate competent 'procedural illustrations' of skills for successful practice. However, today, this is not what all nursing arts and knowledge are all about?

### The Art and Science of Knowing in Nursing

The focus of nursing is the person. Popular global nursing continues to emphasize the process of knowing persons with the view of human beings as organ systems, such as the circulatory system, cardiac system, etc. This view perpetuates the understanding that nursing knowledge of human beings is based on the knowledge of human beings as composite parts that persons are made up of parts - and that completing the whole person is a nursing practice mandate. Such a view makes nurses think that a human being without a leg, such as Paul McCartney's ex-wife, (a contestant in Dancing with the Stars), is not a whole person - therefore can be considered an artificial being, and likewise is not a person. Nevertheless, it is obvious that indeed Paul McCartney's former wife is a human being complete with parts although she has a replacement mechanical part that illustrates her seeming completeness.

This paper attempts to reinvigorate the debate on the realities of the arts and science in Nursing. It focuses on the application of the process of knowing in nursing grounded not only on the positivist views, but in the human science philosophical perspective, and of nursing as a professional practice with a substantive body of knowledge that is science of nursing.

As nursing is both a science and an art, clarifying the conception of nursing as an art is critical to the understanding of nursing as a science. How are the art and science of nursing understood from a disciplinary and professional practice view? Conceptions of nursing as art have gained fame to the extent that debates continue to flourish about the appropriate existence and role of nursing art in appreciating the substantive focus of nursing. Nursing as a fine art - the practice of nursing arts as skills and knowledge, and the expression of nursing in artistic or aesthetic ways are popular versions of these conceptions.

The perspective that the practice of nursing, although grounded in an educational process of the natural sciences such as anatomy and physiology, is in essence the artful expression of knowing the substantive focus of the science of nursing – advancing the process of knowing of persons as participants in their care, rather than as objects of our care is essential. Clarifying this argument includes referencing philosophies of science from a history of science view of the logical positivists to the aesthetics of knowing and understanding the other within the views of postmodernism and human science (Silva

& Rothbart, 1984). Furthermore, this paper ultimately aims to demonstrate that nursing art cannot be separated from nursing science and that the appreciation of nursing as art and science is appropriate and contemporary.

Like other health care professions such as medicine that is learned from the view of persons as composite parts (e.g., as illustrated by the art of da Vinci - the visualization of the anatomical parts through dissection), Nursing has also focused its knowing of persons through sensory data. However, as a human science, contemporary global nursing needs to refocus the study of Nursing towards appreciating persons as more than and different from the sum of the composite parts, and of nursing practice as the process of knowing persons who are participants in their care rather than as objects of our care. Understandably, nursing is grounded in science although as a professional practice, the professed definition is almost often that it is an art and a science. Even the order of these two seemingly dichotomous terms as used in nursing is very telling - that in fact nursing is an art as well as a science. In these chaotic times of contemporary nursing, the debate about its ontological value and praxis is more pronounced. Eventually, the question is raised, “Can there be healthcare without nursing, and if so, why?”

#### **Art and Wholeness of Persons**

Chinn (1994) declared that “art is not something that stands in opposition to science: it is part of science – indeed, it is part of all human experience. Art expresses

what words usually fail to express. Art brings wholeness to human consciousness” (p. 20). Nursing is an art and as such, many definitions of art are claimed to define the art of nursing. While this version of art ‘of’ nursing is important to nursing, it is argued here that indeed, it is not the art ‘of’ nursing that is crucial to nursing; rather it is the art ‘in’ nursing. However, what is the difference? Two critical ideas and thoughtful foci must be considered: that art is an expression (Collingwood, 1958), a way of communicating that which cannot be articulated - in words; and that art is a rigorous process of expression that demands critical knowing so that which needs to be expressed is clearly communicated. How can these two ideas be advanced and communicated? How can the story of the ‘nursing occurrence’ be told, and thus communicated and understood?

Boykin and Schoenhofer (2001), in their theory of Nursing as Caring have expressly described this condition in what they called ‘nursing situation’ This nursing situation is where all nursing occurs. Nursing situation is the “shared lived experience in which the caring between nurse and nursed enhances living caring and growing in caring” (p. 201). The appreciation of a nursing situation as the place ‘where all nursing occurs’ is essential. However, it is the understanding of nursing as a discipline and a profession, the focus of nursing practice, and of caring as the essence of nursing that dictates the critical understanding of nursing situations are where all nursing occurs. In this nursing situation, calls and responses for nursing are heard and

shared between the nurse and the person being nursed. Nurturing the wholeness of persons is the essence of nursing. It is through caring in nursing that this nurturance can be celebrated, supported and affirmed as expressions of the hopes, dreams, and aspirations of living caring and growing in caring. In the unfolding of this nursing situation, the process of nursing is lived meaningfully as knowledgeable practice grounded expressly as caring in nursing.

### **Aesthetic Expressions: Communicating Nursing in Practice**

Aesthetic expressions can be understood in three ways: 1) Giving voice to experiences in order to understand the humanness of persons, 2) Visualizing the meaning of the experience, and 3) Articulating experiences through stories.

A major challenge for scholars of nursing is to consider not whether nursing is a fine art, but whether it is a fit object of aesthetic appreciation, what might constitute such an appreciation, and whether an aesthetic appreciation of nursing is of any value (Wainwright, 2000, p. 753). LeVasseur (๑๙๙๙) declared that expression begins with turmoil and that it can become a productive ferment when something is at stake for the person. When people are staked in the situation, they are motivated to clarify and deepen their understanding. The successful result is an experience; a deeply felt, conclusive, and integrated whole. Its failure, similarly, would be a failure of experience and understanding.

Chinn (1994) describes the relationship between art and science in nursing best when she declared that art of nursing is “the art/act of the experience-in-the-moment. It is the direct apprehension of a situation, the intuitive and embodied knowing, that arises from the practice/praxis of nursing” (p. 24). Therefore, how are nurses to understand a person? How do nurses know what a person is? How can the nurse know contemporary nursing as knowing persons?

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## Conclusion

This article provides some clarifications to the terms art and science in nursing, particularly its influence on understanding contemporary nursing practice. It is hoped that this article will enhance a greater understanding of the art and science in nursing – focused on knowing the whole person and communicating this knowing through the art and science of nursing.

## ศิลป์และศาสตร์ในการปฏิบัติทางการพยาบาล

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### บทคัดย่อ

การพยาบาลเป็นศิลป์และศาสตร์ บทความนี้ให้เนื้อหาสาระเกี่ยวกับความหมายของคำว่า “ศิลป์” และ “ศาสตร์” ทั้งบริบทในอดีตและปัจจุบันซึ่งมีอิทธิพลต่อคุณค่าในการปฏิบัติทางการพยาบาล แนวคิดของการรวมศิลป์และศาสตร์เข้าด้วยกันเพื่อให้เข้าใจการพยาบาลและการปฏิบัติ เป็นสิ่งที่สำคัญต่อการปฏิบัติทางการพยาบาลที่มีค่าในการเข้าถึงและคงไว้ซึ่งสุขภาพและสุขภาวะของบุคคล

คำสำคัญ: ศิลป์; ศาสตร์; การพยาบาล

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