

Copyright is owned by the Author of the thesis. Permission is given for a copy to be downloaded by an individual for the purpose of research and private study only. The thesis may not be reproduced elsewhere without the permission of the Author.

EXPERT PUBLIC HEALTH NURSING PRACTICE:

A COMPLEX TAPESTRY

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements
for the degree
of Master of Arts in Nursing
at Massey University

Leonie Gallaher

1997

ABSTRACT

Patricia Benner's seminal work, *From Novice to Expert* (1984), can be considered the starting point for ongoing nursing research that has sought to describe and understand expert nursing practice.

A review of the nursing literature revealed a gap in the research based knowledge relating to expert nursing practice from a New Zealand and community health nursing perspective.

This study used Heideggerian phenomenology, as this methodology has been interpreted and utilised by Benner, to examine the phenomenon of expert public health nursing practice within a particular New Zealand community health setting. Narrative interviews were conducted with eight identified expert practitioners who are currently practising in this specialty area. Data analysis led to the identification and description of themes which are presented as the research findings, supported by paradigm cases and exemplars.

Four key themes were identified. These seemed to capture the essence of the phenomenon of expert public health nursing practice as this was revealed in the practice of the research participants. The themes describe the finely tuned recognition and assessment skills demonstrated by these nurses; their ability to form, sustain and close relationships with clients over time; the skilful coaching undertaken with clients; and the way in which they coped with the dark side of their work with integrity and courage. It was recognised that neither the themes nor the various threads described within each theme exist in isolation from each other. Each theme is closely interrelated, and integrated into the complex tapestry of expert public health nursing practice that emerged in this study.

Although this research supports and elaborates upon many of the findings from published studies that have explored both expert and public health nursing practice, differences were apparent. This suggests that nurses should be cautious about using models or concepts developed in contexts that are often vastly different to the New Zealand nursing scene, without carefully evaluating their relevance.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am very grateful for the support and encouragement I have received with this study over the past two years, and wish that I could record here the numerous contributions made by friends, family, colleagues and fellow masters students. There are some people whose contribution has been vital to the completion of this study and it gives me pleasure to be able to formally acknowledge them now.

* To the public health nurses who were the participants in this study. It was through your willingness to articulate and share narratives from your practice that the vision for this study became a reality. I hope I have been able to do justice to your stories.

* To the Gallaher 'men' for their love, support and understanding.

* To my thesis supervisors, Dr Jan Rodgers, whose wisdom and clarity of thought gave direction to the initial phase of this journey, and Dr Judith Christensen, whose persistent questioning and high standards were invaluable as the journey progressed towards its destination.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT	ii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	iii
EXPLANATION OF TERMS	viii
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW	1
CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW	7
The research programme of Patricia Benner	7
Commentaries on the work of Patricia Benner	13
Public health nursing practice	15
Expert nursing practice	16
Nursing narratives and expert nursing practice	18
Summary	20
CHAPTER THREE: THE RESEARCH PROCESS	21
Research Methodology:	21
History and underlying assumptions of Heideggerian phenomenology	21
Heideggerian phenomenology as interpreted and utilised by Patricia Benner	24

Critiques of Benner's approach	25
Rationale in selecting Heideggerian phenomenology	27
Research Method:	28
Participant selection	28
Description of participants and environment	29
Data collection	30
Data analysis	32
Ethical considerations	34
Credibility of findings	36
The Research Outcome:	38
CHAPTER FOUR: DELVING BENEATH THE SURFACE	39
Recognising that it is seldom simple	40
Seeing the full picture	46
Discussion	49
Summary	53
CHAPTER FIVE: WATCHFUL JOURNEYING	54
Forming relationships	55
Sustaining relationships over time	59

Closing with care	67
Discussion	68
Summary	73
CHAPTER SIX: MOVING TO THE CLIENT'S RHYTHM	74
Coaching in harmony	75
Focusing on the everyday	81
Valuing and supporting change	84
Discussion	87
Summary	89
CHAPTER SEVEN: COPING WITH THE DARK SIDE	91
Keeping the child at the centre of the web	92
Maintaining personal safety	96
Walking along an ethical path	100
Discussion	103
Summary	107
CHAPTER EIGHT: DISCUSSION	108
Summary of the research outcome	108
Relationship of research outcome and selected nursing literature	111

Implications for nursing practice	118
Implications for nursing education	120
Implications for nursing research	122
Limitations of the study	123
Value of the study for the researcher	124
Conclusion	125

APPENDICES:

Appendix 1: Information sheet for research participants	126
Appendix 2: Consent form for research participants	128
Appendix 3: Interview probes	129
Appendix 4: Domains and competencies of nursing practice as described by Patricia Benner in <i>From Novice to Expert</i> (1984)	130
REFERENCES	133

EXPLANATION OF TERMS

The following conventions have been used in the presentation of these research findings.

<i>italics</i>	the words used by the study participants themselves, including paradigm cases, exemplars and quotations longer than two lines
" "	single words, or short phrases/sentences used by the research participants that appear in the body of the text.
' '	words developed by the researcher or other authors.
...	intervening material within a paradigm case or exemplar that is omitted because it is not directly related to the issue being discussed.
()	this denotes a cultural group, language or place used in the paradigm or exemplar that, if used, would have had the potential to identify the research participants or their clients.
names	personal names of research participants or of the people whose stories the nurses used to describe their practice, have been changed, and pseudonyms used.
client	an individual person, family or school who are the focus of the interactions with the public health nurse in a particular situation. The text clarifies the meaning of the term.
gender	throughout the research report the feminine pronoun is used to refer to the research participants because all the participants were female.