

FEATURE ARTICLE

Philosophical Foundations of Nurse Research: Advancing Knowledge and Addressing Everyday Challenges Through Reflective Praxis

Ariene V. Erie, MAN, RN¹

Abstract

The philosophical basis of nursing research is simply about increasing our knowledge and addressing everyday challenges through reflective thinking. This article explored the fundamental principles that inform nursing research and stresses nurse researchers' vital role in meeting everyday challenges. By employing classic philosophical concepts and contemporary ways of knowing, this article explained how individual beliefs, conceptions about truth, and reflections on self had contributed to knowledge development. To put it plainly, this article is about the story of a nurse researcher and the illustration of how a nurse's philosophy impacts research and consequently contributes to the development of nursing science. Instead of regarding this process as a quest for the ultimate truth, this article recognized the evolving process of interacting with fluid knowledge to advance nursing practice and do well in society.

Keywords: *Nursing philosophy, self-reflection, nursing research, truth, ways of knowing, societal change, qualitative research*

Introduction

At its most fundamental level, science, compassion, and research in nursing are about more than intellectual development; these are about the constant pursuit of meaning in our human experience. In nursing, knowledge is not something abstract that exists outside of our experience; it evolves through reflective experience with the facts of life, health, and care. Therefore, the primary objective of nursing research is to generate knowledge that informs practice, addresses current societal problems, and promotes genuine change.

This article provides a philosophical discussion of how knowledge is produced in nursing while emphasizing the central role that philosophical inquiry plays in informing the perspectives and approaches of nurse researchers. It is based on classical philosophical traditions and contemporary frameworks to highlight how the pursuit of truth, grounded in human experience, becomes a moral imperative and an academic endeavor. Also, it highlights the value of personal experiences as significant precursor of critical reflective views, that improve nurse's performance of social roles of care (Ng et al., 2020).

Philosophy and the Process of Knowledge Generation in Nursing

Knowledge is crucial in addressing healthcare issues in the real world. However, no less significant is how knowledge is produced. The method by which knowledge is produced within nursing research is significantly shaped by the researcher's philosophical stance. Philosophical questioning in nursing is not a matter of abstract thinking

but a reflective consideration of the assumptions, beliefs, and values underpinning practice and research.

Nurse researchers must recognize that knowledge is naturally complex, resulting from many lived experiences and particular contexts. To understand the nature of truth, one must constantly question assumptions, probe belief systems, and examine conclusions derived from such process. This philosophical exploration is bound up in intrinsic questions regarding existence, knowledge, and action, constituting the central values that constitute a nurse scholar's identity.

As Heraclitus pointed out, "change is the only constant in life," which translates to truth not being permanent (Cartwright et al., 2021). Thomas Aquinas' conception of the notion that "Veritas est adaequatio rei et intellectus" ("truth is the alignment of the intellect with reality") supports this concept—truth changes as our reality does (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, 2002). Our philosophical convictions must be adaptive and dynamic to the constantly changing healthcare landscape to generate pertinent, adaptive, and transfigurative knowledge.

Personal Philosophy and the Moral Imperative of Inquiry

My philosophy as a nurse researcher is firmly grounded in the belief that one has a moral obligation to contribute to society's welfare. Truth, to

¹ Faculty Member, Former Curriculum Chair, BSN Program, Western Mindanao State University; PhD Student, College of Nursing, University of the Philippines Manila; Email: erie.ariene@wmsu.edu.ph

me, is meaningful only when it reflects the actual experiences of people and communities. When a newborn dies due to preventable conditions, when nurses are not paid properly, or when students suffer because of learning gaps, those moments tell us that the things we take for granted in healthcare are usually incomplete and require us to go back.

The methodologies we employ must be appropriate for our aims. Applying objective, empirical methods based on positivism, rationalism, or pragmatism is sometimes practical. At other times, we must resort to techniques such as phenomenology, hermeneutics, social theory, or feminist research to fully understand patients', caregivers', and communities' subjective and frequently neglected experiences. That is why philosophical pluralism is crucial—each approach must be carefully chosen depending on the aim of the inquiry, the setting, and the ethical considerations at stake. Nevertheless, critical thinking should be exercised to ensue relevant expansion of nursing's focus on social justice (Reimer-Kirkham & Browne, 2006).

Reflexivity and Scientific Integrity in Nursing Research

Reflexivity is an essential component of qualitative research that challenges researchers to continually consider how their values, beliefs, and social experiences informing the research process and its context, consequently increasing the understanding and credibility of research findings (Dodgson, 2019). Reflexivity highlights the significance of humility and recognizes that knowledge is always partially neutral and incomplete. As nurse scientists, we must participate in self-reflection and critically examine the assumptions within our discipline to enhance our practices and raise the level of care that we deliver.

Science in nursing reaches across several disciplines. Pure science is about producing general knowledge, applied (or soft) science looks towards beneficial outcomes, and human science is primarily about quality improvement. Nursing studies frequently travel these several regions, gaining from testable and sound measures and being rational and sensitive to context. The intensity of scientific inquiry should always be accompanied by a compassionate awareness of what it is to be human.

The Lifelong Commitment to Transforming Society

Throughout the ages, nursing scholars have had a critical role in influencing nursing philosophy as both a humanistic science of caring and as a discipline rooted in humanism and the very nature of personhood (Stewart, n.d.). The application of various nursing theories promotes holistic and ethical care as central to nursing identity (Grand Canyon University, 2025). These philosophical underpinnings prompt us to ensure that our research approaches are guided by theories, yielding evidence and maintain dignity, justice, and the welfare of society (Younas & Quennell, 2019).

Nursing research is, then, a lifelong path. It is a commitment to challenging the way things are, expanding our knowledge of truth, and developing innovations that address human needs. As researchers, we must seek answers and continually ask ourselves: What is the most pertinent truth at this time? This openness to change, complexity, and context propels our profession forward.

Conclusion

Nurse researchers inhabit a unique position where practice, philosophy, and science intersect. Our philosophical principles shape how we understand reality, address problems, and generate knowledge. In an ever-changing, complex world, our practice must be marked with fierce allegiance to reflexivity, ethical investigation, and transformative action. In the end, research in nursing is not merely about generating knowledge. It is an ethical and social undertaking to promote the welfare of people, communities, and the nursing profession.

References

- Catwright, M., Mark, J., Costa, D., and Wasson, D. (2021). 20 Ancient Greek Philosophers and their biographies. GreenHighDefinition. <https://www.greecehighdefinition.com/blog/2021/4/30/the-greek-philosophers>
- Dodgson, J. E. (2019). Reflexivity in qualitative research. *Journal of Human Lactation*, 35(2), 220–222. <https://doi.org/10.1177/089033419830990>
- Grand Canyon University. (2025). Nursing Theory. Grand Canyon University. <https://www.gcu.edu/blog/nursing-healthcare/nursing-theory>
- Ng, S. L., Mylopoulos, M., Kangasjarvi, E., Boyd, V. A., Teles, S., Orsino, A., Lingard, L., & Phelan, S. (2020). Critically reflective practice and its sources: A qualitative exploration. *Medical Education*, 54(4), 312–319. <https://doi.org/10.1111/medu.14032>
- Reimer-Kirkham, S., & Browne, A. (2006). Toward a Critical Theoretical Interpretation of Social Justice Discourses in Nursing. *Advances in Nursing Science*. <https://doi.org/10.1097/00012272-200610000-00006>
- Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy. (2002). The correspondence theory of truth. <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/truth-correspondence/>
- Stewart, M. (n.d.). Philosophy of nursing. In *Philosophy of Nursing* (Chapter 3, pp. 101–120). Jones & Bartlett Learning. https://samples.jblearning.com/9781284152913/9781284152913_CH_03_101_120.pdf
- Younas, A., & Quennell, S. (2019). Usefulness of nursing theory-guided practice: an integrative review. *Scandinavian journal of caring sciences*, 33(3), 540–555. <https://doi.org/10.1111/scs.12670>

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Ariene V. Erie, RN, MAN, is a faculty member at the College of Nursing, Western Mindanao State University (WMSU), where she previously served as the curriculum chair for the Bachelor of Science in Nursing (BSN) program. She earned her BSN degree (Cum Laude) from WMSU and completed her Master of Arts in Nursing, major in Leadership and Management, at the University of the Philippines Open University. She is currently pursuing her PhD in Nursing at the University of the Philippines Manila. A registered nurse with nearly a decade of clinical experience, her practice has been primarily in perioperative nursing and, more recently, in neonatal intensive care. She teaches courses in Transcultural Nursing, Bioethics, Health Education, and Critical Care Nursing. Her research interests focus on learning environments, health culture, and healthcare disparities.