

## Mindfulness and Aesthetic Works for Learning Caring in Nursing

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### Author Biography

Kelly Dyar, Ed.D, RN, CNN, CNE, is an Assistant Professor of Nursing at the University of West Georgia. Her research focuses on military veterans as students and the incorporation of caring science and aesthetics into nursing curricula. In 2017 she received the Doctoral Research Award from the National League for Nursing and the Southern Nursing Research Society and was the 2019 recipient of the DAISY faculty award. Her professional work includes serving on the executive board of the Georgia Association for Nursing Education as the organization's current President-Elect.

The public often views nurses as caring. However, caring can be an abstract and challenging concept for nursing students. Thus, I set a goal of incorporating content and activities to aid nursing students in understanding and integrating caring into their professional practice. In this essay, I describe the incorporation of activities to meet this goal. These activities include a caring theory, mindfulness, and aesthetic works that aid nursing students in learning the concept of caring.

Nursing is a caring and theory-based profession. For this reason, I incorporated content on caring into a Professional Nursing Concepts 2 (NURS3102) course. In this course, students explore nursing professionalism through multiple concepts such as ethical and legal issues, communication, and teamwork. I incorporate the concept of caring through Jean Watson's theory of human caring. Watson (2008) is a nursing theorist and focuses on caring within nursing practice. Widely adopted by nursing programs and healthcare facilities, this theory encourages nursing behaviors such as caring for self and others, practices of lovingkindness and equanimity, and using multiple ways of knowing (Watson, 2008). This theory also encourages mindful practices as a way of knowing ourselves, which then enhances our ability to know and appreciate the humanity of others.

To be consistent with the caring theory and to provide an opportunity to practice mindfulness, I begin the course with a mindful exercise. Watson describes nursing as similar to an orange in which the center, or core, is the enduring and unchanging component of nursing that includes caring and the art of nursing practice. The peel, or trim, is the outward, more visible and changing component of nursing, such as technology and specialization. After explaining the idea of trim and core, I offer the students an orange and invite them to participate in a mindfulness exercise. Although some students choose not to close their eyes, from observation, all students somehow engage with this activity, which integrates the caring theory and offers an example of self-care through mindfulness in a way that is brief yet

### Orange Mindful Meditation\*

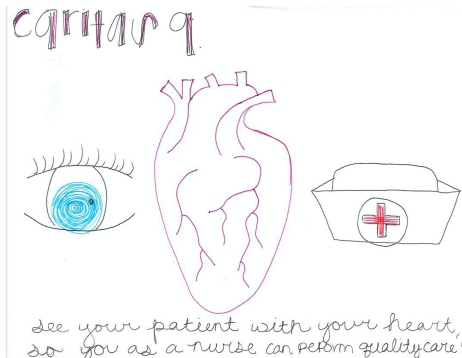
Adapted from Sitzman and Watson (2014)

*Consider the orange as the core and trim of nursing. Close your eyes, taking two slow, deep, cleansing breaths. Now, hold the orange, feeling the weight in your hand. Consider the color, similar to the sun, warming you and the earth. Consider the connections to yourself, others, the orange tree, and the earth. See the orange tree with the bright green leaves and the colorful fruit. Take a deep breath, seeing the tree offering oxygen for your survival. Exhale slowly, seeing your offering of carbon dioxide so the tree can flourish and produce the nourishing fruit. Now, imagine the feeling of opening the orange, the fragrance as the juice is revealed, and the flavor exploding on your tongue. Pause to enjoy these sensations. Open the fruit, peeling away the skin. Inhale the perfume of the fruit, allowing it to wash over you and fill you with joy and warmth. When you are ready, open your eyes and place a section of the fruit on your tongue, allowing it to linger before you begin to chew. As you chew, visualize the fruit nourishing your body to allow you to fulfill your purpose of learning, growing, and caring for yourself and others. When you are ready, take a few deep cleansing breaths and return your focus to the room.*

\*Invite students to participate in a way they feel comfortable.

powerful. As I observe students participating, I can see them begin to relax, smile, and enjoy the moment. Many students have commented that their anxiety lessens, and they enjoyed a few moments to focus on something meaningful. The mindfulness meditation exercise takes less than five minutes and allows the students to experience a moment of connecting with self, others, and the greater world. This exercise also prepares the students to participate in mindful moments throughout the course.

Mindful moments begin when the students enter the classroom. The class meets weekly, and I bring art supplies such as paper, markers, crayons, and colored pencils. I invite students to take whatever they would like to use during class, and I find that many students take paper and other items and draw or doodle during class.

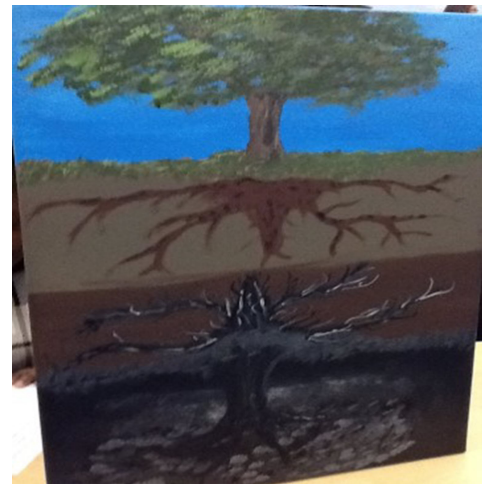


*Figure 1: Mindful Moment Example*

After covering the day's professionalism content, we explore a component of the caring theory. For example, we discuss how professionalism concepts and caring theory connects to nursing practice. After discussion, I give students time to engage in a mindful moment, guided by a prompt. The prompt encourages students to weave the professionalism concept with the caring theory. We agree to have a quiet room to allow mindful focus and respect for the creative processes of others. As music softly plays, students mindfully consider the prompt before using the art supplies to express their responses. Responses from students have included narrative stories, drawings, and poetry. These aesthetic works prepare students for the course capstone assignment.

The capstone assignment is an aesthetic project. Students synthesize course concepts with the caring theory by selecting any medium to express how caring and nursing professionalism are linked and related, demonstrate what they have learned, and show how they are beginning to view themselves as a caring professional nurse. The aesthetic projects reveal that students can demonstrate creativity and caring as they consider their influence on the profession of nursing. Students have created lyrical works, poetry, sculpture, videos, paintings, and textile works, demonstrating creativity and synthesis of knowledge. Students present their work in an art show format, and nursing faculty attend to view the projects.

Students share that these activities have been beneficial to their learning and understanding of the true essence of caring in nursing. After teaching this course using these activities for several semesters, I conducted an IRB-approved study to explore the students' perceptions of these activities related to their overall learning and, more specifically, learning how to be a caring nurse. Quantitative results indicated that the students perceive they can learn through aesthetic projects (Dyer & Dever, 2019). Qualitative feedback supported this data. Regarding learning in general, one student wrote, "It allowed us a repetitive foundation where we learned something and then created something. Our creation will help us individually remember about aspects of caring science." Another wrote their thoughts stating the best thing about the final project is having "...the avenue to refresh and harness the knowledge acquired over the course of the semester." Finally, one of the most compelling student comments indicates there is perhaps something self-actualizing about these activities in writing, "the assignments made me realize the importance of introspection and I learned more about the person I am and the person I am striving to be."



*Figure 2: Aesthetic Project Example*

Nurses must care for self and others. Learning a caring theory allows students to build a foundation for a caring practice. Engaging in mindfulness allows students to care for themselves in preparation for caring for others. Mindful moments provide students a moment to practice mindfulness and creativity in expressing their learning. Aesthetic projects provide a way for students to synthesize multiple concepts into a cohesive whole. Student perceptions of these projects have been favorable. These activities have enriched the course content as nursing students consider themselves as a caring individual and future caring professional.

### References

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