

Title:

SPECIAL SESSION: The Evolving World of Qualitative Methodology as a Tool for Nursing Knowledge Development

Presenter: Sally Thorne, PhD, RN, FAAN, FCAHS

Type:

Oral

Keywords:

nursing philosophy, nursing research and qualitative methods

Summary:

In this session, Dr. Thorne positions nursing's powerful contributions to qualitative methodology over past decades, illustrating how our discipline has extracted ideas from the social sciences, applied them to its own distinctive epistemological direction, and generated knowledge forms ideally suited to translation and integration into practice thinking.

Final Number:

K 14

Slot:

K 14: Saturday, 29 July 2017: 3:30 PM-4:00 PM

References:

Thorne, S. (2014a). Nursing as social justice: A case for the emancipatory thrust of conventional theorizing. In Kagan, P., Smith, M., & Chinn, P.L. (Eds.), *Philosophies and practices of emancipatory nursing: Social justice as praxis* (pp. 79-90). New York: Routledge

Thorne, S. E. (2014b). Applied interpretive approaches. In P. Leavy (Ed.), *The Oxford handbook of qualitative research* (pp. 99-115). New York: Oxford University Press.

Thorne, S., & Sawatzky R. (2014). Particularizing the general: Sustaining theoretical integrity in the context of an evidence-based practice agenda. *Advances in Nursing Science*, 27(1), 5-18.

Thorne, S. (2016a). *Interpretive description: Qualitative research for applied practice* (2nd edn.). New York: Routledge.

Thorne, S. (2016b). The status and use value of qualitative research findings: New ways to make sense of qualitative work. In Lipscomb, M. (Ed.), *Exploring evidence-based practice: Debates and challenges in nursing* (pp. 151-164). London & New York: Routledge.

Thorne, S., Stephens, J. & Truant, T. (2016). Building qualitative study design using nursing's disciplinary epistemology. *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, 72(2), 451-460.

Learning Activity:

LEARNING OBJECTIVES	EXPANDED CONTENT OUTLINE
The learner will be able to understand the rationale for distinct applied research approaches beyond the conventions developed in and for the social sciences.	Understand the distinction between technique and rationale in qualitative methodological convention. Recognize distinctions in purpose between the theoretical and applied disciplinary traditions.
The learner will be able to appreciate the explicit role that qualitative approaches can play within the ongoing evidence discourse.	Critically examine the nature of qualitatively derived claims relative to an evidence-informed agenda for practice knowledge development. Consider the potential of qualitative work in an era of heightened attention to person-centred care.

Abstract:

Since the early 1980s, when nurses began to take up the qualitative research methods of the social sciences as a way of engaging with certain forms of knowledge relevant to their practice knowledge development, there has been considerable tension between those who advocate conventional as opposed to the more applied forms of qualitative inquiry (Thorne, 2014b). Over time, the qualitative methodology conversation has become increasingly intertwined with the more philosophical debates within nursing thought, including the relationship between knowledge of the general and that which pertains to the particular, the standardizing forces of an evidence-based care agenda, the nature of nursing's distinctive epistemological position on matters of health and health care, and the moral implications of a social justice mandate (Thorne, 2014a, 2016b; Thorne & Sawatzky, 2014). Nurses have long wrestled with how to appease the extant methodological rules structures while simultaneously producing knowledge forms that have demonstrable relevance for the work of the discipline. And over recent decades, the communities of scholars oriented toward formal theorizing (such as conventional social science) and application (including nursing and the applied practice disciplines) are becoming increasingly differentiated (Thorne, 2016a).

It is exhilarating to stand witness to an era in which we are reaping the benefits of nursing's longstanding passion for philosophizing about the discipline as it is now being played out in the arena of applied qualitative methods development. Increasingly, we have access to new qualitative research design options that offer the "look and feel" of a legitimate nursing inquiry process rather than merely conforming to a set of rules and conventions developed for the purposes of other disciplinary knowledge projects. These newer applied approaches allow us to integrate our disciplinary intelligence and insight into the kinds of research questions we generate, guide us to determine study samples and data construction approaches that reflect the nature and diversity of the phenomena we wish to study, allow for critical, cross comparative, and deep interpretive analysis at a level reflective of a solid grounding in the body of knowledge

available to the discipline, and steer us toward articulating findings of a nature that can “speak” to the intended audience with disciplinary relevance and epistemological authority (Thorne, Stephens & Truant, 2016). In keeping with the nursing discipline’s deep commitment to knowledge that is “of use” to the profession, knowledge translation is therefore integrated into study design from the outset, such that the user community becomes an inherent stakeholder in the interpretive engagement of ideas throughout the entire process.

Qualitative research designed to align with the logic of the nursing discipline lends itself to a wide range of study forms, from the largescale formal inquiries that can enter such dimensions as patient perspective and human subjectivity into the evidence dialogue within a field to the smaller practice based kinds of studies in which teams of nurses build sensitivity, understanding and insight around the complexities of the clinical phenomena they encounter. As we continue to build our disciplinary sophistication around how we can know good qualitative research when we see it, and gain confidence in designing the kinds of qualitative studies that will be best suited to answering the questions our profession most urgently needs to ask, we are increasingly well positioned to play a leadership role in the evolving evidence-based practice discourse, thereby ensuring that patient voices and the capacity to individualize care remain -- long into the future -- a hallmark of what our nursing profession stands for.