

Poetic Forms: Shaping Aesthetic Knowing

The nuanced, artful processes of nursing practice are not easily articulated and risk being overshadowed by empirical forms of knowledge. Although there is agreement about the importance of aesthetic knowledge in nursing, guidance about its use in teaching and learning is limited. In this article, a learning activity is presented that uses poetics to open discussions about aesthetic knowing and ways of being that underpin artful nursing.

In nursing, aesthetic knowing involves connecting with meaning and immediate experience, which is unique for each person. Aesthetic knowing is described as “a direct understanding of what is significant and meaningful in the moment” (Chinn & Kramer, 2011, p. 10). Similarly, poetic approaches evoke ways of knowing beyond the literal and the singular. They invite “way[s] of representing holistically what might otherwise go unnoticed” (Butler-Kisber, 2002, p. 235).

Poetry in Action

The undergraduate Nursing Inquiry course at the authors’ institution uses a variety of poetic forms. Two types of poetry—haiku and adapted list poems—are particularly effective. Haiku is a short, nonrhyming poem consisting of three lines, with five syllables in the first line, seven syllables in the second line, and five syllables in the third line. Haiku is easy to understand, is nonthreatening in its simplicity, and can powerfully capture experience with few words. In a learning activity that accompanies readings on the art of nursing, students are instructed to begin with 3 minutes of free-writing in response to a sentence stem, such as “The art of nursing is....” Freewriting is open, non-stop writing without concern for grammar or sentence structure. Freewriting brings quiet attention to the activity and encourages creativity. When the writing period is completed, the haiku form (of 3 lines with 5, 7, and 5 syllables, respectively) is explained and presented visually. Students are then invited to create a haiku of “what the art of nursing means to you.” Example haikus from students are presented in the **Table** (with the students’ permission).

TABLE	
Examples of Haiku and List Poetry	
Haiku	List Poem
The Art of Nursing beauty in experience expect the unknown Adapting yourself through evocation of what cannot be seen The art of nursing an elegance of science is it born or taught? The art of knowing seeing people differently a way of being	Writing stems: 1. The color of nursing practice is..... 2. The sound of nursing is... 3. The season of nursing is... 4. If I described nursing as a musical instrument, I would say it was... 5. If it were a gemstone, it would be... 6. The shape of nursing is... 7. If I described nursing as a piece of clothing, I would say it was... 8. The texture of nursing is... 9. The smell of nursing is... 10. The price of nursing is... 11. Nursing tastes like... 12. Nursing happens when... Blue (of course). Gritty. And bitter-sweet. The song of human Being is oddly instrumental... ill timed, worth more than I can say—

List poems also feature an effective and straightforward form. Students are asked to quickly jot down responses to all 12 sentence stems prepared and read aloud by the instructor. Stems are designed to invite metaphorical expressions about a topic—in this case, the nature of nursing practice. Examples of sentence stems are included in the **Table**. Students then dwell on their list of words or short phrases. They have the freedom to leave their list as is or to select favorite words, rearrange their order, add other words, and punctuate their poem as desired.

To encourage reflection and dialogue about the process and learning from the activity, volunteers read aloud their poems, comment on the experience of writing (or

not writing), identify themes, and pose questions. This can be conducted in small or large groups. In the context of studying nursing knowledge and ways of knowing, debriefing often leads to discussion of the entwined relationship of knowing and feeling, the power of poetry and language, and the evocative nature of nursing practice.

Lessons Learned

Several lessons were learned about how to effectively use poetic activities. As with any learning activity, it is important to provide a clear rationale. The activity may be linked with course goals using questions such as:

- What is your experience, observation, or expectation of artful nursing?

- What can poetics teach us about alternatives to empirical knowledge?
 - How can thinking poetically (and otherwise creatively) support clinical practice and reflection?
 - How can aesthetic knowing help us attune to human experience that is both common and unique?
- Also key is engaged instructor involvement, short and flexible debriefings, and the freedom to adapt poetic forms. By using haiku

and list poetry, students are able to express their vision of, and future commitments to, their nursing practice. Poetry provides a useful approach to understanding aesthetic and nonliteral ways of knowing.

References

Butler-Kisber, L. (2002). Artful portrayals in qualitative inquiry: The road to found poetry and beyond. *Alberta Journal of Educational Research*, 48, 229-239.

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