



# Aesthetic expression of caring in nursing among Japanese undergraduate nursing students

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## ABSTRACT

**Background:** Caring is the heart of nursing. However, not many understand the significance of caring in nursing from the perspectives of undergraduate nursing students, especially in Japan.

**Aim:** To describe caring in nursing among Japanese nursing students as learned and communicated through their aesthetic expressions.

**Methods:** The study employed hermeneutic phenomenology. Sixty-one Japanese nursing students in their second year of baccalaureate degree studies participated. Constituting the data were art-based graphic expressions, such as drawings and written reflections on the drawings, as a response to the question of how the participants describe their meanings of caring in nursing. The thematic analysis method was used to analyze and interpret the data. The trustworthiness of the research was established following Lincoln and Guba's criteria.

**Findings:** Seven thematic categories were identified. These categories include (1) Engaging with others; (2) Knowing each other; (3) Being with other persons; (4) Nurturing intimate personal growth; (5) Supporting wholeness of persons; (6) Vacillating rhythm; and (7) Intensifying competency.

**Conclusion:** This study described the understanding of caring in nursing among undergraduate Japanese nursing students during their second year of study. The caring in nursing focused on reciprocal relationships, whole-person relating, and practice competency. Findings suggested that nurse educators should develop teaching-learning strategies for nursing students to continuously grow as caring persons.

## 1. Introduction

As a fundamental human need, caring is the heart of nursing. Nursing institutions take responsibility in teaching caring in their nursing education curricula. Some nursing schools also integrate caring concepts and theories as frameworks in their conceptualization of nursing through their visions and missions (Mahmoud and Schuessler, 2017). In Japan, caring in nursing has been taught as part of nursing theory and as an introduction to nursing since the first year of study in a bachelor program. A major nursing theory textbook by Tsutsui (2015) has introduced a couple of caring theories such as those formulated by Watson (1996), Leininger (1991), Swanson (1991), and Boykin and Schoenhofer (2001). However, in Japan, the teaching of caring education has not yet been fully adopted in the Nursing education model, or in the core curriculum for nurse education (Ministry of Education, Culture,

Sports, Science and Technology, 2017). The teaching methods and content are entrusted to individual universities.

Therefore, nursing education must be continually examined. Moreover, it is imperative to improve teaching strategies to prepare student nurses for nursing practice. Some studies surveyed student nurses' caring methods after undergoing nursing simulation teaching in the United States by using a quantitative research method (Dunnington et al., 2015; Eggenberger et al., 2012); whereas others surveyed caring behaviors of student nurses in Singapore (Loke et al., 2015), in China (Chen et al., 2018), and through a multi-country study in Nigeria, India, Greece, and the Philippines (Labrague et al., 2017). The measures of nursing students' caring behaviors were grounded on some theoretical framework on caring science, where the results informed scores of subscales that guide and illuminate improvements of student caring behavior.

Some qualitative studies described many different ways in which

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caring in nursing is understood. One example is a phenomenological study that described the meanings of caring among 21 nursing students in their 3rd semester of undergraduate studies at a university in Brazil. In this study, students wrote reports that conveyed their knowledge of the meanings of caring as “being with the other, presence, self-care, and taking care of themselves” (Sebold et al., 2016). Still, another qualitative study described the perceptions of caring among the 122 nursing students between the 1st and 4th year of study at a university in Greece, without using scientific knowledge or literature. This study revealed meanings of caring described as “helping, offering, health maintenance, disease prevention and health promotion, and biological and psychological support” (Petrou et al., 2017). Nevertheless, the student nurses' understanding of caring in nursing is based on knowledge provided by the curriculum as well as teaching strategies in each nursing institution, all of which may be influenced by the culture of each country.

From the review of the literature, Yasukata (2011, 2016) recommends adding caring course into the nursing education curriculum because there is no common understanding yet when it comes to caring in nursing in Japan. To know patients more deeply, nurses apply the caring theory in maternal nursing (Nishida, 2015) and community health nursing (Tada, 2014). Also, it is suggested that using caring theory for clinical training in the hospital enhances the nursing students' caring behavior for the benefit of patients (Hosokawa, 2000). Especially, including caring theory for the last round of clinical training—conducted during the 4th year of nursing education—which aims to integrate all knowledge, skills and attitudes in nursing practice, should help to promote caring education for Japanese nursing students (Nishida, 2016).

Understanding nursing students' concept of caring will assist nursing educators in planning and developing their nursing curricula to prepare the nursing students to become caring nurses. Interestingly, aesthetic expressions such as artwork are effective means of communicating a person's in-depth understanding of the meanings of caring. Barry (2001) explained that nursing students can use any art form and medium in their aesthetic expressions, e.g. dance, song, drawing, painting, photography, poetry, prose, or sculpture, or combinations. Additionally, expressing nursing through aesthetic projects provides the opportunity to advance a collective experience of caring as nursing students share their stories of caring with each other (Barry, 2001).

Aesthetic expressions have been used in art-based research approaches. Two such studies used graphic illustrations (drawings) to illuminate the experiences of nurses who cared for persons at the end of life (Kongsuwan and Locsin, 2010). Similarly, another study looked at the meanings of nurses grieving from patients' deaths (Betriana and Kongsuwan, 2019). In the latter study, illustrations (drawings) were analyzed to illuminate the experience. Recently, a study also analyzed the understanding of caring among 41 nursing students in their 2nd year of study in a university in Thailand. Guided by hermeneutics based on Gadamer's philosophy, the study examined the nursing students' drawn pictures, written reflections, and individual interviews (Kongsuwan et al., 2018). From the analysis, the study found different thematic categories of caring: knowledge, caring through a compassionate heart, and caring under professional obligations (Kongsuwan et al., 2018).

The arts-based approaches have potential to reach deep and complex understandings that limit communication in order to express meanings that could be inarticulate (Barone and Eisner, 2012). In order for nursing students to appreciate the significance of art-based approaches to educational research (Pentassuglia, 2017), they could use aesthetic expressions to help them communicate their understandings of caring in nursing. Aesthetic expressions by participants such as visual arts (drawing and painting), narrative, poetry, music, dance can be used as data in data generation process to convey truth or bring about self/other knowledge through multiple ways of knowing such as sensory, kinesesthetic and imaginary (Leavy, 2017).

Since studies on art-based research approaches in Japan are limited, aesthetic expressions will be useful in this study to reveal meanings of

caring in nursing. In addition, aesthetic expressions are influenced by cultural contexts, in that Japanese culture informs the thoughts and feelings of nursing students regarding caring in nursing.

## 2. Aim

To describe understandings of caring in nursing among Japanese nursing students as communicated through their aesthetic expressions.

## 3. Methods

### 3.1. Design

The study followed a qualitative design using hermeneutic phenomenology based on Gadamerian philosophy. Hermeneutic phenomenology provided the context of interpretation; the findings revealed the meanings of the experience of caring by students in nursing. The study applied the Gadamerian philosophical lens to analyze the illustrations drawn by the nursing students, which revealed their personal meanings of the experience of caring. Gadamer (2003) held that the artful expressions of human experience could be communicated or reflected in other ways besides oral or written words. Language shapes human experience through interpretation of meanings (Gadamer, 2003), which, in turn, reveal how nursing students understand caring in nursing, based on their experiences.

### 3.2. Setting

This study was conducted at a university in Japan in 2017. In this university, the Nursing Department offers a four-year bachelor's degree in nursing. Beginning in their first and second year in the program, the students learn concepts of caring science, specifically those drawn from the book “On Caring” by Mayeroff (1971), the theory of Nursing as Caring (Boykin and Schoenhofer, 2001), and the theory of Technological Competency as Caring in Nursing (Locsin, 2005).

### 3.3. Participants

Purposive sampling was used to recruit the participants. The participants were recruited through the following inclusion criteria: (1) the student must be older than 18 years old, and an undergraduate nursing student in the second year; and (2) the student must be willing and able to share their understanding of caring through drawing pictures and writing their descriptions. In this study, the researchers recruited sixty-one Japanese nursing students in the 2nd year of their bachelor's degree program. Their average age was 20 years old, comprising 1 male and 60 females. The participants did not have experience in clinical practice but they had hospital tour experience for 3 days as a part of course learning. Except three participants also worked part-time in clinical settings for four months.

### 3.4. Ethical considerations

This study was approved by the Institutional Review Board of a university in Japan. The researcher gathered the prospective participants in the classroom after class to explain the purpose of the study, its process, and its risks and benefits. The researchers were concerned about the dual agency inherent in the teacher and researcher role that may influence the teacher-learner relationship. To ensure that the students did not feel coerced to participate in this study, the teacher-researchers informed them that their participation, or lack thereof, will not influence their grades. The teacher-researchers also told the students that their participation will result in findings that should advance the general knowledge of nursing as a discipline and profession. Furthermore, the researcher clarified that the students had the right to choose whether they would participate in this study or not, and that they also had the

right to withdraw from the study without any consequences at any time.

The participants' agreement was obtained by written informed consent. This study did not pose direct risks to the participants, either physically or psychologically. All information obtained from the participants was kept confidential. The researcher did not use the participants' names. All data were kept in a secure place, which only the researcher can access. These data and personal information will be destroyed five years after completion of the study.

### 3.5. Data collection

The data in this study consisted of graphic illustrations and written descriptions reflecting the graphic illustrations. Drawing illustrations were the creative artwork and declared the embodied engagement of sensory and emotive behavior, which represented the participants' understanding of their experience (Pentassuglia, 2017). This process encouraged nursing students to freely express their thoughts and understandings of caring in nursing that they may find difficult to articulate in speech and writing (Barone and Eisner, 2012). Writing reflections on their illustrations allowed the students to describe and interpret their emotive expressions. The written reflective data were used to confirm the meanings in the graphic illustrations.

The study was conducted in a classroom after class. The data collection began with the researcher establishing a relationship with the participants. The researcher informed seventy-five of the details of this study by a researcher, after which sixty-one students agreed to participate. Subsequently, the researcher requested the participants to draw pictures of their experience of caring, and to describe how they understood caring in nursing. The researcher distributed papers and colored pencils among the participants. The students had 30 to 45 min to draw their pictures and write their reflections.

They were also given the following guide questions:

- 1) Please draw a picture describing your understanding of caring in nursing.
- 2) Please explain your drawing, in terms of your understanding of caring.

In the end, the researcher reminded the participants that they might contact them in the future to discuss the findings, so that the findings reflect the participants' meanings. Two students were contacted to clarify some unclear points in their reflections. Each student drew 1 drawing. Total was 61 drawing. The average length of written descriptions was 1 page of paper A4 size.

### 3.6. Data analysis

Galvin and Holloway's (2017) thematic analysis method for qualitative research guided this study's data analysis. No software was used in the data analysis. The illustrations and written reflections were analyzed manually by the three researchers, who are also nursing professors and experts in the field of qualitative studies. First, the researchers reviewed and familiarized themselves with each participant's data. Next, coding was performed by highlighting the words, phrases and sentences in all written data that reflected the meanings of caring; the researchers then came up with short labels or codes to describe their content. After that, all the data were collated into groups identified by codes. The researchers made a condensed overview of the main points and common meanings that recurred throughout the data. Next, the researchers identified patterns among codes, which they used to come up with themes. After comparing the themes, the researchers grouped them under thematic categories. Then, they reviewed the thematic categories to make sure that they accurately represented the students' meaning of caring in nursing. Finally, seven thematic categories were figured out and named. The researchers analyzed the illustrations by looking at their subjects and objects, colors, moods, letters, and links. The researchers

also checked the written descriptions of each drawing whether they reflected the pictures or not. After that, the researchers connected the illustrations with the relevant meaning of caring in nursing under each thematic category, which they used to support the textual findings that contributed to a greater appreciation of the meanings. Data sufficient is considered when sufficient information power is achieved by considering study aim, sample specificity, the quality of the dialogue between researchers and the participants, and the data analysis strategy (Malterud et al., 2015). Data sufficiency in this study was attained when the sufficient information power was reached by considering the study aim and data analysis strategy. The certain meanings or themes of the study began to repeat from the data analysis methods and met the study's aim.

### 3.7. Trustworthiness

The trustworthiness in this study was achieved by using four criteria formulated by Lincoln and Guba (1985). The four criteria for determining trustworthiness are credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability. This study used data triangulation of drawing and writing methods to establish credibility. The researchers explained the context of the terms teaching and learning caring in the study to enable someone interested to conclude whether transfer is possible or not. The researchers used audit trails to demonstrate the descriptions and meanings of caring. Other researchers followed the processes of the study and showed results that did not contradict the findings. All documents of this study and data analysis were demonstrated to the other researchers for confirmation.

## 4. Findings

There are seven thematic categories of caring in nursing derived from the participants' expressions: (1) Engaging with others; (2) Knowing each other; (3) Being with other persons; (4) Nurturing intimate personal growth; (5) Supporting wholeness of a person; (6) Vacillating rhythm; and (7) Intensifying competency.

### 4.1. Engaging with others

Caring is engaging with others. The participants understood caring in nursing as a process of the nurses' entering into a mutual relationship between patients, their families, and healthcare professionals in caring situations. As a participant reflected, "*Act as a bridge between patients and their families and doctors*" (Participant11). Another participant explained caring as "*Various vines intertwining reflect the relationship between the nurse and the patient, including the patients' families*" (Participant35). One participant viewed this process of engagement with others as one that needed trust and hope, as in this passage, "*Trust with light shining from the sun and fly with hope*," (Participant16) and "*Patients will not open themselves to the nurse if respect or trust is not in the relationship*" (Participant36). Fig. 1 depicts this category of meaning of caring as engagement with others. A participant who drew Fig. 1, she wrote that "*Heart is reflects the patient. The thread connecting the heart is to show that the patient is connected with others and not alone. It is important for nurses and families to collaborate together in the hope that the patient will recover*" (Participant56)

### 4.2. Knowing each other

Caring is knowing each other. The participants understood that the process of knowing persons was significant in caring. A participant wrote, "*It becomes possible for the patient and the nurse to carry out care by knowing each other well*" (Participant10). The nurses need to know themselves as caring persons and dedicating themselves in human caring. In this process, the nurses know the persons they are caring for by entering into a relationship with the patient and their family by being with them, talking to them, assisting them, and gathering information

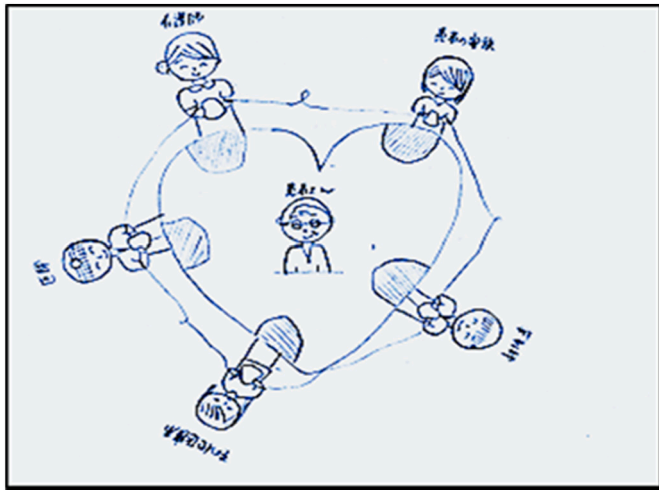


Fig. 1. Illustration of “Engaging with Others”, by Participant56.

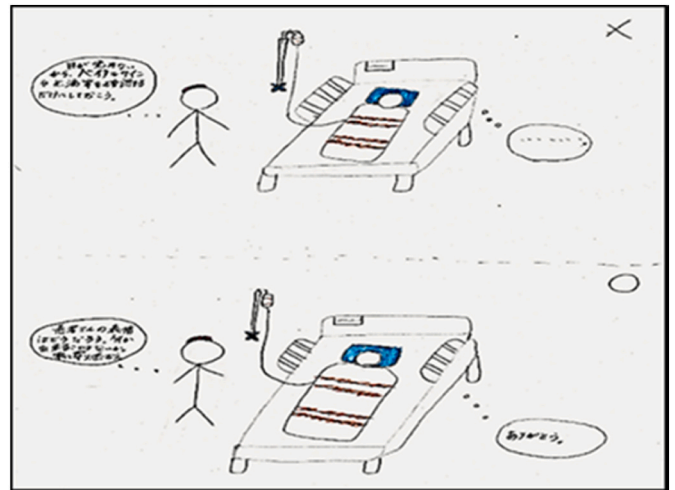


Fig. 3. Illustration of “Being with in Otherness”, by Participant49.

from them. One participant used the metaphor of a key to explain knowing persons, as in Fig. 2, “Find the key to open the patient in order to know him/her by talking to, assisting, and gathering information” (Participant37).

#### 4.3. Being with other persons

Caring is being with other persons. The participants understood that being with different persons such as patients and their family members also constituted caring in nursing. As a participant articulated, “Sometimes being with the family and the patients and relating together are expressions of caring” (Participant41). In this process, nurses communicate caring by valuing the other persons through gentle and heartfelt care, in order for them to retain their well-being. One participant supported this idea as they reflected, “Warmth and gentleness providing information, touching, and talking to patients and families who may have anxiety” (Participant26). Being with other persons does not require extensive conversations more than a nurse's physical presence. As a participant explained, “Even if there is no talking, by standing close to the patient, there is communication in the silence.” (Participant49). It works similarly as the idea of a “bee meets the flowers and watches their growth” (Participant61). Fig. 3 shows a nurse staying at a patient's bedside and communicating

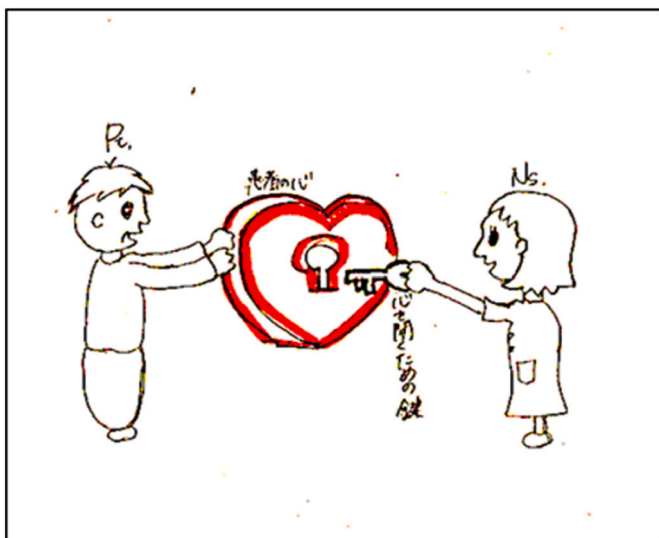


Fig. 2. Illustration of “Knowing Each Other”, by Participant37.

with them to represent caring as being with other persons.

#### 4.4. Nurturing intimate personal growth

Caring is nurturing intimate personal growth. Most participants elaborated their understanding of caring by drawing trees, flowers, and butterflies. The nurses water the trees and flowers, which symbolizes taking care of their patients (Fig. 4). Natural elements such as rain, soil, water, and insects are used as the ingredients of caring, constituting the nurse's knowledge in nurturing the persons. As a participant reflected, “Light, water, and soil are elements of life that nurses nurture as a provider of care” (Participant52). Another participant explained the idea through metaphors, “Rain and insects in the soil are like knowledgeable nurses who support growth of flowers, as much as growth of patients in caring” (Participant61). The participant held that by enabling the person to grow, the nurse grows as well, like butterflies. She wrote, “Butterflies are not only found on growing trees, but they themselves are also growing ⇒ this is the essence of caring.”

#### 4.5. Supporting the wholeness of a person

Caring is supporting the wholeness of a person. The participants viewed nurse's support of the patients as whole persons as significant. The nurses support the patients' spirits and help in providing them a fulfilling life. As a participant wrote, “Caring is supportive, boosting life and spirit.” (Participant32). They gained this reflection from their

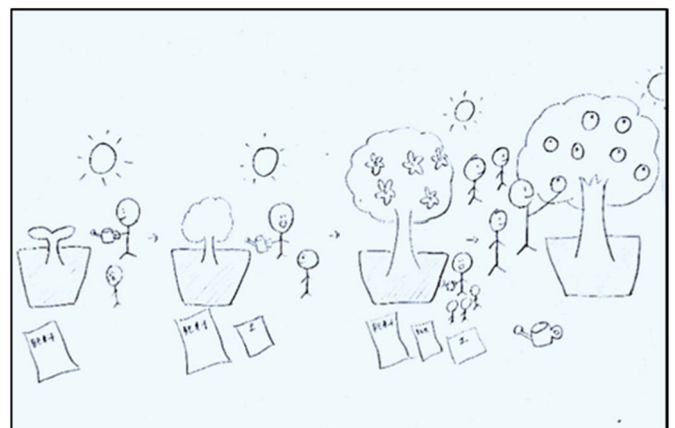


Fig. 4. Illustration of “Nurturing Intimate Personal Growth”, by Participant29.

drawing of a few small growing trees in a soil sac on a bamboo boat, receiving sunlight and little rain water. Caring as being supportive is the expression of giving love and energy to the patients, as in this explanation from one participant, “It expresses how the patient received various love and care from around him/her and became energetic” (Participant14). The nurse’s support of their patients’ will through understanding and respecting patients’ values as illustrated in Fig. 5 with the writing reflection that “People’s customs and values will be different from culture and from different countries and different environments. Caring is to know other people and listen to them without pressing your values on them. Not attach your own values”.

4.6. Vacillating rhythm

Caring can be performed following a vacillating rhythm. The participants understood that caring from nurses can be altered and flexible. The nurse must possess enough awareness to prioritize caring for different patients from moment to moment. However, they should be able to deliver care as soon as the patient needs it. Caring is like a flower blooming only at a certain time; the blooming flower represents the nurse delivering care in appropriate times. As a participant reflected, “Because flowers bloom for a certain time, it is important for nurses to care within the appropriate time.” (Participant35). Nurses can move in and out of the caring mode. They can wait to deliver care until the right time to do so; they know the right time to approach or keep away from the patients. One participant likened this process to the action of holding and releasing a hand (Fig. 6).

“The patients are first. You can reach out whenever the patient wants (hold a hand) ...when unnecessary, you can watch (release your hands) ...just the right distance between the patient and the nurse leads to caring.”

(Participant33)

4.7. Intensifying competency

Caring is intensifying competency. The participants reflected that nurses acquire necessary competencies through experience and knowledge. A participant supported this idea in their reflection, writing, “I think that the caring that nurses do requires health care knowledge and skills, as well as experiences to contact patients” (Participant6). Nurses grow when they gain valuable knowledge from encountering various caring experiences with patients. Another participant explained this idea using

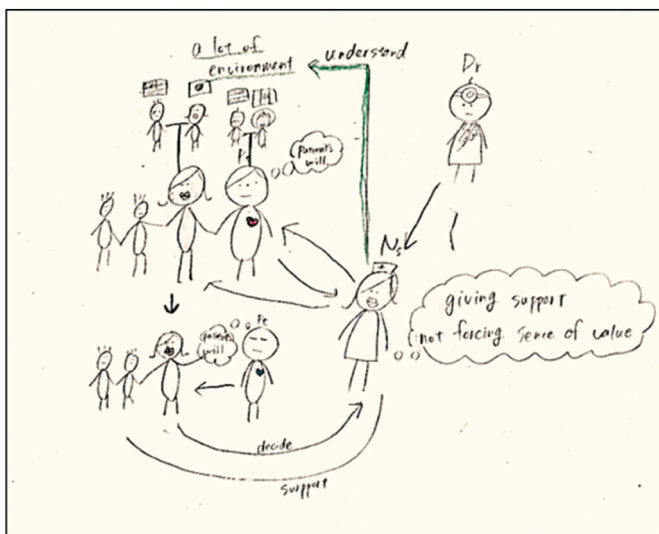


Fig. 5. Illustration of Supporting Wholeness of a Person, by Participant25.

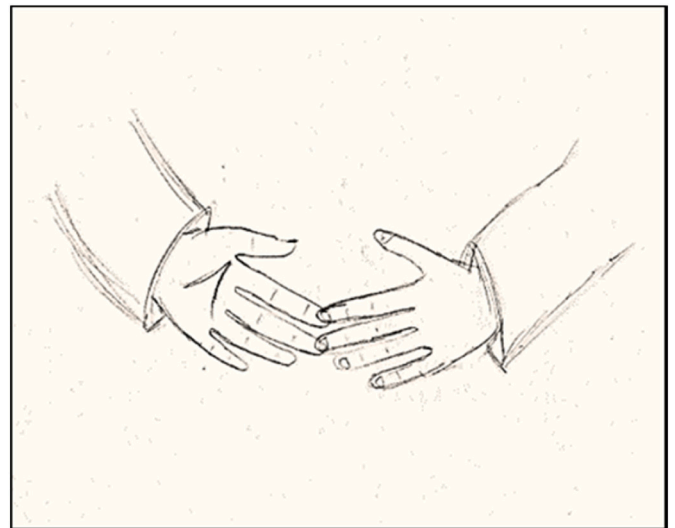


Fig. 6. Illustration of “Vacillating Rhythm”, by Participant33.

the metaphor of a tree spreading its branches. They compared a nurse working to increase their competency to a tree spreading its branches. The participant wrote,

“Many things are learned from patients through various lived experiences. Knowledge generated from these experiences increases and like the branches of the trees these grow and the tree looks wider. Similarly, like the nurses’ knowledge, the trunk and branches also expand to nourish the tree.”

(Participant15)

The nurses need to increase their nursing knowledge and skills continually, because patients always change. By caring for different patients, the nurse gains knowledge and skills through studying reliable evidence. As a participant reflected, “In order to deepen knowledge, it is important to learn every day” (Participant51). Fig. 7 represents the meaning of caring as a process of continually intensifying competency in order to understand patients deeply. This process enables a nurse to learn and grow.

5. Discussion

The findings presented seven thematic categories of the meanings of caring in nursing, derived from the understandings of 2nd year undergraduate Japanese nursing students, which consisted of the following:

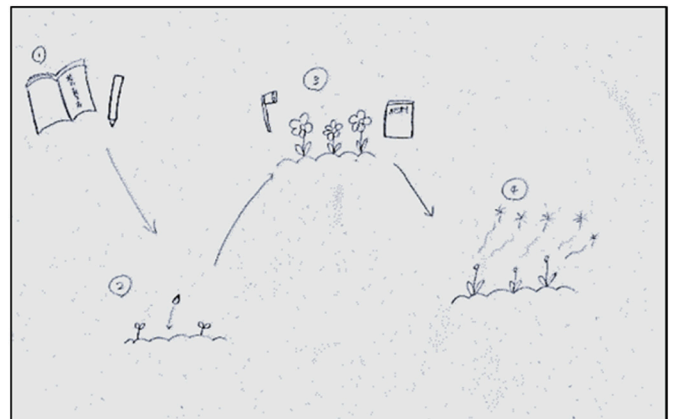


Fig. 7. Illustration of “Intensifying Competency”, by Participant11.

engaging with others, knowing each other, being with other persons, nurturing intimate personal growth, supporting the wholeness of a person, vacillating rhythm, and intensifying competency. These findings showed some similarities with relevant studies (Kongsuwan et al., 2018; Sebold et al., 2016). The meaning of “being with other persons” fits with the meanings of “being with the other” and “presence” found from a qualitative study of Sebold et al. (2016) among 3rd semester undergraduate nursing students in Brazil. Meanwhile, the meaning of “intensifying competency” is congruent with the idea “caring through knowledge” as described by 2nd year undergraduate Thai nursing students (Kongsuwan et al., 2018).

On the other hand, a qualitative study in Cyprus described perceptions of caring among nursing students in 1st – 4th year as “help, offer, health maintenance, disease prevention and health promotion, and provision of services, as well as biological and psychological support” (Petrou et al., 2017). These understandings show differences from this study, which revealed that caring is more related to empirical knowledge, health, and the role of nurses. In this study, caring is more allied to the connection between the nurses and persons being nursed.

The students' understanding of caring in nursing can be influenced by what they have learned in caring courses, and how they have learned them. Hence, the essence of teaching caring in this university was used to discuss the findings. Two caring theories—Nursing as Caring by Boykin and Schoenhofer (2001), and Technological Competency as Caring in Nursing (TCCN) by Locsin (2005)—were taught to the student nurses in their 1st and 2nd year, as they took the introductory nursing course, as well as courses in nursing theory. The students also learned the ingredients of caring formulated by Mayeroff (1971), and the four patterns of knowing identified by Carper (1978) in their study of the theory of Nursing as Caring, by reading level 1 scientific articles. Boykin and Schoenhofer (2001), and Locsin (2005) have grounded their theories on the caring science in nursing. The general theory of Nursing as Caring by Boykin and Schoenhofer (2001) is the basis of Locsin's theory, which emphasized the need for nurses to recognize and realize persons as constantly growing in their caring.

The strategies used in teaching included lectures on the pertinent theories, and using aesthetic expressions of caring (e.g. poems, drawings, etc.) as a source of knowledge into caring in order to explain nursing situations. Fifty-eight students never experienced caring in the clinical setting, while only three students used to work as clinical nurse assistants for four months. Thus, participants' knowledge of caring in nursing was mainly learned from classroom activities.

The findings showed that the students understood caring in nursing as the engagement between the nurse and the person being nursed (Mayeroff, 1971). Through this engagement, the students brought the most caring ingredients of knowing, alternating rhythm, patience, trust, respect, honesty, humility and hope into their relationship with patients. However, the findings did not reveal the aspect of courage in the relationship. The idea of “engaging with others,” as explored in this study, is grounded on the concept of *caring between* in the theory of Boykin and Schoenhofer (2001), where the nurse connects with the one nursed and shares their experience in *caring between*. Through this connection, a nursing situation occurs, which is the source of knowledge of caring. In the nursing situation, the nurse brings the caring ingredients defined by Mayeroff (1971) and the four patterns of knowing (Carper, 1978) to bear on their caring practice. Likewise, “engaging with others” can be linked to the process of “participative engagement” in the TCCN (Locsin, 2005), where the nurse and the patients collaborate in nursing practice.

The idea of “knowing each other” accords with the four patterns of knowing (Carper, 1978); namely, empirics, aesthetics, ethics, and personal knowing. The nurse uses empirics to gather information from the patients. Aesthetics functions to trigger compassion in the nurse so that they want to know the patient's needs. The nurse relies on ethics to cultivate self-dedication and the desire to care. Finally, the nurse's sense of personal knowing allows them to know themselves so that they can better care for the patient. “Knowing each other” can be explained by the

concept of *caring between* in the Theory of Nursing as Caring by Boykin and Schoenhofer (2001), and the concept of knowing the person as a process of nursing in the TCCN theory (Locsin, 2005). The idea of “being with other persons” reflects the nurse's understanding of caring in nursing, and is congruent with the caring moment in the theory of Nursing as Caring (Boykin and Schoenhofer, 2001). Through “being with other persons,” the students understood the need to communicate caring with their heart, including verbal communication, such as talking with the patients and explaining information, as well as non-verbal communication, such as touching the patients and sharing in silence.

The students expressed the idea of “nurturing intimate personal growth” by drawing scenes of planting and watering the trees and flowers, symbolizing the act of caring for the patients to make them grow. This understanding is congruent with the concept of caring by Mayeroff (1971), where he described caring as a process of helping another grow and develop. To describe this act of nurturing, the students drew butterflies to reflect the nurse's own growth in caring for a person. This particular point can be explained by the Nursing as Caring Theory (Boykin and Schoenhofer, 2001), as the enhancement of a nurse's personhood through the caring relationship between the nurse and the one nursed.

In this study, the students focused on caring for the whole person. They understood caring as the act of “supporting the wholeness of a person”. This concept of personhood has been contextualized as one assumption in the theory of Nursing as Caring, which states that persons are whole and complete in the moment, as well as in the theory of TCCN (Locsin, 2005) which affirms this concept as the foremost assumption for the nurse to care for the person as whole, even if some parts of the body may be missing. In this study, the students understood the importance of the nurse supporting the person's life and of lifting up the person's spirit through love and encouragement without pressing their own values on the person.

The term “intensifying competency” can be explained by the Theory of Nursing as Caring (Boykin and Schoenhofer, 2001). The students understood that through the experience of caring, they can learn and gain more knowledge and skills, thus attaching value to improving the self continuously. This understanding is congruent with the concept of the enhancement of personhood (Boykin and Schoenhofer, 2001). Regarding the knowledge principle found in the theory of TCCN (Locsin, 2005), this theory views the nurse's competency as significant in empowering the nurse to provide efficient care.

While the theories of caring provided ways by which the findings were able to illuminate the expressions of the students pertaining to their experiences of caring as “engaging with others, knowing each other, being with other persons, nurturing intimate personal growth, supporting the wholeness of a person, vacillating rhythm, and intensifying competency”. In addition, the students' cultural background as Japanese people inspired their aesthetic expressions of their understanding of caring. According to the Japanese curriculum guidelines, all students from elementary school to high school underwent courses on moral education, which includes lessons on courtesy, consideration and kindness, friendship, thanks and respect, modesty, justice, group participation and responsibility, and contribution to society (Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology, 2015). Years of learning these values at school embedded the attitudes of moral caring in the daily lives of the Japanese. Their moral education also informed their expressions of their personal understanding of caring in this study. The ideas of “engaging with others” and “knowing each other” relate to courtesy; speaking and acting appropriately accorded with consideration, while empathy connects more with kindness. Also, the terms “being with other persons”, “nurturing intimate personal growth”, “supporting wholeness of a person”, and “vacillating rhythm” can be influenced by the lessons learned from the participants' experiences of friendship, and of trust and helpfulness.

Japanese students learn how to live as a Japanese person in their life experiences through school, family and community. Supporting people's

lives results from learning ways of expressing gratitude and respect. Modesty helped the students act appropriately with others, while respect helped them retain an open mind toward others with different ideas and positions. The value of justice enabled the students to be fair and impartial to everybody; their learning experiences on group participation and responsibility opened up the students to participate in group activities, while being individually aware of each one's role in the group, and of their duty to cooperate with all members. Moreover, through their learning experiences, and their contribution to society, the students are keenly aware of their roles as members of their local communities, and they have learned to be respectful toward those who devoted themselves to the community, including the senior citizens.

Through the ontology, epistemology, and methodology of the Gadamerian philosophical lens (Gadamer, 2003), the study's findings successfully illuminated the different meanings of caring. Drawing illustrations assisted the students in their embodied engagement of their own knowing, informed by their background knowledge and experiences (Pentassuglia, 2017). The Japanese nursing students were able to express this knowledge using linguistic metaphors to discern their appreciations of caring in nursing. The students constructed their individual meanings of caring through their textual reflections on their own illustrations. The texts and drawings gathered in this study enhanced the students' understanding of what caring means, as well as enriched their experience.

## 6. Implications

The findings of this study holds some implications for nursing education practice. Nurse educators must support the nursing students in becoming professional caring nurses who value and maintain the persons' wholeness. Nursing curriculum designers could create caring courses that integrate caring concepts and theories such as Mayeroff (1971), Nursing as Caring (Boykin and Schoenhofer, 2001), and TCCN (Locsin, 2005), beginning from students' preclinical practice during their 1st and 2nd year of undergraduate study, in order to frame the students' knowledge of caring in relation to nursing engagement. Multiple teaching methods in the classroom could include letting the students create aesthetic representations such as drawings, paintings, poems, which could contribute further to the students' fuller appreciation of caring in nursing. Nurse educators can also apply the aesthetic expression approach to evaluate their students' understandings of caring in nursing.

## 7. Limitations

This study was conducted in one institution in Japan. Nursing students in this institution might hold different meanings of caring compared to nursing students in other institutions, as well as students in other countries. Other institutions, and other institutions in other countries, might teach nursing under different contexts and caring cultures. Most students in this study did not have clinical experience which limits transferability of the findings to other groups. In addition, the study did not use the interview method to collect data in order to allow the students clarify their interpretations of their illustrations and written reflections. Lastly, teacher-researchers invited the nursing students to participate in the study would have the potential for perceived coercion due to the dual relationship with the participants. Therefore, using an intermediary for recruitment to avoid feelings of coercion with the nursing students is necessary.

## 8. Conclusion

This study described the understanding of caring in nursing among the second-year Japanese nursing students in a university. For this study, the researchers used the art-based research to reveal different meanings of caring, which are engaging with others, knowing each

other, being with other persons, nurturing intimate personal growth, supporting wholeness of a person, vacillating rhythm, and intensifying competency. The varied understanding of caring in nursing among the students were grounded on the concepts of caring, as proposed by different theories of nursing as well as the implanted moralities from the Japanese educational system's courses in general education. The results showed that the students could comprehend the principle of caring in nursing and could distinguish the concept of caring in nursing from general caring. It is expected that the nursing students can integrate their knowledge of caring in nursing in the second year into their clinical practices in their later years of study, as well as in their future nursing practice as professional nurses. Further study is recommended to follow up the students' understandings of caring in nursing as they enter their third and fourth years.

## CRedit authorship contribution statement

Criteria	Author Initials
Made substantial contributions to conception and design, or acquisition of data, or analysis and interpretation of data;	WK; YY; TT; RL; KO
Involved in drafting the manuscript or revising it critically for important intellectual content;	WK; YY; TT; RL
Given final approval of the version to be published, each author has participated sufficiently in the work to take public responsibility for appropriate portions of the content;	WK; YY; TT; RL; KO
Agreed to be accountable for all aspects of the work in ensuring that questions related to the accuracy or integrity of any part of the work are appropriately investigated and resolved.	WK; YY; TT; RL; KO

## Ethical approval

This study was approved by the Institutional Review Board of a University in Japan (No. 2807).

## Author statement

This revised research article entitled "Aesthetic Expressions of Caring in Nursing among Japanese Undergraduate Nursing Students" Ref: NET\_2019\_1790R1 is submitted for consideration by Nurse Education Today. This study is the original work and has not been submitted and published elsewhere. The Institutional Review Board of Tokushima University, Japan was approved this study (No. 2807). All co-authors have approved the revised manuscript and agreed to submit it to this journal.

## Declaration of competing interest

None to declare.

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