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HEIDEGGER'S HERMENEUTIC CIRCLE: A POSSIBILITY FOR INTERPRETING NURSING CARE

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ABSTRACT

Objective: to reflect on the possibility of interpreting care in Nursing research based on Heidegger's hermeneutic circle.

Method: this is a reflection based on Heidegger's hermeneutic circle in order to contribute to understanding the method, highlighting historical aspects and conceptual, structural and operative conceptions for Nursing.

Results: this study highlights that the stages of the hermeneutical circle and its applicability in Nursing investigations, thus allowing to elucidate their relationship, interpreting care in the most diverse experiential situations.

Conclusion: according to the hermeneutic circle, care interpretation emphasizes nursing research in the sense of the possibility of compressing and interpreting care in the most diverse dimensions of the existence of being.

DESCRIPTORS: Qualitative research. Philosophy in nursing. Hermeneutics. Nursing research. Nursing care.

CÍRCULO HERMENÊUTICO HEIDEGGERIANO: UMA POSSIBILIDADE DE INTERPRETAÇÃO DO CUIDADO DE ENFERMAGEM

RESUMO

Objetivo: refletir sobre a possibilidade de interpretação do cuidado nas pesquisas em enfermagem a partir do círculo hermenêutico heideggeriano.

Método: trata-se de uma reflexão com base no círculo hermenêutico heideggeriano, de modo a contribuir com o entendimento do método, salientando-se os aspectos históricos e as concepções conceituais, estruturais e operativas para a enfermagem.

Resultados: o estudo evidenciou que as etapas do círculo hermenêutico e sua aplicabilidade nas investigações em enfermagem permitem elucidar a relação entre elas, interpretação do cuidado nas mais diversas situações vivenciais.

Conclusão: a interpretação do cuidado por meio do círculo hermenêutico destaca a pesquisa em enfermagem no sentido da possibilidade da compressão e interpretação do cuidado nas mais diversas dimensões da existência do ser.

DESCRIPTORIOS: Pesquisa qualitativa. Filosofia em enfermagem. Hermenêutica. Pesquisa em enfermagem. Cuidados de enfermagem.

CÍRCULO HERMENÉUTICO HEIDEGGERIANO: UNA POSIBILIDAD DE INTERPRETACIÓN DEL CUIDADO DE ENFERMERÍA

RESUMEN

Objetivo: reflexionar sobre la posibilidad de interpretación del cuidado en las investigaciones en enfermería a partir del círculo hermenéutico heideggeriano.

Método: se trata de una reflexión basada en el círculo hermenéutico heideggeriano, de modo a contribuir con el entendimiento del método, resaltando los aspectos históricos y las concepciones conceptuales, estructurales y operativas para la enfermería.

Resultados: el estudio evidenció que las etapas del círculo hermenéutico y su aplicabilidad en las investigaciones en enfermería permiten elucidar la relación entre ellas, interpretación del cuidado en las más diversas situaciones vivenciales.

Conclusión: la interpretación del cuidado por medio del círculo hermenéutico destaca la investigación en enfermería en el sentido de la posibilidad de la comprensión e interpretación del cuidado en las más diversas dimensiones de la existencia del ser.

DESCRIPTORES: Investigación cualitativa. Filosofía en enfermería. Hermenéutica. Investigación en enfermería. Cuidados de enfermería.

INTRODUCTION

Hermeneutics has the broad and continuous task of trying to understand and interpret a described thought in some form of language, by someone who lives or has lived a particular phenomenon, describing such a situation with a true meaning, or as emphasized by Heidegger, the "hermeneutics of being-there also becomes a 'hermeneutic' in the sense of elaborating conditions of possibility for all ontological investigation".^{1,77}

Nursing seeks to understand the other in a singular way, emphasizing an incessant attempt to understand and solve problems or everyday situations inherent in the professional praxis. From this perspective and in different moments and spaces of health care, nursing practice deals with qualitative issues by providing care.

The concern to capture human way of life, their demands, as well as social and cultural differences are all taken into consideration in the care plan for human beings; these issues usually become a reason for studies given the complexity of their apprehension.²

The phenomenological reference is used to understand certain phenomena studied by nursing researchers, to give voice and visibility to the phenomena experienced by human beings, thus allowing care to be planned that is consistent with the needs and/or singularities of the being.³

In this aspect, Heidegger's hermeneutic circle projects the possibility of interpreting the phenomena of nursing care for phenomenological nursing studies, where the researched subject's positioning can be re-evaluated by the researcher at any time in the research process.⁴

Thus, the present study aims to reflect on the possibility of interpreting care in nursing research based on Heidegger's hermeneutic circle.

PHENOMENOLOGY: HISTORICAL ASPECTS INVOLVED

Phenomenology "is the description of what appears or science which has this description as its purpose or project".^{5,11} And because it is a philosophy of consciousness, it has the principle of intentionality.⁶ Emerged in the second half of the nineteenth century in opposition to the positivist thought, through studies by the philosopher Edmund Husserl (1859-1938).⁷

As a method of philosophical inquiry, phenomenology established the main concepts of the method with the aim to capture the phenomenon, meaning the emergence of things in consciousness, interrogating it, describing it and seeking to grasp its essence and revealing its meaning. In this sense, phenomenology is an investigation that lies in the reality and in the possibility of the health professional's field of action, and especially the professional nurse.⁷ The method seeks to approach the phenomena as a form of revelation of its essence and its critical meaning.⁵

As the essence of nursing is the care, which is immersed in objective and subjective dimensions, phenomenological research can be a search to understand the subjectivity of the researched phenomenon, which is the care. In analysing the descriptions, the researcher seeks to characterise the content of the phenomenon, as well as its different meanings; and in this context, the analysis is carried out by comparing the responses of the subject, of the group or between the groups, in which the researcher seeks a convergence of the units of meaning according to the interpretations that have been elaborated, and thereby constructing the discourse in this way.⁶

In the natural attitude the object is natural and therefore exists, whereas in the phenomenological attitude the object is intuited and/or perceived, and so it is intertwined with the consciousness.

Consciousness is therefore intentional, and intuition is the intellectual view of the object of knowledge.⁶

It is fundamental to understand that there are several strands of phenomenological thinking by Edmund Husserl. Martin Heidegger was born in 1889 in Germany, and became one of Husserl's pupils in 1915 and a scholar of phenomenology. However, several scholars continued the work of the Master Husserl, among which we can point out: Merleau-Ponty, Martin Heidegger, Karl Jaspers, Max Scheler, Merleau-Ponty; Emmanuel Levinas, Edith Stein, Jean-Paul Sartre, Gabriel Marcel, Hans-Georg Gadamer, Paul Ricoeur, Martin Buber, Ernesto Grassi, Nicolai Hartmann, and Hans Jonas; in their own way, each of them deepened specific themes/phenomena.⁶

The philosophical reference that supported and led to the philosophical reflections of the hermeneutics phenomenology by Martin Heidegger, specifically the hermeneutic circle and the concepts contained therein, were mainly based on the work "Being and Time", which seeks to present the sense of existentiality of being.¹

HEIDEGGER'S HERMENEUTIC CIRCLE: CONCEPTIONS AND IMPLICATIONS FOR NURSING

Phenomenological research seeks the essence of the phenomenon, since it is based on its descriptive study which reports the experience of the subject being studied.⁸ In this method, the researcher turns to the being/subject and seeks to look at the phenomenon as it is in their experience, seeking to understand the phenomenon that presents itself to the consciousness. In this process the researcher helps to perceive how the phenomenon appears and how it is presented in its various forms and arrangements.

For Heidegger, "the expression 'phenomenology' means, above all, a concept of method".^{1:66} "One of the contributions of phenomenology to philosophy lies in the way how judgments and meanings are perceived. Martín Heidegger does not separate reason from emotion, or the subject from the object".^{1:114}

Thus, the conceptual construction of some terms that reveal the existentiality of the being for care is essential for supporting Nursing research through the use of Heidegger's hermeneutic circle.

The question of the existence of the being focuses on the concern with the form of human experience. To exist is to relate with others in the world,

and humans are responsible for their own existence by their way of "Being" and by their way of "Being" with others.¹ The "Being" represents the presence, the manifesto, what is perceived, understood and known. Humans (*Dansien*) are launched into the world and the "Ente" are things in different senses, meaning everything we say, understand, how we behave, what we are.¹ With regard to care, nursing relates to the other in the possibility of being-with-the-other in the most diverse situations experienced.

The way we are is characterized by us being beings-for-care, in which Nursing is the opening to the presence. According to its way-of-being, it tends to understand its own being from that entity with whom it relates and behaves in an essential way, first and constantly from the "world". It is in the presence that man constructs their world, their way-of-being, it is unveiled in their existence and their own life story. Nursing care is present, since it implies presence and proximity. In this perspective, comprehensive care is that in which caregiver and the subject receiving care are close; and, from an act of empathy, they understand that by identifying the needs of the individuals they can help them when they need care.⁹

From a professional perspective, nursing has the dedication of comprehensive care to human beings as its essence; however, care reaches its fullness when the caregiver is also cared for.¹⁰

Therefore, presence is the possibility of being. That is, "all presence is what it can be and the way it is its possibility. The fundamental possibility of presence concerns the characterized modes of occupation of the "world", of concern for others, and among all, the possibility of being for itself, by virtue of itself".^{1:203}

The care conveyed by Heidegger indicates the possibilities of the human being, or being-there in the world. A being-with existentially constitutes being-in-the-world, and must be interpreted by the phenomenon of healing, since this determines the being of presence in general. The being-in-the-world is healing, it is the care in the occupation and in the concern, even if it is primitive.¹

With the possibility of presence as a manifestation of care, the latter can be interpreted as the mode-of-being of the occupation. Presence occurs in the exercise of relating both modes-of-being to the existence; relations with the mode-of-being of entities simply given, and relations with beings endowed with movement. In both of these two modes-of-being, healing is expressed, which can be occupation and concern.¹ For nursing, this process

can be evidenced when there is planning of care actions for the other, making it even more tangible in its implementation.

Therefore, care is unveiled in the relations of the existence of being-there, in the existential relations of nursing, which involve consideration and respect in the way-of-being, of behaving. Concern and occupation are part of care, since they are the ones that inspire the being-with-the-other. Care can be understood as an act, which occupies an ontic sense, or as possibilities; a meaning that goes beyond the act, beyond what can be perceived, thus occupying an ontological sense.¹

Therefore, concern assumes two extreme possibilities regarding care. On the one hand, nursing can take on full care, withdrawing from the other the possibility of choice, autonomy for self-care; in other words, assuming the occupations of the other. Concern assumes the occupation that the other being/subject must carry out, thus they are displaced from their position, retreating, and then assuming the occupation of something already available and ready, or reject it. However, in this concern, the other (subject) can adopt the position of dependence and submission. The other possibility is substitutive concern, which removes "the care" from the other, thereby determining reciprocal coexistence, and in most cases referring only to manual occupation.¹

In human coexistence, we are always approaching or moving away from those who are with us in care moments. In the usual way-of-being with others, we engage with those we care for. This constant movement of getting closer and distant is what propels us to perform care actions. When we approach to recognize the object of research imbricated with life experiences, we can glimpse an understanding of the living process of the other, and from this we can interpret the care actions we can take, as well as the care actions that the other can take for themselves, occupying the being for the care.

POSSIBILITIES OF USING THE METHOD FOR NURSING RESEARCH

Phenomenological research seeks the essence of the phenomenon, since it is based on its descriptive study which reports the experience of the subject under study.¹¹ The phenomenological method translates the understanding about living and not just definitions and concepts; therefore, it is an understanding directed towards the meanings of perceiving.¹²

In formulating from a phenomenological nature, the objective must be in the subjects' perception, and especially in the meaning that the phenomena have for people.¹³

For this reason, phenomenologists strive to describe the same world, that world that is familiar to all, suppressing judgments regarding any and all phenomena which constitutes parts of a larger system, and thus isolating any object from the context in which they are in fact inserted, and contemplating it in its own purified essence.¹⁴

In the field of nursing research, it is necessary to grasp the essence of the whole, which begins with restlessness, a question. This question corresponds to dissatisfaction on the part of the researcher regarding what they believe to know about something. The research then continues according to its own methodology to carry out the desired investigation. In this process, knowledge is unveiled from the knowledge and meaning through consciousness in an objective and subjective way, having the investigated being/phenomenon as reference.⁶

All knowledge that already exists regarding the subject to be studied, what has already been produced by science, consists of a pre-reflective moment, considered as a methodological step for literature review.

Thus, in phenomenological research, the researcher has apprehensions about something and these apprehensions lead them to question, to follow a trajectory towards the phenomenon through the person who experiences a certain circumstance. In this sense, the phenomenon arises from the person who knows, through their experience and their way of seeing the world, revealing itself to the researchers who seek to capture the essence of such phenomena.¹⁵

The research or existential encounter converges to moments of empathy and intersubjectivity, in which the research question is made, questioning the Being, seeking to find meaning for the "Being", the way of "Being".

In order to proceed with the investigation, the researcher must follow the method's steps represented by the following phases: a) description: in which they capture the phenomenon as it appears to the consciousness; b) *epoché*: the researcher must be devoid of temporary judgments, judgments of value and preconceived ideas for open awareness in order to perceive the phenomena without prejudice; c) hermeneutics (interpretation): moment when the described data are understood and interpreted, thus phenomena are explained and meanings become known. In the course of these phases, new realities are unveiled.

The analysis must be the guiding thread that structures the concept of "Being". It is based on the existential encounter (question), in which the Entity that was questioned and the "Being" that was questioned are investigated. Based on the comparison of the subjects' responses, and according to the interpreter's or hermeneutic understanding, the researcher proceeds to the analysis, seeking a convergence of the units of meanings, which allows them to elaborate their own discourse. Such units of meaning configure open categories, which remain open to new investigations.

Interpretation is the last step of the research. It is a provisional interpretation, considering that there are no conclusions, since the phenomenon is always a perspective. Therefore, it is the interpretation of the discourse that reveals the reflected dimension on the care of the interpreted phenomenon.⁶ Throughout this process, the researcher reflects on their own reflection, which refers to its transcendence.

Nursing research can be based on phenomenology, with the intention of revealing the mode-to-be in Nursing care, and using Heidegger's hermeneutic circle for this process, which highlights three steps for interpreting the study phenomenon, namely: pre-understanding; understanding and interpretation.

Pre-understanding is the ontological structure of understanding. This cannot refer to existing without assumptions; in other words, the interpreter makes use of predetermined positions or pre-conceptions, or even a previous position of the daily interpretation of circumvision. Heidegger asserts that "the appropriation of the understood, despite veiled, always fulfills the unveiling guided by a vision that fixes the parameter in the current perspective, the one already understood to be interpreted".^{1:211}

For Nursing, pre-comprehension contemplates what is experienced by the being-there, regarding the personal dimension, their life experiences associated with the construction of scientific nursing knowledge and their perception of the world.

Heidegger ties the phenomenon of understanding to the emotive sphere, however he includes an analysis of this phenomenon, relating it to the notion of possibility.⁷ Understanding is essential to human existence, to the *Dasein* (being-there), since it means that existence is essentially the possibility of being. Being-there or existing, is the being-in-the-world that opens one to the understanding of the other and of the self, characterizing the occupation with the world, the concern for others, and in this context, the possibility of being for oneself, as a virtue of yourself.¹

In nursing, the movement of understanding opens the possibilities of being with the other's perception in one's perception, as well as in the perception of the other, in the way of caring/providing care without any inferences nor judgments, since both are in the same world, existing, and both can be projected in the movement of caring, in which the occupation can be seen as preparation for care, making it possible in the totality of the relationship.¹⁶

To understand is not only an understanding of the abstract of oneself, rather it is an understanding about their possibilities of existence, when we are and want to be projected into the future as we understand ourselves and the other.¹⁶

Interpretation is the projection of the presence, inherent to understanding, and having the possibility of elaborating yourself into different forms. "To interpret is to expose, it is an unfolding of the possibilities, therefore the human being is a being of possibilities".^{16:63}

Interpretation is existentially based on understanding. To interpret is to create new possibilities projected onto the understanding; it is the ability of "Being", a "Being" living in the world, who experiences the facticity of a new conditions, in which their being demands the need of caring for themselves and for others.

In nursing research, interpretation is the very process of caring in its completeness, in which the meaning of the phenomenon is revealed to the researcher, which indicates possibilities of answers to the studied phenomenon.

The figure 1 seeks to illustrate the process of understanding of Heidegger's hermeneutic circle, characterizing the steps and emphasizing that they are all dependent on/interrelated to one another. It also shows that when interpreting a phenomenon, there is a new pre-understanding and understanding of it, demonstrating that the time and space of relationships are always in a movement of being veiled and unveiled. In this sense, the applicability of this method to interpret care demonstrates the essence of nursing in its existentiality in the world.

Hermeneutics is based on a holistic and cyclical interpretation. Holistic, since any part of the text or message to be interpreted lies in the condition of dependence on the interpretation of the whole; and cyclical, because any interpretation is based on the previous interpretation, either in the pre-trial, the pre-conception, or the pre-interpretation that guides and structures the interpretive act.¹⁷

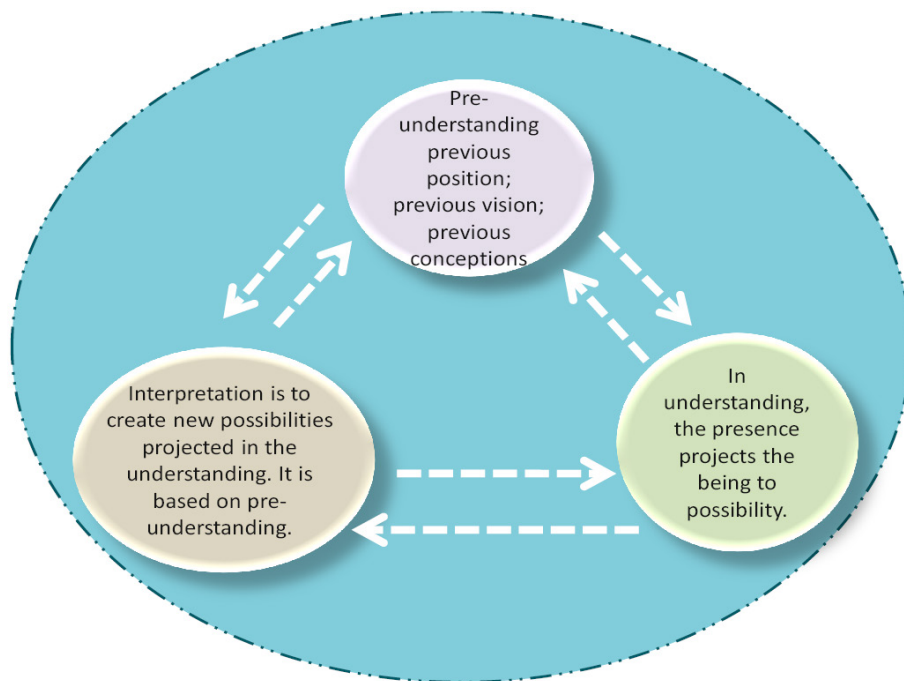


Figure 1 - Hermeneutic Circle^{1;215}

The hermeneutic circle reminds us of the very circle of life, that is, in perceiving something we use our knowledge, experiences and previous positions; and from there we begin to understand the new movement, and at the same time, we interpret the phenomenon. It also reminds us of the importance of understanding the totality of the being, which requires to be understood without fragmentation, the being-there in its entirety, so that the relations between the causer and the cause can be understood in the environment and the reality experienced.

As a method for research in Nursing, Phenomenology consists of a priori assuming a posture that aims to understand the other, in their place and living moment (their experience), as a subject of essences and presence, being active and participatory in their expressions of life. Such living movement lies in the foundations of caring, in which providing care actions turns to the other and to the self, in the existence and in the world.

Nursing investigations of a phenomenological nature have the proposition of unveiling obscurity from caring in order to expand possibilities of looking at human beings, transposing its Cartesian, Reductionist and fragmentation model.¹⁸ With the approach of seeking to understand the other in its facticity, the phenomenological method approaches the current trend of health and nursing research, since it seeks humanized actions for the care of human beings.¹⁹ It makes it possible to overcome the

biomedical model in the face of valorizing intersubjective relations in the perspective of a peaceful culture.²⁰ It also contributes to a look at the experiences related to the health-illness process of the human being in different care and health care settings.²¹

In this perspective, the hermeneutic circle can be a tool to theoretically and methodologically guide the research. In the theoretical-phenomenological aspect, considering the discipline a way of understanding the experiences; and in the methodological aspect, a guide regarding the steps for data collection and interpretation.

Studies implementing the phenomenological approach help the understanding of several phenomena of human existence, contributing to humanized care based on the knowledge base of nursing in the most diverse experiences of humans in the process of living. Thus, in a peculiar and creative way, nursing encompasses aspects of science and art, making (in the context of nursing care), the doing and the knowledge of the profession possible, expressed in the praxis that is based on recognizing the personality of each patient.²²

Phenomenology allows a comprehensive understanding of nursing research insofar as it is directly imbricated with human phenomena, incorporating meanings of all that relate to the lived experience with the purpose of understanding the individual and collective attitudes and values of the present and the past.²³

CONCLUSION

In its metaparadigms, Nursing determines the care to the human being in its experiential process in a certain space and time. Thus, by approaching phenomenology, it seeks to understand the experience, perceiving the subjects as phenomena of existence.

In this care universe, Heidegger's hermeneutic circle is constituted as a way of understanding and interpreting the nurse-being in the experience of care. Structured pre-understanding based on care experiences, in addition to studies about it, leads to an understanding of the nursing way-of-being, and from this to interpretation.

The pre-understanding movement contemplates studies of care associated with our own readings of life, together with the experiences that we have experienced throughout our professional trajectory. Understanding expresses the opportunity to understand the phenomena studied and the people who participate in the research as a whole, thus giving indications to the interpretation, revealing the lived themes, units and categories; and the interpretation of the phenomenon presents itself as possibilities of new horizons, generating new pre-understandings and understandings of the same phenomenon, and even of others which circumscribe this study.

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