

Institution: University of Dundee		
Unit of Assessment: UoA 30 Philosophy		
Title of case study: Hermeneutics and Nursing Practice		
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 2000-2013		
Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:		
Name(s):	Role(s) (e.g. job title):	Period(s) employed by submitting HEI:
Nicholas Davey	Professor of Philosophy	March 1996 - present
Period when the claimed impact occurred: 2014 – 2020 (ongoing)		
Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? N		

1. Summary of the impact

Professor Davey's research into the hermeneutics of practice has influenced the development of an innovative Canadian nursing course text published in 2015, *Conducting Hermeneutics Research: From Philosophy to Practice* by Professor Nancy Moules. Davey's research provided the reflective tools to articulate the dynamics of patient dialogue and to develop a dialogical approach to nursing in cancer care. In Canada it has altered how care practice is presented and taught in the Calgary nursing curriculum and has changed the way in which clinical guidelines and care standards are communicated empathetically to patients.

2. Underpinning research

The underpinning research is the body of work by Nicholas Davey on the hermeneutics of practice. The centrepiece of this work is the monograph *Unquiet Understanding* [R1], which builds upon a substantial amount of research that Davey had already undertaken in this field [R2-R6] and which has been further developed in his monograph *Unfinished Worlds* [R7].

The research contains four key insights:

- knowledge creation and exchange cannot be understood apart from the particularities of a given practice and its diversity of viewpoints;
- difficult life experiences are not to be understood through detached observation, but require practical involvement with patients through listening, empathy and the sharing of lived horizons. Such experiences “demand looking and thinking again” [R7 p. 27];
- rather than offering a theory that explains practice, hermeneutics provides practitioners with the reflective tools to draw critically from their engagements the assumptions governing their operation;
- knowledge of trauma and illness is not simply determined by expertise but emerges through a participatory epistemology where meaning is co-constituted, and shared.

Davey's research identified the hermeneutical elements of practice which make confrontation with the challenges of negative experiences inevitable. These elements inform a dialectics of learning which can, with due analysis, operate positively in all applied practices. They demand that when failure and disruption emerge, both are met with a review of a practice's expected outcomes and a re-evaluation of its understanding of limit-experiences. Understanding the effects of these elements encourages practitioners to seek, through open dialogue, a more complete grasp of their practice.

The insights from Davey's work offered Moules a model of participatory epistemology in which multiple ways of “knowing-through-doing” are brought into critical reflection. The insights

Impact case study (REF3)

represent a development of earlier works on the hermeneutical elements of practice; and arguments concerning participation and critical distance were extended in his monograph [R7]. His work [R1] and his related 2014 Calgary lectures on “The Hermeneutics of Practice” influenced the shaping of Moules’ nursing course text and its associate nursing programme by contributing to her re-positioning of nursing practice in wider debates about existential knowledge, social care and the rendering of illness as meaningful.

3. References to the research

[R1] Davey, N (2006) *Unquiet Understanding, Gadamer’s Philosophical Hermeneutics*, Albany, NY: State University of New York Press

[R2] Davey, N (2005) ‘Was geht mich die Geschichte an? Art Practice and the Question of Historicity’, in Mey, K. (ed) *Art in the Making*, London, Verlag Peter Lang, pp.15-36

[R3] Davey, N (2005) Aesthetic f(r)iction: the conflicts of visual experience, *Journal of Visual Art Practice*, 4:2-3, 135-149, DOI: [10.1386/jvap.4.2and3.135/1](https://doi.org/10.1386/jvap.4.2and3.135/1)

[R4] Davey, N (2003) ‘Sitting Uncomfortably: a Hermeneutic Reflection on Portraiture’, *Journal of the British Society for Phenomenology*, vol. 34(3), pp. 231-246, DOI: [10.1080/00071773.2003.11007407](https://doi.org/10.1080/00071773.2003.11007407)

[R5] Davey, N (2003) “Art’s Enigma: Adorno, Gadamer and Iser on Interpretation”. in Wischke, M. & Hofer, M. (eds), *Gadamer verstehen / Understanding Gadamer*. Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, Darmstadt, pp. 232-247

[R6] Davey, N (2002) Hermeneutics and the Challenge of Writing, *Journal of the British Society for Phenomenology*, 33:3, 299-316, DOI: [10.1080/00071773.2002.11007388](https://doi.org/10.1080/00071773.2002.11007388)

[R7] Davey, N (2013) *Unfinished Worlds: Hermeneutics, Aesthetics and Gadamer*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

Evidence of Quality of Research

R1 was commended in reviews, e.g., *Journal of British Society for Phenomenology*, Vol. 40, No. 3, Oct. 2009, pp. 337-339; it was selected for a Book Panel at the SPEP Annual Conference, Chicago, 2008. R3, R4 & R6 were peer reviewed.

4. Details of the impact

Davey’s research into the hermeneutics of practice contributes to the first text to use hermeneutics as instrumental to the development of care protocols. Through its influence on Professor Nancy Moules (Chair of Child Cancer, University of Calgary), aspects of his hermeneutics of practice have been deployed as part of a new tradition of “qualitative research” in psychology and social science, reaching international practitioner audiences through adoption in nursing curricula and enabling the practical application of hermeneutic structures to meet the demands of nursing practice.

Davey’s involvement with the Calgary unit began in June 2014 with a week of lectures on “The Hermeneutics of Practice” at the invitation of Moules. In associated workshops he responded to patient presentations concerning their lived experience of trauma and acute illness. These corroborated his approach to empathetic transference in crisis situations. Moules’ course text, published a year after Davey’s Calgary presentations, document the impact of Davey’s research on her project [E1].

Moules’ research has multiple aims: to alter attitudes towards nursing practice by presenting it as more than a technology of care; to promote the voice of nursing in humanities’ debates about

human well-being in times of crisis; and to remodel the specialist/patient relationship as a mode of dialogical exchange leading to the mutual transformation of both patient and carer. Distinctively, her research attempts to free nursing from the (ward) desk by opposing its reduction to a technology of patient management and to promote the practice's practical understanding of suffering within humanities' debates about mortality. In responding to the "technology of patient management", Moules makes explicit reference to Davey's hermeneutic critique of method in her case against positivist reductions of nursing pedagogy; Davey's dialogical hermeneutics further provides Moules with the reflective tools to articulate the transformative nature of patient-carer dialogue as a way to change the understanding of what it means to care and to be cared for.

Amongst other hermeneuticians, Davey is cited most with 33 references. Moules substantiates Davey's claim that genuine listening must stay close to the horizon of the patient [E1, p.94], and that empathetic understanding requires imaginative witnessing [E1, p.68]. She confirms the therapeutic value of the dialogical with an extensive quotation from Davey 2006 p.xvi [E1, p.198]. In 2015, a year after Davey's address, Moules wrote:

Having a glimpse of applied hermeneutics through the eyes of philosophical experts is at the same time gratifying and a stimulating reminder that we are working fresh ground, and it behooves us to keep working to be as exacting as we can about what we do. It is in this spirit that it felt timely to undertake to describe the work-in-progress that is applied hermeneutics in the fleshed out form of a book [i.e., the course text of 2015]. [E2]

Since the publication of her pioneering book, Moules has been awarded five national prizes for nursing excellence. Her work has brought instrumental changes to the way in which clinical guidelines and care standards are communicated empathetically to patients in Canada [E1, p.185]. The influence of Davey's work has been acknowledged by Moules who notes:

Professor Davey has contributed to my understanding of hermeneutics and Gadamer's work. Through me, graduate students across disciplines have been opened to understanding the philosophy that guides our practices and research. [E3]

Davey's broader influence is also confirmed by an Associate Professor in the Calgary Nursing Unit who comments on the power of hermeneutics in influencing the language of "therapeutic change" and the "significance of dialogue in forming collaborative relationships with patients" describing this as "a deeply hermeneutic way of thinking, that does run counter to conventional approaches of diagnosis and symptom management" [E4]. He further states:

Hermeneutics is well accepted as a basis for research into problems of human relating in nursing, education, and healthcare – not only in our own institution but also translating into success securing Canadian federal research funding ... Your emphasis on hermeneutics-as-practice is highly congruent with our needs and approach. [E4]

In separate correspondence, Davey's perspective is acknowledged more broadly as a way to bring physicians "closer to the flesh and blood realities of patient experiences" and as an ongoing influence [E5].

Moules' course text has been taken up by 3 UK University and Nursing libraries, 22 in the US, 4 in Switzerland, 3 in Australia, 8 in Canada as well as teaching institutes in Denmark, France, New Zealand, Qatar, Sweden and South Africa [E6]. As a result of Davey's engagement with the Calgary Group, his hermeneutics of practice has reached beyond academia and now touches a more universal community of concern:

When we practice hermeneutics as a research tradition... we come to understand... matters of human consequence: living well in conditions where suffering often exists... [this research] touches on human conditions of living: illness, schools, children, health, relationships, suffering, healing and hope. [E1]

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

[E1] Moules, N.J., McCaffrey, G., Field, J.C. and Laing, C. (2015) *Conducting Hermeneutic Research: From Philosophy to Practice*. New York: Peter Lang. pp. 38, 46-47, 51-52, 59, 63, 65, 68, 73, 75, 89, 94, 117, 129-30, 132, 135, 180, 181, 183, 190-191, 196, 202

[E2] Moules, N.J. McCaffrey, G. (2015) Catching Hermeneutics in the Act, *Journal of Applied Hermeneutics*. DOI: [10.11575/jah.v0i1.53248](https://doi.org/10.11575/jah.v0i1.53248)

[E3] Letter of support from Professor, Associate Dean of Research, Faculty of Nursing, University of Calgary, Canada.

[E4] Email correspondence from Assistant Professor, Faculty of Nursing, University of Calgary, Canada, 30 November 2020

[E5] Email correspondence from Assistant Professor, Faculty of Nursing, University of Calgary, Canada, 29 September 2020

[E6] WorldCat libraries report (15 December 2020)