Breaking Down the Walls

Compassionate care of the dying – what gets in the way?

Laura Middleton-Green
April 2015
Background

Is there really a “compassion deficit”? (Francis 2013; Neuberger et al. 2013)

Enhancing care requires that we understand influences on compassion at all levels: systemic, interpersonal and intrapersonal.

Focus of this talk is on methodological challenges of researching the intrapersonal aspects of this – part of a larger PhD study
From suffering to compassion
The Study

Ethnographic study in acute care of the elderly ward

Case study approach – patients unable to speak

Observing what? Speech, body language, time, space, objects

Sensory ethnography

Ethical approval obtained (eventually!)

A problem…
Care of the Dying Person

We witness high levels of suffering and frequent mortality salience primes (Ablett & Jones 2007)

Psychological defences “Perceptual, emotional or cognitive distortion of our inner or outer reality” (Lindstrøm 1989)

Defences may be protective …(Baumeister et al. 1998)

…but may also impact negatively upon care (Menzies–Lyth 1959)
Death anxiety: when defences are activated...

Stereotyping – ageism (Martens et al. 2005), out-group prejudice (Dovidio 2010), negative attitudes towards people with dementia (O’Connor & McFadden 2012)

Distancing from mortality salience “primes” eg cancer (Smith & Kasser 2014)

Disgust and avoidance (Goldenberg et al. 2001; Cox et al. 2007)

Reduced attention and concentration (Hirschberger et al. 2010)

Automatic and task-focused behaviour (Moors & De Houwer 2006; Brownstein & Madva 2011)
Researching the unconscious ...

**Experiments**
(Vickio & Cavanaugh 1985, Hirschberger 2010, Burke et al. 2010)

**Retrospective Interviews**
(Payne et al. 1998; Tomás-Sábado & Gómez-Benito 2005)

**Observation**
(Kaufman 2005; Kayser-Jones 2002)
“Think Aloud”

Origin in architecture – now widely used (van Someren et al. 1994)

Participants speak out loud any words that come to mind as they are undertaking a task

Based on Vygotsky’s idea of “inner speech” (Vygotsky 1962, in (Daniels 2005)

Usually inaccessible inner speech exposed; no opportunity to rewrite experience to produce rational or coherent account

May be a closer approximation to thinking in practice eg selective attention to cues
“Think Aloud” - analysis

Analysis usually descriptive statistics – “communication units” – grammatical sentence (main clause and all subordinate clauses attached)

“The minimal terminable unit of meaning” tabulated and analysed for frequency of occurrence

BUT…

Not usually expressed in complete or rational sentences – content not meant for anyone other than the thinker

Dissecting and categorising may impact on understanding of the whole, including the individual (Charters 2003)
Pilot study

Staged fictional vignette with 6 undergraduate student nurses

No right or wrong

Feelings as well as thoughts

Video-recorded stream-of-consciousness as “case” developed, subsequent debrief

Analysed recordings for overall impression (pilot only)
Reflections

Not a difficult task

Debrief useful

May have utility as reflective tool

Co-listeners

Changing minds
Blaming then reviewing
Confusion, self-doubt
Comparing to other situations
Looking backwards and forwards
The “right thing to do”
Rationalisation process
Non-verbal signs powerful – silences, smiles, re-reading, shifting gaze

Cognitive overload in task?
Defences?
Limitations

Vignettes may not adequately represent clinical reality unless they have personal resonance.

Student nurses may have seen it as a task to be completed “correctly” despite my assurances.

Differences in how decisions are made between novice and expert practitioners (Benner 1984; Benner & Tanner 1987; Windle et al. 2013)
Comparing observational technique with TA (adapted from Aitken et al. 2011)

<table>
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<th>Observation</th>
<th>Think aloud</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Strengths</strong></td>
<td><strong>Weaknesses</strong></td>
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<td>Behaviours give insight</td>
<td>Post-hoc rationalisation</td>
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<tr>
<td>Includes embodiment, emplacement</td>
<td>Depends on presence of sensory cues and activities</td>
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<td>Mutual learning and insight</td>
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Findings may differ – Thompson et al (2011) : both approaches to ask the same question

Potentially useful method of triangulation?
The Future

Not giving up

Asking about practice *during* practice (where appropriate)

Development of authentic vignettes from observational field notes

“Feel Aloud” – senses and emotions

Semiotic analysis
References


References


