

Institute for Health and Community Studies

Scholarship for caring practices: A framework

Purpose: This document provides a framework for a definition of scholarship that is particularly relevant to caring practices. Scholarship has been defined in various ways, and IHCS offers a distinctive vision that underpins the diverse and multiple levels of its activities. This position statement is intentionally brief in order to provide an integrating framework that articulates its core dimensions. The framework is expressed in two phases:

- The definition and scope of scholarship
- Aims: applying this framework

Definition and Scope of Scholarship

Integrative learning

A scholar is one who learns in the deepest and broadest sense. In relation to caring practices, such a scholar is not just a detached thinker, but is engaged in the kind of learning that has ethical and practice-related components. Such a scholar learns at many levels through study, engagement with practice, and through the development of personal and professional values and identities. Such a multidimensional definition of scholarship thus requires opportunities for the integration of intellectual, practical and ethical faculties.

A humanising value base

This distinctive emphasis centres on the kind of learning and understanding that connects with the experiences of people, whether users of services, students, or fellow professionals. Such understanding requires a sensitivity to unique contexts in practice and an empathic imagination that thoughtfully considers the ‘inner’ landscapes of peoples lives, particularly in relation to their interactions with care and education settings.

Product: inclusive and transferable methods and knowledge

IHCS wishes to disseminate its experiences and discoveries as a learning community. It is mindful of its interrelationship with multiple partners, local and international, discipline specific and interdisciplinary, citizens who are recipients of health and social care, and citizens who are students in both pre-qualifying and post-qualifying contexts. It is inclusive in that it wishes to extend the reach of scholarship towards the well-being of populations, and in particular, to under-represented and disadvantaged people and groups. It is also mindful of a necessary symbiotic relationship between learning and working, as well as between micro and macro levels of service delivery and organisation. Such complex engagements require the kind of flexible scholarship from IHCS staff that include receptive qualities of listening and learning, as well as active qualities of scholarly leadership.

Aims: Applying this framework

This distinctive definition of scholarship gives direction to a number of practical aims that are consistent with its vision:

- To offer integrative learning as a continuing journey of personal and professional development; the integration of academic study, practice-related experience, narrative reasoning, and value-based imagination and enquiry.
- To offer integrative learning that stretches from self exploration to an exploration of system and context.
- To offer integrative learning that includes evidence-based practice and practice-based evidence
- To offer integrative learning and reflective practice opportunities that allow participants to develop their personal and professional values and identity.
- To engage in research and the dissemination of such research that makes a difference to the quality of citizen's lives and experiences, whether in the health, social care and educational arenas. Participatory strategies that involve users and their experiences are central to this endeavour.
- To offer educational, practice development and research methodologies that empower partners to make a difference to the quality of lives of the users of their services.
- To develop educational, practice development and research themes and groups that pursue specialist applications of the definition and scope of scholarship
- To develop IHCS staff as a creatively ongoing scholarly community through interactive discovery and dissemination activities.
- To offer opportunities for extending the reach of scholarship beyond traditional boundaries by strengthening the links between practitioners and academics, and by including service users in the development of teaching, practice development and research.
- To design educational curricula and learning strategies that include both macro and micro levels of analysis and understanding, from the unique narrative of a person's health experience, or experience of care, to the widest contextual, community, demographic and political levels of understanding.
- To establish a resource bank of scholarly expertise that can be responsive to partner and multiple stakeholder interests.
- To work creatively with partners in a mutually enhancing relationship that recognises the strengths and contributions of each.

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