

Drawings as access to the spiritual dimension in the care setting - A Case Study using the Documentary Method

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Background

The development of spiritual care skills in nursing students is seen as an important task. However, research on this topic is still limited in German-speaking countries.¹ International research has shown that the ability of nurses to demonstrate spirituality at work has positive impact on “job commitment, satisfaction, and performance; demonstrating results in altruism and conscientiousness, self-career management, reduced inter-role conflict, reduced frustration, organization based self-esteem, involvement, retention and ethical behaviour.”² Hence, it is important to develop methods that give access to the spiritual dimension of individuals – nurses and patients.

Aim and objectives

The main goal is to familiarize nursing students and nurses with the topic of Spiritual Care and encourage them to reflect on their own spirituality. Working on the topic through analyzing drawings could lead to a deeper understanding of (the individual's) spirituality.

Methods and analysis

In 2023, a course on the topic of “Spiritual Care” took place for nursing students at an university in Austria. Students were encouraged to draw what spirituality looks like to them. It was optional to send the drawings to the researcher for analysis. In this paper, one drawing by “Amelia B.” is interpreted according the documentary method for pictures from Ralf Bohnsack^{3,4}. This method covers two main steps when interpreting pictures/drawings:

➤ 1. Formulating interpretation

In this step, it is summarized what is presented, explicitly depicted and interpreted by the producer of the painting. It concerns the representation of the “what”.

➤ 2. Reflective interpretation

In the second step, the immanent meaning, the “how” is depicted. The focus lies on how something is thematized with a particular habitus.^{3,4}

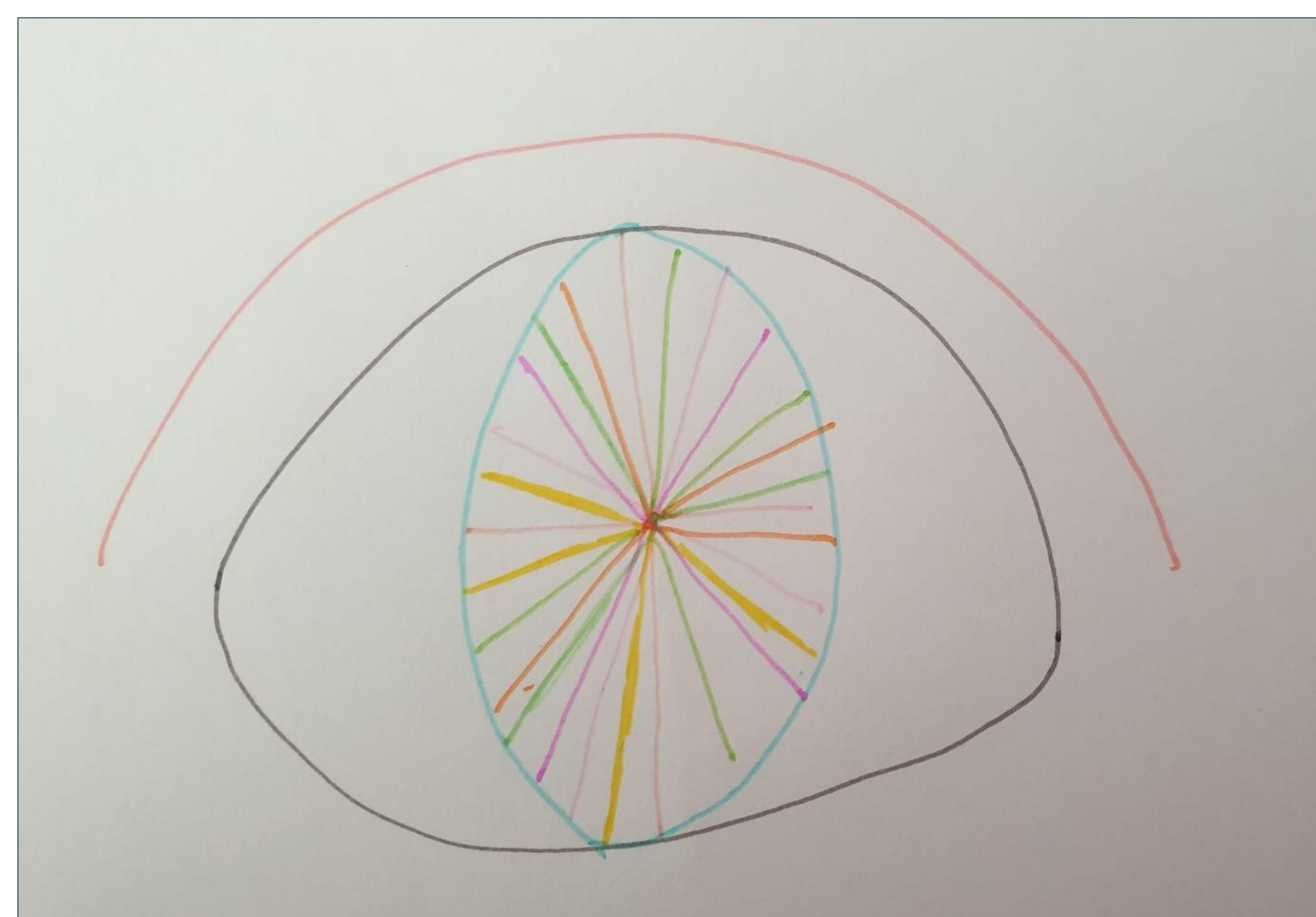
Results

At the centre of the depicted drawing is an abstract motif that refers to the representation of the concept of spirituality. The image producer herself interprets the motif as an eye, which aligns with the interpretation of the researchers. In the centre of the drawing is an upright ellipse with coloured lines or rays emanating from its centre.

Results

The ellipse is a recurring shape in the drawing. The different layers of the picture, with their various colours, symbolize to the complexity of the theme.

At the centre is a radiating, colourful and multi-faceted structure. The viewer's gaze is drawn to the centre of the ellipse by the rays inside the circles. This point is where all the lines meet or emerge. Due to the overlap at this point, the bright colours blend into a darker point. This can be seen as the pupil. While the shape of the eye and the eyelid are strongly reminiscent of a human eye, the iris shape and colour stand out from a human depiction. On the one hand, the choice eye motif refers to the physical-human level. At the same time, the eye also symbolizes a divine level or values such as truth, wisdom and foresight. The abstract depiction of the iris also refers to a supernatural level.



Conclusion

The results provide some initial insight into the images associated with spirituality. In this case, the symbol of an abstract eye was used to represent spirituality. Spirituality shows up as colorful, multi-faceted and multi-layered.

This study demonstrates that analyzing drawings can provide profound insights into what is meant by spirituality. It illustrates how the documentary method can be used to approach the field of Spiritual Care, making incorporated knowledge accessible.

References

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