

## **Aesthetic Knowing in Pediatrics Nursing: A Philosophical Narrative Review**

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### **Abstract**

Aesthetic knowing represents a fundamental yet underexplored pattern of nursing knowledge, emphasizing meaning, interpretation, and relational engagement in care. In pediatric nursing, where children often communicate illness experiences through nonverbal and symbolic behaviors, empirical indicators alone may fail to capture the depth of these encounters. This philosophical narrative review sought to clarify the philosophical foundations of aesthetic knowing in pediatric care, delineate its conceptual dimensions, and explore its implications for practice and education. Drawing upon Dewey's aesthetic theory, Gadamer's hermeneutics, and Merleau-Ponty's philosophy of embodiment, a comprehensive search across nursing, health sciences, and philosophical databases identified theoretical and conceptual sources relevant to aesthetic knowing and child nursing. Sixteen key publications were synthesized using an interpretive thematic approach. The findings conceptualize aesthetic knowing as an embodied, situational, and relational mode of understanding that enables pediatric nurses to interpret children's lived experiences and respond ethically to vulnerability. It emerges not as mere intuitive empathy, but as a disciplined epistemological stance bridging ethics and interpretation in clinical practice. The integration of aesthetic knowing into pediatric nursing education and reflective practice may foster interpretive competence, enhance empathic responsiveness, and ultimately strengthen child-centered, humanistic care. This review contributes a clearer philosophical and practical framework for recognizing aesthetic knowing as a vital source of clinical wisdom in pediatric nursing.

**Key Words:** Aesthetic Knowing, Nursing, Pediatrics, Philosophy.

\* Please cite this article as: Yaghoubinia F, Nourmohammadi J. Aesthetic Knowing in Pediatrics Nursing: A Philosophical Narrative Review. *J Ped Perspect* 2026; 14 (1):19880-19888. DOI: **10.22038/jpp.2026.93746.5623**

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## 1- INTRODUCTION

Nursing, as both a professional discipline and a humanistic practice, is situated at the intersection of science, art, and ethics. While scientific and technological advances have substantially improved clinical outcomes in recent decades, the growing emphasis on empirical evidence, standardized protocols, and measurable indicators has at times obscured the human and meaning-centered dimensions of care (1). In response to this reductionist tendency, nursing scholars have increasingly emphasized the importance of diverse ways of knowing that more adequately reflect the complexity of human experiences of health, illness, and care (2). Within this framework, aesthetic knowing has emerged as a foundational pattern of nursing knowledge, highlighting the nurse's capacity for intuitive, creative, and context-sensitive understanding of patient experiences and reframing care as a meaningful, relational, and interpretive act (3).

Aesthetic knowing in nursing extends beyond technical competence or personal emotion; it represents a distinct epistemological mode through which nurses perceive, interpret, and respond to clinical situations (4). This form of knowing is enacted through attentive presence, perceptual sensitivity, and the ability to grasp the subtle meanings embedded in patients' behaviors, emotional expressions, and unspoken needs (5). Philosophically, aesthetic knowing draws on traditions such as phenomenology, hermeneutics, and the philosophy of art, all of which foreground lived experience, intersubjectivity, and the interpretive nature of human understanding. Despite its conceptual richness, aesthetic knowing remains insufficiently theorized in contemporary nursing discourse and is often

marginalized in favor of empirical and ethical forms of knowledge (6).

The relevance of aesthetic knowing is particularly pronounced in pediatric nursing. Children frequently have limited capacity to articulate their experiences of illness, pain, or distress through language, instead expressing themselves through behavior, play, silence, or nonverbal cues (7). Moreover, childhood illness unfolds within a dynamic interplay of developmental stage, family relationships, and healthcare environments, rendering pediatric care inherently complex and context-dependent. In such settings, reliance solely on objective data and clinical indicators is unlikely to capture the full meaning of the child's experience. Aesthetic knowing enables pediatric nurses to interpret these nuanced expressions, recognize the individuality of each child, and deliver care that is responsive, compassionate, and developmentally appropriate (8).

Although person-centered and holistic approaches are widely endorsed in pediatric nursing, existing literature suggests that aesthetic knowing has been addressed in a fragmented and largely implicit manner (9). Many studies focus on outcomes related to communication, empathy, or holistic care without explicitly engaging with the philosophical and epistemological foundations of aesthetic knowing or examining its role in shaping pediatric nursing practice. This lack of conceptual clarity may contribute to an oversimplified understanding of care and limit the integration of aesthetic knowing into nursing education, clinical reasoning, and professional development (10).

Given these gaps, a philosophical narrative review is warranted to critically examine and synthesize existing theoretical and conceptual literature on aesthetic knowing in pediatric nursing, thereby illuminating the precise mechanisms through which foundational philosophical discourses

translate into tangible, transformative impacts on clinical performance, interpretive competence, and the cultivation of empathic, child-centered care (11).

**Objectives:** The present review aims to elucidate the philosophical underpinnings, dimensions, and practical implications of aesthetic knowing within pediatric nursing contexts. By bringing greater conceptual coherence to this pattern of knowing, this review seeks to enrich theoretical discourse, inform nursing education, and support the advancement of human-centered, meaning-oriented care for children and their families.

## 2- METHODS

### 2-1. Study Design

This study was conducted as a philosophical narrative review with the aimed of critically examining and synthesizing theoretical and conceptual literature related to aesthetic knowing in pediatric nursing. A narrative review approach was chosen to allow for a deep interpretation of philosophical perspectives, conceptual frameworks, and theoretical discussions that cannot be quantitatively synthesized. This design is particularly suitable for exploring epistemological constructs and tracing the evolution, meanings, and implications of aesthetic knowing within nursing discourse.

### 2-2. Search Strategy

A comprehensive and systematic literature search was conducted to identify relevant scholarly works. Electronic databases commonly used in nursing, health sciences, and philosophy were searched, including PubMed, CINAHL, Scopus, Web of Science, and Philosopher's Index. The search strategy combined controlled vocabulary terms and free-text keywords related to aesthetic knowing, nursing knowledge, philosophy

of nursing, and pediatric nursing. Key search terms included combinations of: aesthetic knowing, patterns of knowing, nursing knowledge, philosophical nursing, pediatric nursing, child nursing, and humanistic care. Boolean operators ("AND," "OR") were used to refine and expand the search as needed. To ensure comprehensive coverage, the reference lists of key articles were manually screened, and seminal theoretical works frequently cited in the literature were intentionally included.

### 2-3. Eligibility Criteria

**1- Focus (P & I):** Literature that explicitly addresses the concept of Aesthetic Knowing (or closely related embodied/phenomenological knowledge) within the context of pediatric nursing care or the lived experience of children receiving care.

**2- Philosophical Foundation (C) :** Included works must be philosophically grounded, engaging with established traditions such as phenomenology, hermeneutics, or pragmatism (e.g., Dewey, Gadamer, Merleau-Ponty) to frame their discussion of knowing.

**3- Relevance to Practice (O):** Studies were included only if they articulated or allowed for the inference of transferable insights into practice. This mandatory criterion required evidence demonstrating how aesthetic understanding can practically inform: (a) the quality of the nurse-child/family interaction, (b) the nurse's interpretation of the child's illness experience, or frameworks for ethical decision-making in pediatric care.

### 2-4. Study Selection

All identified records were screened in two stages. First, titles and abstracts were reviewed to assess relevance to the review objectives. Potentially eligible publications were then retrieved in full text and evaluated against

the inclusion criteria. The selection process emphasized conceptual richness, philosophical depth, and relevance to pediatric nursing practice rather than methodological hierarchy.

### 2-5. Data Extraction and Analysis

The data extraction process focused on capturing key conceptual elements, such as definitions of aesthetic knowledge, philosophical assumptions, theoretical frameworks, and described implications for pediatric nursing practice, education, and professional identity. Instead of utilizing standard extraction forms, an iterative and reflective approach was employed to develop sensitivity to conceptual subtleties and contextual meaning. The analysis followed a thematic interpretive and synthesis process. Texts were read multiple times to identify

recurring concepts, underlying philosophical orientations, and points of convergence and divergence across sources.

Through continuous comparison and reflective interpretation, significant themes and conceptual patterns were developed, refined, and organized to clarify the nature and role of aesthetic knowledge in pediatric nursing. Specifically, two independent reviewers analyzed emerging themes in relation to the core principles of Deweyian aesthetics, Gadamerian hermeneutics, and Merleau-Ponty's embodied philosophy. Any disagreements were resolved through consensus, ensure that all integrated insights could be traced back to these fundamental philosophical commitments.

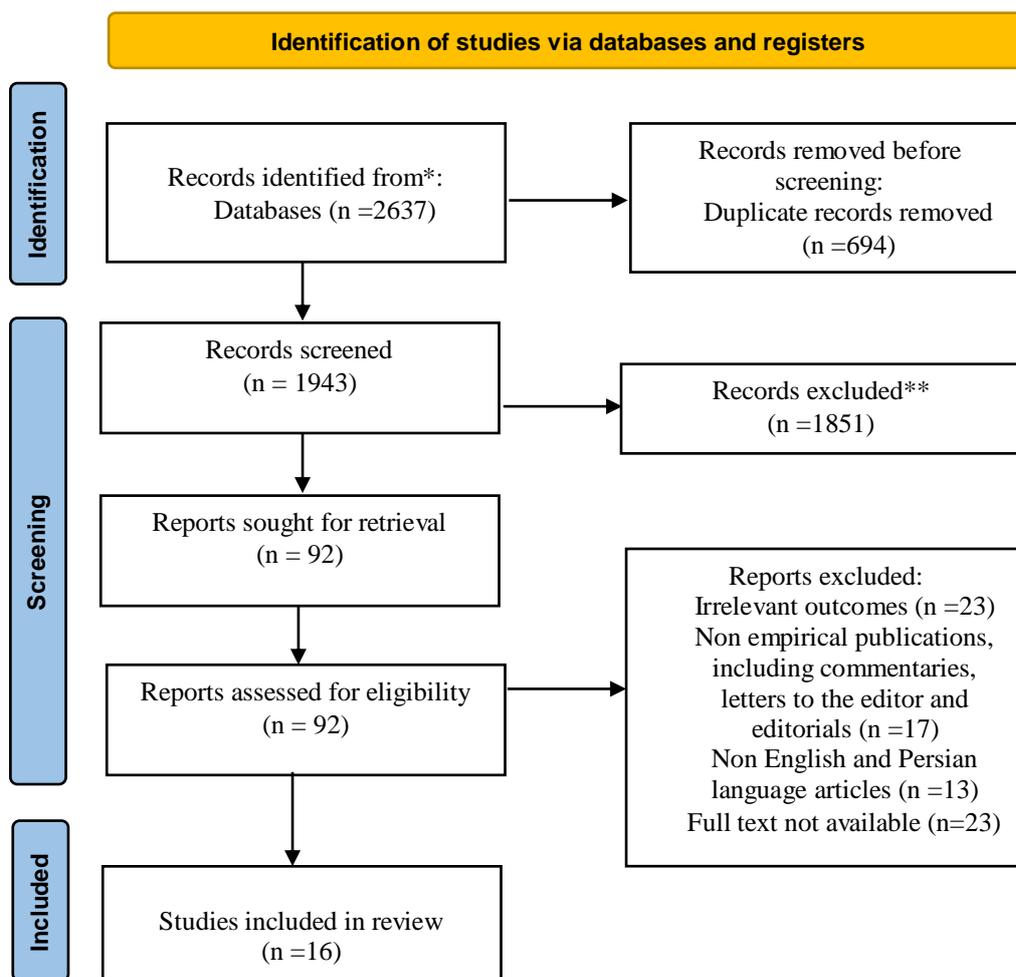


Figure-1: PRISMA flow diagram (12).

## **2-6. Rigor and Trustworthiness**

To enhance rigor, transparency was maintained throughout the review process by clearly documenting search strategies, inclusion criteria, and analytic decisions. Reflexivity was emphasized, with ongoing critical reflection on the authors' interpretive stance and theoretical assumptions. Conceptual coherence and logical consistency were used as indicators of trustworthiness, aligning with standards for philosophical and narrative reviews.

## **3- RESULTS**

The interpretive synthesis of the reviewed literature revealed that aesthetic knowing in pediatric nursing is a multidimensional and relational form of knowledge that shapes how nurses perceive, interpret, and respond to children's experiences of health and illness. Aesthetic knowing is not just an isolated or intuitive skill, but rather an integrative epistemological orientation embedded within clinical encounters. Four interrelated themes were identified that collectively elucidate the nature and significance of aesthetic knowing in pediatric nursing.

### **3-1. Aesthetic Knowing as Embodied and Situational Understanding**

In the literature, aesthetic knowing was consistently portrayed as an embodied and context-sensitive form of understanding that arises within concrete clinical situations. In pediatric nursing, this knowing is enacted through the nurse's attuned presence, sensory awareness, and immediate responsiveness to the child's condition (13). Instead of relying on abstract rules or generalized protocols, nurses draw on embodied perception to grasp the unique configuration of emotional, developmental, and relational factors shaping each encounter. This situational awareness enables pediatric nurses to recognize subtle shifts in

behavior, affect, and interaction that may signal distress, comfort, or unmet needs, especially when verbal communication is limited (14).

### **3-2. Interpretation of Children's Nonverbal and Symbolic Expressions**

A significant theme that emerged was the central role of aesthetic knowing in interpreting children's nonverbal and symbolic expressions. The literature reviewed highlighted that children often communicate their experiences through play, body language, facial expressions, silence, or resistance rather than direct verbal articulation (15). Aesthetic knowing allows nurses to interpret these expressions not as isolated behaviors but as meaningful responses situated within the child's developmental stage and lived experience. Through this interpretive lens, pediatric nurses are able to discern emotional states, fears, and coping strategies, thereby tailoring care in ways that are both clinically appropriate and emotionally supportive (16).

### **3-3. Relational and Ethical Dimensions of Aesthetic Knowing**

The findings emphasized that aesthetic knowing is inherently relational and ethically grounded. It develops within the nurse-child-family relationship and is maintained through empathy, mutual responsiveness, and moral attentiveness. In pediatric settings, aesthetic knowing helps establish trust and emotional safety, which are essential for effective care (17). This form of knowing was found to guide ethical action not through formal principles alone, but through sensitivity to the child's vulnerability, dignity, and individuality. As such, aesthetic knowing bridges epistemology and ethics, informing moral judgment in situations characterized by uncertainty, emotional complexity, and power asymmetry (18).

### **3-4. Implications for Pediatric Nursing Practice and Education**

The synthesis revealed that aesthetic knowing has significant implications for both clinical practice and nursing education. In practice, it enhances individualized, child-centered care by enabling nurses to adapt interventions to the child's emotional and developmental needs. In educational contexts, the literature pointed to challenges in articulating and teaching aesthetic knowing, as it resists standardization and objective measurement (19). Nevertheless, reflective practice, narrative pedagogy, and experiential learning were identified as promising approaches for cultivating this pattern of knowing among pediatric nurses. The findings suggest that neglecting aesthetic knowing in education may limit nurses' ability to fully engage with the complexities of pediatric care (20).

### **4- DISCUSSIONS**

This philosophical narrative review aimed to clarify the nature and significance of aesthetic knowing within pediatric nursing by synthesizing conceptual and theoretical literature. The findings demonstrate that aesthetic knowing constitutes a distinctive and indispensable pattern of nursing knowledge that enables pediatric nurses to engage with children's experiences in ways that extend beyond empirical observation and technical competence (21). In pediatric contexts characterized by developmental variability, emotional vulnerability, and limited verbal expression, aesthetic knowing emerges as a critical means of interpreting meaning, guiding relational engagement, and informing ethically responsive care (22).

Consistent with foundational nursing theories, the findings reaffirm that aesthetic knowing is fundamentally embodied and situational. Rather than being reducible to intuition or subjective

impression, it represents a disciplined form of perception cultivated through clinical experience, reflective practice, and sustained relational engagement (23). In pediatric nursing, this embodied knowing allows nurses to integrate sensory cues, emotional atmospheres, and contextual knowledge into a coherent understanding of the child's condition. This challenges dominant evidence-based paradigms that privilege standardized measures and protocol-driven interventions, suggesting that exclusive reliance on such approaches may inadequately capture the complexity of pediatric care encounters (24).

A central contribution of this review is highlighting the interpretive role of aesthetic knowing in understanding children's nonverbal and symbolic expressions. The literature synthesized in this review emphasizes that children communicate distress, comfort, and coping through modalities such as play, silence, or behavioral change. Aesthetic knowing enables nurses to interpret these expressions within the child's developmental and relational context, thereby avoiding misinterpretation or oversimplification of pediatric responses (25). This interpretive capacity aligns with phenomenological and hermeneutic perspectives, which emphasize meaning as emerging through lived experience and relational understanding rather than through objective measurement alone. The findings further illuminate the intrinsically relational and ethical dimensions of aesthetic knowing (26). Pediatric nursing care is inherently moral in nature, given children's heightened vulnerability and dependence on adults for advocacy and protection. Aesthetic knowing supports ethical practice not primarily through abstract principles, but through moral attentiveness, empathy, and responsiveness to the child's individuality (27). This reinforces the view that ethical judgment in pediatric nursing is deeply intertwined

with ways of knowing, and that aesthetic knowing serves as a bridge between epistemology and ethics by guiding nurses' actions in complex, emotionally charged situations (28).

From an educational and professional perspective, this review highlights the ongoing marginalization of aesthetic knowing within nursing curricula and competency frameworks. The findings suggest that the dominance of empirically measurable outcomes and technical skill acquisition may limit opportunities for students to develop aesthetic sensibility and interpretive judgment (29). Integrating pedagogical strategies such as narrative inquiry, reflective writing, and arts-based learning may provide viable pathways for fostering aesthetic knowing in pediatric nursing education. These approaches acknowledge that this form of knowing is cultivated through experience and reflection rather than transmitted through didactic instruction alone (30).

Despite its contributions, this review is not without limitations. As a philosophical narrative review, the synthesis is interpretive in nature and does not aim to provide exhaustive coverage of all empirical studies related to pediatric nursing care. The reliance on theoretical and conceptual literature may limit generalizability; however, this approach is consistent with the study's aim to deepen conceptual clarity rather than evaluate intervention effectiveness. Future research could build on these findings by empirically exploring how aesthetic knowing is enacted in pediatric clinical settings and how it influences care outcomes for children and families.

In conclusion, this review underscores aesthetic knowing as a vital and under-theorized dimension of pediatric nursing practice. By foregrounding its embodied, interpretive, relational, and ethical

characteristics, the study contributes to a more comprehensive understanding of nursing knowledge and its application in child-centered care. Recognizing and integrating aesthetic knowing within pediatric nursing practice, education, and research may enhance the profession's capacity to respond meaningfully to the complex and deeply human experiences of children and their families.

## **5- CONCLUSION**

This philosophical narrative review clarifies aesthetic knowing as a distinct and indispensable epistemological dimension of pediatric nursing. The synthesis indicates that aesthetic knowing enables nurses to understand children's experiences through embodied, interpretive, and context-sensitive engagement, thereby addressing aspects of care that cannot be fully captured through empirical data or standardized clinical protocols. In pediatric settings, where developmental variability and communicative limitations are prominent, this form of knowing is particularly critical for meaningful and ethically responsive practice. Positioning aesthetic knowing as a disciplined mode of professional judgment challenges reductive conceptions of nursing knowledge and supports a more integrative epistemological framework. Explicit recognition and systematic incorporation of aesthetic knowing into pediatric nursing education, reflective practice, and theoretical inquiry may enhance nurses' interpretive competence and strengthen child-centered care. Continued conceptual refinement and empirical exploration are warranted to further elucidate its role in advancing the quality and integrity of pediatric nursing practice.

## **6- CONFLICTS OF INTEREST**

The authors declare that they have no competing interests.

## 7- FUNDING

This research did not receive any specific funding from public, commercial, or non-profit agencies.

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