PROGRAMME

The Final Oral Examination
for the Degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY
(Curriculum and Instruction)

Susan Breiddal
1996 University of Victoria B.SW
1982 Institute of Transpersonal Psychology M.TP

“Dwelling in the Realm of Death: The Lived Experience of Counsellors’ Encounters with Mortality in a Palliative Care Context”

Thursday, May 9, 2013
9:30 a.m.
MacLaurin building, D115

Supervisory Committee:
Dr. David Blades, Curriculum and Instruction, University of Victoria (Supervisor)
Dr. Daniel Scott, Child and Youth Care (Co-Supervisor), University of Victoria
Dr. Ted Riecken, Curriculum and Instruction, University of Victoria (Member)
Dr. Anne Bruce, Nursing, (Non-Unit Member), University of Victoria

External Examiner:
Dr. Brenda Cameron, Nursing, University of Alberta

Chair of Oral Examination:
Dr. Paul Wood, Department of History, University of Victoria
Abstract

This research was designed to explore the lived experience of encountering mortality in the palliative care context. Encountering mortality was defined as having the knowledge that we are all subject to death. Counsellors included in the study were those, including the author, who had served on a Palliative Care Crisis Team, in the community, and/or the in-patient unit of a hospice in a mid-sized Canadian city. Conducted as a phenomenological study, all co-participants electronically or face-to-face, answered 18 questions that generated from an initial open-ended question, and answered other clarifying questions as requested. The author also tracked the experience, of the experience of encountering mortality, by creating a Sacred Mandala—a painting that involves a particular structure, meditation practices, and journal work—and submitted the journal work as part of the data. Through searching for themes by returning again and again to the words, these themes evolved: responding to the call; the realities of death; being in the know and the impact of knowing; relationships—intensity, intimacy and connection; the gift of stillness; encountering mortality can be mundane; being of service; finding balance between giving enough and receiving enough; being in the face of D/death; staying awake; and
living life. It was found that encountering mortality is full of paradoxes, and that the struggle of holding opposing forces is necessary for transformation toward wholeness, but requires structured support. That support needs to be offered when caregivers are entering the field and throughout their careers. Support needs to provide a discipline and structure that is complex enough to encourage, contain and support participant’s expression of strong emotion, exploration and self-reflection of practice, sharing with others, and being witnessed.
Awards, Scholarships, Fellowships

- $1500 HSA Scholarship, Tuition for UBC: Building International Teams, Exchanging Knowledge, 2010
- $650 VIHA Scholarship 2011
- $1000 HSA Scholarship, University of Victoria, 2012

Presentations

Victoria Hospice

Hospice: Psychosocial Care of the Dying
Self-Care 2011

University of Victoria, Health Psychology, 2012
The experience of working in palliative care.

University of Victoria Nurs323, Relational Practice 2009
Reflexive Practice

Publications

- Talk about a job: Being There…An ethnographical study of a palliative care counsellor’s day. Insights into Clinical Counselling, 2012-07-24
- How art and phenomenology can help to understand what it is like to face death on a daily basis in one’s work place, University of Victoria, 2012. Self-care in palliative care: A way of being. Illness, Crisis and Loss, 2012.
- A place to thrive. Insights into Clinical Counselling. 2011
- A Fate Worse Than Death, Crisis, Illness and Loss, 2012