Abstract

This paper puts forward the argument that there are various, competing, and antithetical evidence-based practice (EBP) definitions and acknowledges that the different EBP definitions are based on different epistemological perspectives. However, this is not enough to understand the way in which nurse professionals choose between the various EBP formations and consequently facilitate them in choosing the most appropriate for their needs. Therefore, the current article goes beyond and behind the various EBP epistemologies to identify how individuals choose an epistemology, which consequently will assist our understanding as to how an individual chooses a specific EBP formation. Individuals choose an epistemology on the mere belief that the specific epistemology offers the ideals or ideas of best explaining or interpreting daily reality. These ideals or ideas are termed by science, history, and politics as ideology. Similarly, individual practitioners choose or should choose between the different EBP formations based on their own personal ideology. Consequently, this article proceeds to analyse the various ideologies behind different EBP definitions as to conclude that there are two broad ideologies that inform the various EBP formations, namely the ideology of truth and the ideology of individual emancipation. These two ideologies are analysed and their connections to the various EBP formations are depicted. Eventually, the article concludes that the in-depth, critical, and intentional analysis by individual nurses of their own ideology will allow them to choose the EBP formation that is most appropriate and fitting for them, and their specific situation. Hence, the conscious analysis of individual ideology becomes the criterion for choosing between competing EBP formations and allows for best evidence to be implemented in practice. Therefore, the best way to teach EBP courses is by facilitating students to analyse their own ideology.

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Introduction

The current article emerged primarily from my own personal troublesome journey in comprehending the concept of evidence-based practice (EBP) and consequently, in teaching EBP at a post-registered level. As I read through the vast amounts of nursing literature on EBP, it became evident that multiple meanings, diverse definitions, and a manifold of conceptual variations existed all vying with one another for legitimation. The more I read around the subject of EBP, the more apparent it became that EBP is different things to different people.

Furthermore, it also became apparent that the literature is wont to treating EBP as a framework, which not only promotes certain modes of practices, but also enables them by demoting others as not appropriate, worthy, or warrantable. Equally intriguing is that the conceptual variations on EBP have real effects when implemented in daily practice, and practitioners have to make real decisions on the appropriateness or suitability of the EBP variations for their practice reality.

Moreover, the most concerning issue for me and for the remaining of this paper is the way nurse professionals decide on which EBP variation is more appropriate, fitting, and relevant to adopt and implement in their practice reality. In other words, the aim of this article is to assist nurse practitioners, educationalists, and researchers to identify the criterion for deciding on the most appropriate and fitting EBP variation for their practice or research. In order to do this, I will commence by providing a brief analysis on the various EBP definitions based on their epistemological dispositions. Consequently, I will go beyond and behind the epistemological analysis of EBP, which, in spite of the insightfulness that such an analysis provides, nevertheless still leaves unanswered my basic question that has to do with the criterion that can assist each individual nurse in selecting an appropriate EBP variation to implement in practice.

Eventually, this article will suggest that the criterion for choosing an EBP variation is very much similar to the criterion of choosing an epistemology and it is the mere personal belief of the individual that the specific EBP variation provides the ideals or ideas to best explain or interpret daily reality. In the language of science, history, and politics, these ideals or ideas are termed as ideology. Therefore, this article suggests that there is a close affiliation between the various EBP formations and the ideology of nurses. In fact, it is put forward that the various EBP formations are towered upon an ideological base. Consequently, two fundamental ideological formations will be identified that relate and guide to the various EBP formations, namely the ideology of truth and the ideology of individual emancipation. Furthermore, the connections between the EBP variations and the above two ideological formations will be analysed to conclude that the criterion for deciding on the type of EBP variation that is most appropriate for practice should be based on the in-depth analysis of the ideology of each practitioner.

Evidence-based practice definitions and epistemology

The literature on EBP displays a manifold of EBP definitions, which provide the basis for understanding EBP and have been extensively described in the relevant literature (Sackett et al., 1996; Closs & Cheater, 1999; Buetow & Kenealy, 2000; Jennings & Loan, 2001; Kitson, 2002). However, what becomes intriguing is how practitioners consolidate these various and at points incongruous definitions and eventually, how they decide which EBP definition is more appropriate or has greater gravitas. Therefore, the intent of the current article is not to documentate the manifold of definitions on EBP, but to go beyond and behind these definitions to the philosophical underpinnings that informed these definitions. The overall
intent is not to falsify certain definitions in favour of others or to replace all of them with a new all-inclusive one, but rather through interrogation and negotiation of existing definitions to question altogether the fundamental ingredients of these definitions and develop the argument on how and why they have emerged.

One amenable way of doing this is to make reference to the epistemological assumptions upon which various definitions of EBP rest. The epistemological debate on EBP usually takes the form of a divide between positivism/post-positivism and non-positivism (interpretivist, constructivist, critical theory) epistemological claims (Forbes et al., 1999; Rashotte & Carnevale, 2004; Mantzoukas, 2007).

However, the decision to partake in a specific epistemology is a personal and highly biased one. The way one decides the participation in a system that defines what is worthwhile to know and dictates the mechanisms and vocabularies, which enables the acquisition of such knowledge is a personal belief and assumption, almost faith that the specific epistemology is appropriate, adequate, and ideal for acquiring knowledge (Mantzoukas, 2005). This is what Rorty (1980) referred to when he stated that ‘epistemology becomes in intellectual circles a substitute for religion as the place to go to find the vocabulary and the convictions which permits one to explain and justify one’s activities as an intellectual’ (p. 4).

Therefore, in spite of the potential of epistemology to logically and rationally articulate choices and decisions made, the process by which one chooses an epistemology lacks any such rationality or logic. The individual selects an epistemology based on the mere belief that the specific epistemology is ideally situated to logically and rationally explain the world. It is this point that Popper (1972) debated about the epistemology of positivism, when he argued that the positivist epistemology is one ‘of rationally indefensible belief – of an irrational faith’ (p. 4).

Therefore, the logic and rationality enclosed in any epistemology presupposes the personal belief and conviction of the individual that the specific epistemology is ideal in explaining the world. This notion of finding and establishing the ideal way of thinking and acting is what the French philosopher Destutt de Tracy in the late 19th century termed as ideology (Freeden, 2003). Hence, what I am suggesting then is that the epistemological assumptions of the individual are not irrelevant to the ideological assumptions of the individual. In fact, ideology becomes the foundation upon which epistemology can be built. While reading through the various EBP definitions, I tried to identify the connection of each definition with a certain epistemology, and consequently relate this to an ideology that propelled the authors of each writing to express themselves in accordance with the specific epistemology.

**Introduction to ideology and EBP**

It is true that ideology is perceived as having a bad name, often associated with politics and disdainfully stigmatized as an impartial and totalitarian approach to matters. Furthermore, it is assumed that naming someone or something as an ideology we afford an emotional state, which enclaves a degree of irrationality or fanaticism that requires at least a cautious approach. While ideology is not an innocent concept and often we find connections with politics and totalitarian regimes, nonetheless ideology’s main intention is to provide an ideal mechanism for decoding and making sense of both our reality and our actions.

In a metaphorical manner, ideology has been portrayed as a conceptual map that deciphers the various aspects of life by decoding ostensibly random and uncomprehending pieces of information, enabling in this way the individual to make sense of the world. Just as maps provide condensed chunks of information, and at the same time protect us from over-information that may be useless, e.g. a road map informs where one should make a turn, and at the same time avoids more complex information such as where are certain bumps on the road. Similarly, ideology provides a map for ideas and concepts in a coded, metaphorical, and symbolic form conveying chunks of necessary information and meanings, while at the same time obscuring the underlying intricacies and complexities of the conveyed meanings.

Viewing ideology from such a perspective, it is interesting to analyse two recent, well-written, and thought-provoking nursing articles on EBP to
identify the broad ideological perspectives that have informed the two different EBP formations that they portray. The two articles are those of Paley (2006) and Avis & Freshwater (2006). Both articles appear in press at the same time, and both articles set as their remit to explore the topic of EBP and its core concepts of expertise and clinical judgements. Both articles follow the same structure in presentational style taking the form of thesis–antithesis–synthesis, where the thesis of the paper is initially presented, the counter-thesis analysed and found fallible or wanting and eventually, a logical synthesis is constructed on the initial thesis.

This is a classical method of structuring an argument and does not merit any further analysis. However, what is intriguing and worthy of analysis is that both papers use the same concepts, namely expertise and decision-making to analyse the nature of evidence, only to conclude to a synthesis that is diametrically opposing.

Paley (2006) commences by pointing out that in order for evidences to be a valid source for decision-making, it is required that they be analysed on the basis of a criterion of truth. He continues to provide his counter-thesis by denoting that this criterion of truth (or error, as Paley most of time refers to it) can be seriously underestimated and distorted by traditional notions of expertise embedded in intuition, reflective narratives and non-empirically verifiable types of knowledge. Eventually, Paley concludes that the evidence for EBP must approximate truth using empirically verifiable mechanisms and these truths must be distributed to others through a system or network, primarily in the form of published randomized control trials (RCTs). Therefore, the expertise rests not with the individual, but with the truths that the system maintains and distributes. It is not the individual who is the expert, but the system that encloses these truths. Eventually, Paley concludes that best evidence is what the system presents as being (probably) true.

On the other hand, Avis & Freshwater (2006) commence by pointing out that valid evidences for practice are those emerging from the critical reflection of individual practitioners. They continue to provide their counter-thesis by denoting that empiricism in the form of objective, value-free, and true evidence can undervalue and distort knowledge for practice. Eventually, Avis and Freshwater conclude that evidence must be relational, dialogical, consistent, and coherent to the network of all other sets of beliefs of the individual. Therefore, evidence for practice rests not on a set of sterile procedure intended to produce some sort of verification, but on the critical process of the individual’s reflections on specific situations and the ability to connect these reflections in a coherent and consistent manner with the network of personal beliefs. It is not the findings from research that are best evidence, but the experiences of the individual, and the ability to connect research findings and experience in a coherent and consistent manner with the specific situations and all the other personal beliefs of the practitioners that attribute validity to evidence.

It is apparent that the above articles provide two opposing definitions of evidence based on two different epistemologies, namely positivism/post-positivism on the side of Paley and non-positivism/‘post-modern’ on the side of Avis and Freshwater. However, what I consider to be equally interesting is that at the heart of the whole argument, there are two different ideologies at work that have led the writers to side with each one of the above epistemologies. It appears that Paley adopts an ideology of truth and the minimization of error, whereas Avis and Freshwater adopt an ideology of individual emancipation from superimposed research knowledge. The ideology of truth and the ideology of individual emancipation frequently appear in the EBP literature of the nursing discipline. These two ideologies will be analysed, and their relationship to EBP will be identified.

The ideology of truth

The ideology of truth purports that the human mind can be structured and organized in such a way as to appropriately read facts and arrive at real explanations of the world (Geertz, 1993; Minogue, 2000; Freedon, 2003). Moreover, it is suggested that the ideology of truth not only functions as a symbolic device that orders reality, but also in a selective and patterned manner obscures certain aspects of reality and emphasizes certain others to promote them as more
valuable or valid, and eventually as the true ones. Therefore, the ideology of truth should not be considered as an exact representation of reality, but more of symbolic reconstructions of reality (Minogue, 2000; Freeden, 2003).

The ideology of truth achieves the above by using two basic techniques. The first one is to convey in its messages more information than that the authors of the ideology are aware of or intend to, and the second one is to make sure that the receptors of the ideological message unconsciously acquire information or views that become ingrained in their world views, which they sequentially come to consider as their own. These unconscious messaging of an ideology is what Ricoeur (1976) refers to as the surplus of meaning.

The main medium that these two techniques use to achieve their aims is language. The ideology of truth uses language and orders words in such a way to convince via semantic devices that there can be no indeterminacy of the conveyed meaning. The language used by the ideology of truth asserts that the purported ideas are ‘right’, and that they speak the ‘truth’. In other words, it demonstrates the intent to remove any contestation from the conveyed meanings with regard to their correctness or veracity, and this is referred to as the ‘decontestation of meaning’ (Browne, 2001; Freeden, 2003).

This notion of ‘decontestation’ is pivotal for the ideology of truth because the message it transmits needs foremost to provide a degree of certainness to enable practical decisions to be undertaken without doubting their integrity or correctness. In simple terms, if the ideology of truth would permit an overt contestation of its fundamental ideas, this would nullify its capacity to systematically organize meaning, and would have deflationary effect in persuading people to base their decisions on the specific ideology. Decision-making is an expression of finality (real or manufactured) signalling the closure of discussion, and if the ideology of truth is to have a role in patterning human thinking to undertake specific decisions, then this ideology needs to strive to provide a certainty that underpins such finality.

Paradoxically, while the ideology of truth strives to provide a sense of finality to enable decision-making, at the same time this ideology intentionally creates a degree of vagueness and elusive meaning to allow enough interpretative leeway satisfying in this manner a variety of readings by different people. Freeden (2003) asserts that all ideologies begin with non-negotiable assumptions from which logical conclusions can be drawn, but most of these assumptions are tolerable to various interpretations. Such elusive-ness is intentional and necessary if an ideology is to be functional. Daily reality requires not only decisions to be made, which demand decontestation, but also requires the maximum possible support for the decisions made. A decision based on a certain ideology, which does not have sufficient support, inevitably will lead to rejecting it as suboptimal or wrong. Therefore, the ideology of truth must offer sufficient openness in meaning for different individuals or groups to read in it their own preferences as for decisions made on the basis of this ideology to acquire the necessary backing.

In short, the ideology of truth must contain a mix of elements that involves both firmness of concepts enabling decision-making and elusive meaning satisfying various audiences in order to acquire adequate support for the decisions to have any effect. These competing goals are actualized through the medium of language (verbal and non-verbal) that targets at the same time both the conscious and unconscious of the individual. Symbols, metaphors, slogans, and sound bites are marshalled aiming at both the rational/conscious part of the individual by providing simple, illustrative, and clear-cut statements and at the emotional/unconscious part of the individual by providing memorable, impressive, and penetrative imagery. Therefore, the ideology of truth through the medium of language transmits to individuals a sense of correctness or rightness of the purported ideas, but when an individual has to logically argue the correctness or rightness of their ideology, it allows enough interpretative space to permit the individual to argue the ideas from a point of view that is congruent with one’s own personal framework of thought.

Evidence-based practice and the ideology of truth

The ideology of truth in the EBP movement is evident from its initial conception in the form of
evidence-based medicine, which has been typified as a decision-making framework that provides the necessary ideational input for practitioners to make ‘correct’ practice decisions and to undertake justifiable actions. In a similar manner, EBP from a nursing perspective has been projected as a conceptual and decision-making framework that is capable of enhancing objective problem solving in the clinical setting and of standardizing the content and form of clinical interventions for the benefit of the patients (Kitson et al., 1998; Closs & Cheater, 1999; van Meijel et al., 2004; Leach, 2006). In fact, barriers that inhibit practice from being based on evidence have been considered to undermine the decision-making potentials of practitioners (McKenna et al., 2003; Thompson et al., 2005). More than this, advocates of qualitative research consider that the findings from qualitative studies do not acquire practical significance, and are not implemented in daily practice by the mere fact that they are not considered as acceptable evidence, because they do not align to the ideology of truth (Geanellos, 2004; Morse, 2006). In short, the ideology of truth that informs the various EBP definitions anticipates that EBP is a decision-making framework that patterns in an objective and precise manner practitioners’ thinking, thus enabling them to explain in a truthful style of daily reality.

The EBP definitions that are informed by the ideology of truth consolidate contradictory statements, and bind together seemingly heterogeneous ideas in order to provide a truthful explanation of daily practice. This consolatory function is most graphically presented in the variety of definitions regarding the constitutive components of evidence. The majority of EBP definitions reconcile objective, generalizable, and acontextual knowledge emanating from RCTs with subjective, individualized, and contextual knowledge emanating from patients’ and practitioners’ experiences suggesting that they both should be viewed as justifiable and warrantable forms of evidence for EBP (Closs & Cheater, 1999; French, 1999; Rycroft-Malone et al., 2004). However, these EBP definitions, as the ideology of truth suggests, offer a surplus of meaning and convey unconscious messages that promote certain types of evidence, namely those emanating from RCTs as the most valid types of evidence (McKenna et al., 2000; Rolfe, 2002).

These EBP definitions achieve the above goal by using language that targets initially the unconscious of the practitioners. Phraseology that describes EBP as the mantra of the moment, the current catch phrase, the flavour of the minute and the overriding buzzword (Jennings & Loan, 2001; Walker, 2003; De Simone, 2006) unpacks a simple, yet concentrated message indicating a degree of significance invested in EBP by current practice, and recognizes a sense of urgency for its implementation.

Also, various slogans portraying EBP as an unalterable fact, as a rational decision-making framework, and as unquestionably the right approach to follow because it enables the provision of superior patient care, convey, in a clear-cut and authoritative manner, the superiority of EBP (EBMWG, 1992; Parker, 2002; Djulbegovic, 2006; Jenicek, 2006). Furthermore, similar slogans that suggest that practitioners have a moral imperative not to make clinical errors and therefore, should use EBP in the clinical setting (Borry et al., 2006), that all sane people are in favour of EBP, and that anyone who does not believe in EBP is in the wrong business (Reilly, 2004; De Simone, 2006), intend to remove any contestation about the validity and superiority of EBP.

Equally, sound bites such as efficiency, percentages, significance, effectiveness (Morse, 2006), conscientious, explicit, judicious (Sacket et al., 1996), and superior care (Haynes, 2002) serve as surrogate messages to previous slogans in suggesting the appropriateness of EBP for daily practice and transmitting in a definitive manner: what is considered as correct, right, and acceptable practices, and more significantly, it is conveyed in such a way as to impart a sense of obviousness and inevitability.

Furthermore, the manner in which the above language is worded privileges certain types of evidence and obscures certain others. In specific, the above wording, while not explicitly negating evidence from various sources, nevertheless privileges evidences that emerge from objective and generalizable sources that purport to provide definitive, accurate, and truthful evidences, and which enables practitioners to practice in a predictable, objective, and standardized manner.
In short, it reinforces the notion that valid evidences are those produced by a method that can secure the acquisition of the (probable) truth about a clinical issue and the best situated method to achieve this, at least in theory, is RCTs. Therefore, the findings of RCTs are unconsciously projected as the most valid evidence.

On the other hand, EBP targets the conscious and rational aspects of practitioners to enable the marshalling of a huge number of supporters. This is achieved by intentionally allowing a degree of slipperiness to the term that makes it vague and elusive enough to enable multiple readings satisfying different audiences with different views. None of the above slogans and sound bites explicitly denoted that RCTs are the most warrantable method for the production of valid evidence. In fact, most of above cited authors argue that evidence emerging from case studies, qualitative research, reflective analysis, and patient experiences should be considered as valid evidence, thus introducing a degree of slipperiness to the term at the conscious level, while at the same time the underlying unconscious messages conveyed through the ordering of the words in the text promote the findings from RCTs as the only or most valid types of evidences. This is what Rolfe (2002) refers to as the double coding of EBP, where different messages for different audiences are simultaneously promulgated in the same text. Jenicek (2006) extends Rolfe’s view by suggesting that this slipperiness of the term is to a degree an intentional act to incorporate as many as possible views about the notion of evidence, hence keeping us all happy.

The ideology of individual emancipation

The ideology of individual emancipation purports the notion that there cannot be a single pattern of thought that can depict the ideal, real, and genuine human condition. In fact, in a Marxist, post-Marxist and post-modernist twist, ideology becomes not a way of decoding, revealing, and defining reality, but rather the means for distorting and obscuring reality to produce an illusion of reality that refers not to the ideal or natural way of thinking and doing, hence implying that ideologies are not ideals, but ideas created by certain individuals intending to guide society’s thoughts and actions by presenting those ideas as the ideal or natural state, in spite of the fact that such a state does not exist.

What seems to be of greater significance for the ideology of individual emancipation and has preoccupied Marx and Engels in their work *The German Ideology*, was the individuals that defined this ideal or real state and the reasons behind it. Marx and Engels considered that the aim of any ideology is to conceal reality and construct a false reality based on the theory of false consciousness. By this, Marx and Engels referred to the fact that ideas were socially constructed and as such always represented the vested interests of those that conceived them. Perhaps, more importantly, Marx and Engels associated ideology with class, asserting that the ideas of the ruling class were the ruling ideas and were employed by the ruling class to exercise power. The ideas of the ruling ideology were made to appear congruous to normality by asserting that they represented true claims, and therefore anything other than the ruling ideology was assumed as abnormal. Of course, the overall mission for Marx was to unmask the dissimulative nature of ideology, to expose the professional group of ideologues that promulgated specific ideas for their own benefit and to emancipate the masses from this false consciousness (Arthur, 1974; Minogue, 2000; Freeden, 2003).

This notion that ideologies are apparatuses of power and exploitation is further extended by post-Marxist thinkers, such as Gramsci and Althusser. While agreeing with the Marxist view regarding the illusionary reality created by ideology, they go on to assert that ideologies have real consequences when applied to practice. Furthermore, for these authors, both the producers and the consumers of an ideology are in a dialectical interplay to constantly shape and reshape the ideological formations. Last, they argue that ideology is primarily reinforced through educational institutions or through the unwitting reaffirmation of the obvious by the individual (Hoare & Newell-Smith, 1971; Althusser, 1984).

The post-modernist work of Barthes and Derrida, while not directly focusing on ideology, nonetheless
their endeavour with language, grammar, myth, and narrative, provides interesting linkages with ideology. The undercurrent theme of both theorists is that texts are viewed as relational, and words are explained only in terms of their relationship with various linguistic systems in which they take part. Barthes terms this as ‘citationality’, and Derrida as ‘textuality’, where new understandings emerge from citing previous understandings that have been ingrained in the unconscious of the individual as real and every meaning alludes to or depends upon the existence of other meanings and primarily on its opposite meanings (Belsey, 2002; Butler, 2002).

The two central tenets of the ideology of individual emancipation are language and individuality. Language in this case is not a mere medium for conveying truths, but is the apparatus of creating illusionary hierarchies and constructing power relations. Language creates narratives that privilege certain ways of interpreting reality, and marginalize coexisting others. Consequently, these constructed narratives take the form of a grand narrative or a master narrative that intends to describe the acceptable forms that can be used to interpret reality and serves as a legitimization strategy for the preservation of the status quo regarding power (Sands & Krumner-Nevo, 2006). In other words, if reality is not interpreted in accordance with a grand narrative constructed by people in authority, then the interpretation does not hold ground merely because it threatens to overthrow the authority of these powerful people. In a nutshell, the ideology of individual emancipation purports that our ideas are not in a sense the origin of language, but the reverse is the case. Our ideas are the effect of the meanings that we learn and reproduce by language that is created by people in authority (Belsey, 2002).

This brings me to the second tenet of the ideology of individual emancipation, which is individuality. Each individual acquires a central role in undoing the established status of power relations by becoming critical or even displaying incredulity towards any form of grand narrative (Lyotard, 1984; Freedon, 2003). Each individual must be alert and deconstruct taken-for-granted notions or notions that are projected as real or ideal, which are imbued in grand narratives, and reveal the myths and falsity that lie behind such narratives (Belsey, 2002). Eventually, this critical stance will emancipate the individual from the dissimulative superimposed reality and enable him or her to construct his or her own little narrative (Freedon, 2003). Consequently, these little narratives are not judged on their truthfulness, but on their coherence. Thereby, coherence refers to the relations that the parts of the text bear to one another and the whole text, as well as the relation that the text bears to other texts of its type (Sands & Krumner-Nevo, 2006).

Evidence-based practice and the ideology of individual emancipation

The idea of an illusionary reality that is central in the ideology of individual emancipation is a theme that is either implied or explicitly stated in the work of many nursing authors with regards to EBP. McKenna et al.’s (2000) article on EBP explicitly denotes that its sole intention is to demolish some myths relating to EBP. The central myth of EBP that it sets out to demolish is that of equating EBP with maximum clinical effectiveness, with research-based practice and with neglecting knowledge that does not emerge from RCTs. In a similar manner, Rolfe (2002) embarks upon the task of revealing the illusion that EBP accepts diverse evidence, whereas in reality, practice has been intentionally manipulated in accepting as only warrantable evidences of those emerging from RCTs. Other nurse authors also denote the intentional distortion of practice reality by EBP in projecting the findings from RCTs as the only acceptable forms of evidence (Allen & Kristin, 2005; Holmes et al., 2006; Mantzoukas, 2007).

Furthermore, the nursing literature asserts that the individuals that have engineered this intentional distortion of EBP are highly established researchers, nurse academics, nurses with authoritative positions in governmental posts, economical imperatives, other professional groups, and the epistemology of positivism. All the above have had a fair share of criticism directed towards them as the groups that have vested interests in presenting RCTs as the ‘correct’ or ‘normal’ way of practising (Forbes et al., 1999; Walker, 2003; Freshwater & Rolfe, 2004; Mantzoukas, 2007).

These powerful groups, like all ideologues, have utilized language, metaphor, and binary oppositions as the ideology of individual emancipation suggests, and have portrayed RCTs as the only valid and normal way of practising. Any type of practice, which does not emerge from the findings of RCTs, is pejoratively labelled as intuitive doing or guesswork practice. Hence they allude to the binary opposites where the alternative to intuitive doing and guesswork practice is valid and secure practice, thus suggesting that if we want to practice in a valid and secure manner, we need to implement findings from RCTs, whereas if we do not, we are at risk of practising in a guesswork manner and therefore in an unsafe manner. Therefore, any other practice, which is not based on the findings of RCTs, is invalidated as incorrect and abnormal for safe practice (Rolfe, 1999; Rolfe & Gardner, 2006; Mantzoukas, 2007). The core aetiology for such distortions appears to be the need of powerful groups, which base their status on the ability to develop, conduct, and disseminate RCT findings, to maintain and increase their powerful and hegemonic positions (Rolfe, 2000; Holmes et al., 2007).

This finally brings me to the second tenet of the ideology of individual emancipation, which is the role of the individual in the EBP movement. In accordance with this tenet, the individual cannot acquire a passive stance and recourse to some absolute definition on EBP to justify and judge the appropriateness of the evidence used in practice. Any definition is bound to enclose the vested interests of its creators and represent not some ideal reality, but an illusion of reality that serves the intention of its creators to maintain their powerful positions.

This then requires that the individual practitioner acquire a decisive role in providing justifications of the evidence used in practice. The practitioner is required to critically analyse any form of information and justify in a reasoned, consistent, and coherent manner why this information is the best evidence to base practice upon. Hence, the validity of the evidence will be judged not on their truthfulness, but on how well-reasoned they are by the individual practitioner and how coherent they are with all other decisions and actions taken for the specific patient.

In essence, for the ideology of individual emancipation, EBP has become a signifier with no clear meaning, and its purpose is important to warn practitioners that they are now entering an area which their critical faculties have to be engaged. No utopias, no solutions, only the awareness of the whole debate regarding EBP, and a realization of one’s own position in relation to EBP. This critical aptitude required by the ideology of individual emancipation for EBP fulfils one of the most important aspirations of the EBP movement, which is the illumination of the central ideas, overt assumption, and unstated biases of the individual practitioner. Finally, the implementation of best evidence in practice eventually depends upon the individual practitioners, and is achieved by blending intellectual judgement, emotional satisfaction, and aesthetic appeal.

Concluding remarks

To conclude, this article commenced with my personal concern of fully understanding and appropriately teaching EBP in nursing. Trolling through the literature I identified a variety of EBP definitions which emphasized different forms of evidence, and such was the variations that some definitions appeared to be exact opposites.

Consequently, I wanted to analyse and eventually decide which of these EBP variations best explained and depicted the EBP movement. In other words, I was seeking some kind of criterion on judging which kind of EBP variation was most appropriate or legitimate for nursing practice. I analysed the various articles on EBP in terms of their academic structure, but most of them were academically well-structured, and therefore there was no way of deciding which type of EBP formation was better. Consequently, I decided to go beyond and behind the structure, and analyse their epistemologies. This provided some answers, because I could identify that different epistemologies were at play behind the various EBP formations.

However, again this did not suffice to decide which EBP formation was better or more appropriate or more valid, it merely indicated that the variations in the EBP definitions had an epistemological base. Therefore, I decided to understand how one chooses
an epistemology and consequently answers my question as to how one chooses an EBP formation. It appears that the choice of an epistemology is based on the personal belief of each individual that a specific epistemology offers the ideals and/or ideas for explaining and/or interpreting reality. In other words, the choice of an epistemology is based on the ideology of each individual. Therefore, I concluded that the choice of an EBP formation was again based on the ideology of each individual practitioner.

The article consequently proceeded to analyse the ideological positions behind the various EBP formations and identified two such ideologies, namely the ideology of truth and the ideology of individual emancipation. The ideology of truth sets out to find the ideal way of explaining in a truthful manner reality, which in the EBP case is evidence emerging from mechanisms that are error-free. In order for the ideology of truth to achieve this and explain reality in a truthful manner, it targets the conscious and unconscious of the individual through the medium of language. The ideology of truth for EBP requires that practitioners implement, in an accurate and objective manner, the evidences that emerge primarily from RCT findings. The ideology of individual emancipation sets out to reveal the illusions created by powerful individuals or groups, which in the EBP case hold highly profiled positions and promote RCTs as best available evidence by manipulating language primarily through the use of binary opposites. The ideology of individual emancipation for EBP requires that individual practitioners become critical about all types of evidence and argue that the best evidences are those that are reasoned in a coherent manner by each practitioner.

In conclusion, it is suggested that the only criterion to discern between the various EBP formations that appear in the literature is for each individual practitioner to identify their personal ideology. In other words, in order for practitioners to decide on the type of EBP formation that is more appropriate and fit for them, they will need to critically examine whether their ideology is one of truth or individual emancipation. Once the individual practitioner has undergone such an analysis and has concluded to an ideological position that is more attractive or provides the belief that can best explain or interpret daily reality, then the practitioner can go and find the relevant epistemology and EBP definitions that would allow him or her to logically and contingently argue his or her point of view and implement appropriate and valid evidence in the practice setting.

This is probably the most important contribution of the EBP movement to the discipline of nursing. This conscious, intentional, and analytical manner of selecting an EBP formation leads to safe and best practice, to rational decision-making in practice and to quality of care. However, this suggests that EBP without the ideological positioning of the individual practitioner would only have serendipitous benefits for both practitioners and patients. All the benefits that the literature attributes to EBP are in a sense a by-product of this conscious, critical, analytical, and intentional ideological positioning of the individual practitioner. Therefore, it is concluded that the best way to teach EBP courses is to facilitate students to analyse their own ideology and allow them to choose the appropriate EBP formation for their needs and contexts.

References


