

Explaining why nurses remain in or leave bedside nursing: a critical ethnography

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Abstract

Aim To describe the application of critical ethnography to explain nurses' decisions to remain in or leave bedside nursing, and to describe researcher positioning and reflexivity.

Background Enquiry into hospital nurses' decisions to remain in or leave bedside nursing positions has been conducted from a variety of theoretical perspectives by researchers adopting a range of methodological approaches. This research helps to explain how work environments can affect variables such as job satisfaction and turnover, but provides less insight into how personal and professional factors shape decisions to remain in or leave bedside nursing.

Review methods A critical theoretical perspective was taken to examine the employment decisions made by nurses in a paediatric intensive care unit (PICU).

Data sources Data was collected from nurses ($n=31$) through semi-structured interviews and unobtrusive observation.

Discussion The authors describe critical ethnography as a powerful research framework for enquiry that allowed them to challenge assumptions about why nurses remain in or leave their jobs, and to explore how issues of fairness and equity contribute to these decisions.

Conclusion Critical ethnography offers a powerful methodology for investigations into complex interactions, such as those between nurses in a PICU. In adopting this methodology, researchers should be sensitised to manifestations of power, attend to their stance and location, and reflexion.

Implications for practice/research The greatest challenges from this research included how to make sense of the insider position, how to acknowledge assumptions and allow these to be challenged, and how to ensure that power relationships in the environment and in the research were attended to.

Keywords Critical ethnography, nurses' work, critical theory, nursing research, power, reflexivity

Introduction

ENQUIRY INTO hospital nurses' experiences of work, and their decisions to remain in or leave bedside, or 'staff', nursing positions, has been conducted from various theoretical perspectives and by applying a range of methodologies. Much of what is known about the topic has been obtained by use of cross-sectional survey methods (Vahey et al 2004, Gomersdottir et al 2009) and analysis involving linear or logistic regression.

Findings from these projects have contributed significantly to studies of the effects of work

environments on, for example, job satisfaction and turnover, but have provided less insight into how multiple workplace, personal and professional factors intersect to shape nurses' decisions.

In this article, the authors describe an approach to investigating nurses' employment decisions in a highly technological and fast-paced healthcare environment, namely a paediatric intensive care unit (PICU) in a tertiary healthcare centre in western Canada, where few nurses remain in bedside nursing positions throughout their careers. Having a critical theoretical perspective, the authors wanted

Nursings Relationship With Medicine A Critical Realist Ethnography Developments In Nursing And Health Care

Edwin R. Van Teijlingen



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