

Making or breaking meaning of the practices of nursing: a consideration of the notions of clinical decision-making, knowledge as action and *illusio*

Authors: Sarah Lake; Trudy Rudge; Associate Professor Sandra West

Authors organisation: Sydney Nursing School, University of Sydney; 88 Mallett Street
CAMPERDOWN, NSW 2050.

Email: slak9234@uni.sydney.edu.au

Abstract:

This paper explores the dialectic between habitus and field (Bourdieu, 1977, 1990, 1998) for several moments of nursing practice and then considers what an explication with more usual ways of making meaning in nursing might look like, eventually moving to an attempt to weigh up the various points of view on making or breaking meaning in these moments. It aims to ask: What do different approaches to the study of everyday practices of nursing tell us about how nurses provide care in the complex, dynamic and uncertain setting of the acute hospital ward?

In the hospital setting, throughout the 24hr daily cycle of shift work, mediated by handover of patient status and progress, nurses attend to patient needs for care relevant to the course of the patient's hospital stay. Each nurse will look after several patients for the duration of the shift so that there may be unfinished, competing and/or conflicting patient needs for care occurring simultaneously. Somehow nurses mostly address all that needs to be done for this finite period of time, handing over in-progress and planned care to the next shift.

But how nurses nurse 'within and between', the crucial but taken-for-granted character of everyday acute care nursing, has not yet been studied. The authors' research observes nurse participants in practice and talks with them to see how they do this, exploring the question: "How do nurses accomplish nursing within and between patients' needs for care in acute care hospital wards?"

In one observation over the course of just a few minutes, as a diabetic patient was preparing for breakfast, the nurse moved fluidly between intravenous antibiotics, insulin, breakfast, documentation, the doctors' round and wound care, embodying knowledge as a pivotal player of the game and accomplishing multiple moments of nursing practice.

Based on the observation an account of the nurse's actions is woven together from five main sources of data. These are the field notes of the observation, the transcript of a follow on conversation with the nurse, records in the researcher's field diary relating to the observation and other aspects of nursing in that ward as well as relevant hospital documentation, including clinical protocols and the patient's the case notes, which incorporate the entries of the multi-disciplinary team.

Using Bourdieu's Theory of Practice (1977, 1990, 1998), this paper presents a preliminary analysis of this ethnographic observation of the nurse's actions during the course of the few minutes. Bourdieu's Theory of Practice aims "to provide an understanding of the practical reasoning of the groups of people studied, based on their own vision and experience of the world" (Deer, 2008, p. 120). His work emphasises that "individual social practice is never "determined" according to specific rules, but is endlessly and variously negotiated according to personal circumstances" (Grenfell, 2008, p. 154).

The nurse's actions as observed by the researcher, a registered nurse who came to the research question through reflections on more than 30 years of practice enhanced by post graduate study, and who therefore had (to a degree) a similar habitus to that of the nurse, were such a sequence of negotiated practices.

But as Bourdieu points out, a point of view is only a point of view from a point of view (Bourdieu, 2003). So what does this view offer that is different to views in the nursing literature where studies of clinical decision-making predominate? How does the notion of *illusio* work as a way of understanding and make or break the meaning of the embodied practices of nursing?

References:

- Bourdieu, P. (1977). *Outline of a theory of practice*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Bourdieu, P. (1990). *The logic of practice*. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press.
- Bourdieu, P. (1998). *Practical reason: On the theory of action*. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press.
- Bourdieu, P. (2003). Participant objectivation. *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, 9(2), 281-294.
- Deer, C. (2008). Doxa. In M. Grenfell (Ed.), *Pierre Bourdieu: key concepts* (pp. 119-130). Durham: Acumen Publishing Limited.
- Grenfell, M. (2008). Interest. In M. Grenfell (Ed.), *Pierre Bourdieu: key concepts* (pp. 153-170). Durham: Acumen Publishing Limited.