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Citation:

Klingenberg, MK (2018) Assessment of nursing applicants: restating complexities. In: Partners in Practice: Nurses Working Together Through Change RCN Education Forum National Conference and Exhibition 2018, 20 March 2018 - 21 March 2018, Newcastle.

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Assessment of nursing applicants: restating complexities

Preferred type of presentation: Concurrent

Theme: Assessment

Aim:

The purpose of this presentation is to provide insights on assessment in selection processes which are different from those promoted in the current selection literature thereby opening spaces for discussion and potential change of practice.

Abstract

Recruitment into the nursing profession remains a principal issue. The assessment of applicants in selection procedures for nursing courses has been discussed for more than 25 years as the application of highly structured, reliable and valid methods. Such research however seems to overlook complexities of assessment. In addition, although more and more structure is requested by researchers and commentators alike, the problems with identifying “right” or “wrong” applicants appear to be as substantial as 25 years ago.

This presentation will treat assessment differently; not as an application of methods but as a social practice. In doing so it will emphasise tensions which are under-discussed in the general canon of selection literature. Based on an extensive and original ethnographic study of selection assessment processes in three higher education institutions in the UK, which included interviews, observations and document analyses, this presentation discusses the interrelations of methods and the people involved in selection (be that applicants, service users or, academic or administrative staff). It will argue that the repeated request for ever more structured assessments may be misguided.

The presentation will share some of the findings from a completed doctoral research project: Observing assessments for selection in practice shows how selectors orientate their actions to outcomes which they consider important at the time, such as protecting or sabotaging selection methods, protecting hierarchical or professional positions, or filling in gaps scripted methods could not sufficiently communicate. Importantly, concepts such as fairness or values, although seen as fairly stable in the literature and in current policy, become contested and (re)negotiated in practice. Assessment becomes, when observed ethnographically, a local practice, depending on and creating *local* pressures and solutions. Being “right” or “wrong” for nursing becomes an outcome of assessment processes rather than qualities inherent to applicants.

This is an important observation for nurses and nurse educators. Reimagining assessment as a social practice rather than an application of methods, can help to foreground the

professional expertise and re-emphasise the responsibility of nurse educators in a time when somewhat simplistic solutions to complex problems form the basis for policy.

Learning aims:

Share learning from observing different assessment approaches in undergraduate nursing selection, in particular about tensions produced and addressed during assessments.

Promote discussion on the concepts of objectivity and subjectivity as effects rather than inherent qualities of assessment practices.

Evaluate the usefulness of ethnographic approaches when researching assessment practices.

Reading titles:

1. HEE. (2014). Evaluation of Values Based Recruitment (VBR) in the NHS. Retrieved 05.08. , 2014, from <https://www.hee.nhs.uk/sites/default/files/documents/VBR%20literature%20review.pdf>
2. Taylor, R., Macduff, C., & Stephen, A. (2014). A national study of selection processes for student nurses and midwives. *Nurse education today*, 34(8), 1155-1160.
3. Timmermans, S., & Berg, M. (1997). Standardization in action: achieving local universality through medical protocols. *Social studies of science*, 27(2), 273-305.

Biography

Michael Klingenberg is a senior lecturer nursing in the School of Health & Community Studies at Leeds Beckett University. He is admissions tutor for adult nursing and leads a

number of modules which promote critical engagement with nursing practice and policy. Research interests focus on applied qualitative methodology, in particular poststructuralist approaches which are underused in nursing research, as well as service user involvement in nursing education. He has conducted studies discursively analysing concepts such as patient-centredness and has just completed a professional doctorate for which he interrogated selection processes in higher education.