

Preparing Students for Successful Transition to Practice

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Background and Purpose

According to the Institute of Medicine, success in improving health care will require a multifaceted strategy, including revamping the education and training of health care professionals. Nursing faculty, faced with many challenges in healthcare education, must explore innovative ways to teach students real-world clinical practice in a cost-effective, productive, and high quality manner. In a recent national survey conducted by Ironside and McNelis (2009), approximately 50 percent of faculty respondents identified providing appropriate guidance and supervision to each student, teaching students to think on their feet and make clinical judgments, and providing meaningful feedback to each student as their three greatest challenges to optimizing clinical learning. Given the constraints on faculty time during the clinical experience, alternative strategies are needed to facilitate student readiness for safe, quality practice.

During data collection for a related study, the investigators used cognitive task analysis (CTA) to accompany data observation of students' activities and learning experiences in clinical settings. CTA was used as an interview strategy to capture details of a specific incident from the participant's own experience. An in-depth understanding of student thinking associated with actions and decisions resulted. The purpose of this study was to examine the utility of using CTA in teaching practice to facilitate deeper student learning.

Methods

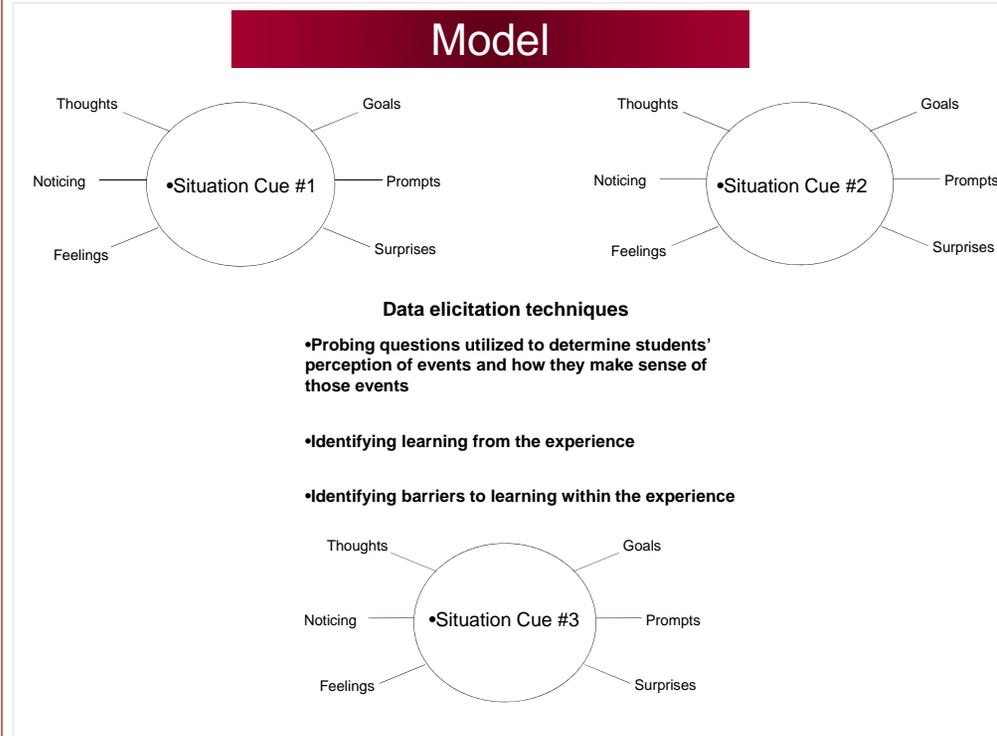
A pilot of this strategy was used with 7th semester students enrolled in a critical care practicum course. CTA was used two times in the clinical setting and once in a simulated learning environment. Post-conference groups ranged from 5 to 10 students. The practicum cohort consists of 8 female and 2 male students enrolled in the accelerated track BSN program. Post-conferences were held in a private conference room and lasted approximately one hour. The technique was briefly described prior to beginning. The topic of discussion was chosen based on faculty's perception of learning potential.

Introduction to CTA

Cognitive task analysis (CTA) can be used as a teaching/learning strategy by faculty to elicit detailed information surrounding student performance. Using CTA, faculty focus on describing and representing the cognitive elements that underlie goal generation, decision making, and judgments in clinical settings. Post-clinical conferences offer a venue for using CTA and addressing the problem of constraints on faculty time in the actual clinical setting.

Using CTA:

- provides an in-depth understanding of student thinking associated with actions and decisions
- identifies cognitive skills or mental demands that are needed to perform a task proficiently
- focuses on describing and representing the cognitive elements that underlie goal generation, decision making, and judgments in the clinical setting
- facilitates students' ability to see the "big picture" and the complexity of care and situations, while moving them away from more linear thinking.



Lessons Learned

As a reflective pedagogy, CTA is:

- Context and student driven: importance of when and where method will work
- Useful in both actual and simulated clinical experiences

Preliminary Outcomes:

- Facilitates higher level thinking
- Engages all students in post-conference dialogue
- Facilitates reflective thinking
- Enables instructor to uncover student thinking, student perceptions, and the significance students placed on given situations
- Allows instructor to pull together various perceptions to help formulate big picture

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