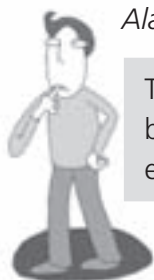


## Exemplar 2

### Course area: Assessment and Workplace Training

Merelyn Treanor    merelyn.treanor@tafensw.edu.au    TAFE NSW—Western  
Alan Turnbull      charles.turnbull@tafensw.edu.au    Institute



This Exemplar illustrates the difference between courses which are mainly based on content and pre-structured exercises, and those which give more emphasis to guiding learners through a process.

We<sup>6</sup> work in the staff development area in TAFE. We're currently offering the Certificate IV in Assessment and Workplace Training via blended delivery to TAFE staff. Most of our 'students' are part-time TAFE teachers. They come from a very wide geographical spread, from Lithgow to Broken Hill. Some of them may have travelled for half a day or more to get to a workshop session.

Up until this semester, we've been using a normal face-to-face approach. The material was delivered over six day-long workshops, held on Saturdays. They can get quite frustrated about having to give up so much of their own time. We wanted to try a different approach that cut down on face-to-face time, and added more flexibility for the learners. We wanted teachers to experience online learning as well. This semester, we decided to try a blended approach as a comparison. It is mainly delivered online, with only three workshops. Straight away, you've halved the amount of face-to-face time. We wanted to see how the learners liked it, and how cost-effective it was.

We started the course off with a day-long, face-to-face workshop, which gave an orientation to the course and to course requirements. We got them to introduce themselves to other learners, we talked about the course requirements, we looked at the course itself and the *Janison Toolbox* that it sits in, and we went through the learning resources that are available. Most of the first workshop was spent with them on the computer, learning how to navigate around the course, and use the communication tools.

The modules in Assessment and Workplace Training fall into three distinct areas. The first is about the delivery of content to students. The second area, which is where we're up to now, deals with assessment. Then the third will deal with planning and promoting training programs.

Each of these areas is covered in a workshop. After each workshop, we try to send them away with a clear idea of what they have to do to demonstrate competence in each area.

6 To make the account easier to follow, the term 'we' is used throughout the account. Both interviewees contributed to the discussion. Merelyn taught the first part of the course, covering Teaching and Learning. Alan was teaching the second part, dealing with Assessment. They were jointly involved in managing the overall program.

The workshops are a few months apart. They are meant to provide a trigger, so before students turn up next time, they know how much work they have to complete. The workshops are then used mostly for reinforcement, and to present new information.

The online material we're using is full of content, with over 200 learning activities. Early on, we got a good tip—don't try to check learner input for all activities. In fact, we settled on two activities for each module that we check and provide feedback on. Students do the rest of the activities for their own benefit. If we tried to trawl through the site to look at everything students had done, we could spend our life going round and round, seeing who had answered what!

Right now, we are halfway through the course. The students like a lot of things about the course. They like the swiftness of our responses, our accessibility. But, boy, you almost need to be available 24 hours, seven days a week to satisfy their expectations. Because we're new to this, we've tried hard to be responsive. In fact, we've set the goal of a 24-hour response time to emails. But that's difficult to achieve. I'm worried about how sustainable it is. You can see how you get facilitator burnout!

At the second workshop, they told us they wanted more interaction between workshop sessions. So we set up chat sessions, and we've run forums. But the course doesn't easily accommodate them, and they haven't been particularly successful. Anything like a chat is an add-on.

The online materials we're using assume that students will work alone. They go away, read the notes, and answer the questions online. No group contact is built in between workshops. The materials are an early example of TAFE NSW learningware, and are overdue for reform. There needs to be a lot more learner interactivity.

In contrast with the face-to-face course, the online version is causing us some anxieties, particularly now they're doing the assessment modules. This material is complex and, when you're delivering it face-to-face, normally results in huge numbers of questions.

But in the online version, it feels like a big void. Right now [mid-way through assessment], it is not clear how they're progressing. For example, we just came across a student yesterday who hadn't even started, because he didn't know what to do. We've only heard from three students, but the rest are a worry.

When they first started off on the course, they were very involved in the activities. Because remember, we're not looking at their work, and so we're not getting a feel for where students are up to. There could be any number of reasons why they're not as active now as they started off. We don't know. You have to put up with the anxiety.

There are hundreds of pages of notes in this course. One suggestion someone gave us was to hand out copies of the materials to everyone at the beginning. That way, learners don't have to print off everything from their college or home. We handed out the notes at their first workshop, along with a learner kit for the course.

Before we finish, some general comments. The level of uptake of the internet out west is low and the infrastructure to support it is not there in country areas. Pure online probably won't be very strong for us, particularly outside the large rural towns. It raises a lot of questions. For us, it may be best to use the online resources in a blended delivery model, rather than trying to go fully online.

### Comments on our own learning...

I [Alan] am doing *Introduction to Teaching Online* concurrently with delivering this course. I'm continually switching between being a learner myself, and delivering the course to others.

One major conclusion I've come to is that the Cert IV, with its heavy focus on content, is not the best method to use. I prefer the approach they take in *Introduction to Teaching Online*. It is much more guidance-driven than content-driven.

In my case [Merelyn], I've facilitated various teams through five years of *LearnScope* projects. In the process, I've learnt a lot from participants. But until this year, I have not been in the role of online teacher.

I have also facilitated *Introduction to Teaching Online*, and I'm currently participating in the *Facilitating and Managing elearning (FAME)* course. One of *FAME's* requirements is that you have to deliver online. The approach we've been describing originally came up in that context.

But there are a few problems with the training that is available. Firstly, the facilitation style emphasised in courses like *FAME* and *Introduction to Teaching Online* does not match the style of a lot of online courses. That has been a big issue for us with the Cert IV in Assessment and Workplace Training. To teach online through TAFE Connect, you need three levels of training. You need course-specific training, as we did by being trained in the Cert IV materials. You also need training in *Janison Toolbox*, so you know how to work the platform. You can enroll in an online course on *Janison*<sup>7</sup>. And finally, you need to have completed *Introduction to Teaching Online*, which helps with training facilitation.



7 The TAFE NSW online platform, which is conducted through TAFE NSW Professional Development Network.