

Exemplar 4

Course area: Bridging for Enrolled Nurses



Carole Camp carole.camp@tafensw.edu.au TAFE NSW—Hunter Institute

This Exemplar illustrates a nice balance between orderliness and control, on the one hand, and self-direction and reflection on the other.

For a few years, we've run a face-to-face bridging course for enrolled nurses. It is normally conducted over 18 weeks, then students are eligible to go directly into second year of the Bachelor of Nursing. However, late last year, the University was asked by one of the private health providers if their enrolled nurses could do the Degree online. The University agreed, and asked TAFE if we would offer the bridging course online as well. The request was to conduct the online course over a slightly shorter period—14 weeks.

The target audience were all nurses working for the health provider somewhere in the eastern states of Australia. Many of them had been nursing for 20 or 30 years, middle-aged women who had never had anything to do with computers.

The plan was to run the whole bridging course online. The only formal face-to-face activity was the assessment of clinical skills and their examinations, which I'll talk about later.

The bridging course consists of three modules. In designing the online version, we used the on-campus material as a basis. I got some funds with the support of a group in the Hunter region which encourages innovative teaching and learning and helps teachers go online. The nursing unit in TAFE NSW also provided funds, which allowed release time to develop the new course.

When the project was approved, I asked for some extra staff development, and enrolled in the *FAMe* course. I'm still doing it now. Even though I'd dabbled with computers for years, *FAMe* has really helped me get the knowledge I need to teach online.

The content of the online course has been influenced by *FAMe*, which is very activity based. I was fortunate in that our face-to-face bridging course has lots of case material and scenarios which were easy to adapt for online use. Some online material that I've seen used in university courses has too much theory and is too dry. There is a tendency to just dump the content onto the screen. So, with the TAFE bridging course, I was keen to get people to work with the information, to do exercises and reflect on what they'd learnt.

Another thing I tried to do was to be clear and realistic about what students had to do. The material would say: ‘This week, you need to do X’. I never had more than three activities for each learning outcome—for example, ‘send me an email and post comments on a forum’.

We had chats. Actually, I don’t like to use that term! It suggests something casual, whereas in the ‘chat’ sessions we ran, students and facilitators were expected to come along with information and contribute. Because the students are working nurses, we organised both a day and an evening chat time-slot, and each student was expected to participate in one of these. It worked—we got almost 100% participation.

When students started the course, they received written information about what was expected. It even detailed the need for computers and printers, and the amount of time they could expect to spend. At the start, even before the course was formally underway, I set up a chat room using the free group website *nine.msn*. Once the students had been shown what to do, they started participating in chat informally until the course commenced.

When they started, I also buddied them up. I gave them the name of another student, so they each had a buddy they could talk with. I got that idea from the *FAMe* course. I enjoyed having a buddy, and when we eventually met face-to-face, it was nice.

There were a range of group activities during the course. One that worked well was role play, where everyone was given a role to play—for example, as nurse, patient, relatives, doctors. We had an online case conference, where I played a psychiatric patient. They gained a lot from that.

Where it was possible, students tried to get together. In one case, a few were at the same location, and in other cases, they would travel to meet each other.

As I said earlier, assessment was the only formal face-to-face part of the course. We got the health provider to identify nurses with Cert IV Workplace Assessor or equivalent at each site. We deliberately limited the role, because of how much online work they were required to do each week. I did the theory of medications and the legal side of injections online. Then, in the workplace, they got demonstrations of how to give a subcutaneous injection, and students were assessed doing it.

To help the assessors, I developed a workbook so they would be clear about what the student had learnt and what was expected of them.

In one of the bridging course modules, we’ve been fortunate that the textbooks we prefer to use also comes with a CD. Instead of trying to get funds for fancy graphics and animations, you can advise students to go to their CD and ‘have a look at the diagram’. I’d highly recommend that approach—it will save you a lot of time and money.

In another of the modules, we used a tailor-made CD, which contained copies of all of the learning outcomes and assessment tasks. We took care to format these as if you are logged on and working online. It means that, in the future, it will be easy to transfer the material online.

One thing to take care with is to be more realistic about how much time is involved teaching a course like this. We were only paid for the eight hours per week, but we all did much more.

Another area where you need to be careful is avoiding students sending you lots of emails. It is much better to set up a forum, and have students paste comments in. It means that everyone can have a look and learn. Whereas if they email the teacher, no-one else sees it. And all 20 of them might be emailing the same thing!

We ran this course using the *Janison* platform. But even when the course was up and running, we still kept the nine.msn chat room active. It proved to be a very useful backup. A few times, when our server was down, we could still have chat sessions. And at the end of the course, some of the students said they'll stay in touch with the others using the site ninemsn.com.au.

Overall, we were really happy with the outcomes, and so were most of our students. When you look through a range of comments from student evaluations, what comes through is that many of them found the course stimulating and enjoyable:

'The activities were always a challenge.'

'You could say that we never got bored. There was always a different direction that needed to be taken.'

Student feedback also suggested that they found us mindful and interested:

'If I was ever unsure, a quick email sorted any queries.'

'The facilitators were always looking out for our contributions, whether they were good or otherwise.'

We started with 20 students, and most of them got through the course. We thought that was a miracle, given that it was compressed into 14 weeks and students were required to cover a lot more work each week.

At the end of the course, we had an online 'party'. We each posted our photos onto the forum, which was fun. We got a lot of very positive feedback from students about this course. And now, a lot of people have heard of it, and are keen to do it next year.

Comments on my own learning...

In terms of my own staff development needs, I'm keen to learn about how to design web pages. When I was developing the nursing course, I had a designer to do the actual design—'put a picture here, put this text there.' But it would help if I could do some of that myself.

I've also tried to pass on some of what I've learnt. This year, I facilitated part of *Introduction to Teaching Online*, which is a mini-version of *FAMe*.

