

Meaningful Assessment for Skills Class Case Study

Background

This team are the allocated staff for School of Nursing module NUR370 - Nursing the Person with Complex needs, a 2nd year pre registration nursing skills module. As a team, we worked collaboratively from the outset by constructively exploring our own individual ideas and looked for a way out that was more extended than any one's own limited vision. This was an ideal module to do so as previous module coordinator (Diane Lyttle) had already started to use innovative approaches to learning such as scenario based learning and this created an environment for pushing boundaries to enhance the student experience.

Another important factor was a relatively new team with several team members who joined the school of nursing in recent years. This resulted in a motivated, and enthusiastic team with a shared vision and goal. We quickly recognised everyone's individual strengths and had delivered the module together in 2018 – 2019 which gave us the opportunity to reflect together on strengths of the team, the module and possibilities for the future.

An open dialogue was in place throughout the module re design giving everyone the opportunity to identify and share what aspects of the module they felt they had specific experience and specialist knowledge. This also fostered a culture within the team where team members could ask for help with specific areas and to make suggestions for change as they could identify with students.

Without this approach the innovative change would not have been possible. It also enabled us to acquire ongoing feedback from students, so we could get immediate feedback from them when completing specific lectures and skills seminars. Students were consulted during the module delivery of Semester 1 2018 and at the end of semester 3 2019. They also were engaged formally through student staff consultations and this was invaluable in shaping the new approach.

This resulted in changing the assessment approach from a 2000 word assignment to online tests and assessed video scenario

The new assessment involved- Student's completing four formative 15 minute online tests during the first 7 weeks of the module with a maximum overall 10% available. A summative 1.5 hour online test was undertaken at week 8 with a maximum 70% available. Finally, subgroups of 6-7 students were video recorded during a practical skills assessment of catheterisation, venepuncture or NG insertion where 10% was available for team performance and 10% for individual performance. This assessed scenario enabled students to demonstrate not only their clinical competence but to illustrate a person centred approach for their patients.

What was done:

The module aims to help students make relevant links between theoretical knowledge and simulated practice in preparation for practice learning where they will engage with people with complex needs in various care environments. The students will work in partnership with people in their care to develop personalised strategies to meet their holistic needs. The focus was student centred and it allowed the learner to retain independence and a degree of autonomy over their learning.

The design involves a scaffolding approach to learning both in terms of across the semester and building on knowledge from year 1. The methodological approach was focused on giving students a high quality authentic learning experience that was transferrable to the clinical setting.

Students attend weekly 1hr lectures and weekly 3hr skills sessions.

Teaching Excellence - Develop and deliver innovative curricula using contemporary methods of pedagogy The lecture provides the theory behind the skills to be delivered and the skill sessions were largely scenario based with student completing the clinical skill using manikins and human participants where possible. Scenario based sessions allowed students to practice person centred nursing when delivering a skill such as catheterisation, ECG recording, insertion of NG tube to name a few.

The four formative online tests were completed bi-weekly enabling students to ensure they had acquired the necessary knowledge to complete the skill safely and to understand the underlying principles of the particular skill. This ensured they were aware of precautions to be followed with regards to the skill. This new assessment created a noticeable improvement in student preparedness for skills classes and a more confident engagement from students.

The final class test was an opportunity to ensure students had the necessary knowledge to go onto placement areas and this innovative approach enabled the module team to monitor the overall effectiveness of the learning outcomes.

Whilst from an initial perspective it may appear the new assessment approach is high the students found this to be a more cumulative approach to assessment. It was based on the approach that students can work collaboratively on real world problems in order to develop their knowledge and problem-solving skills (Norton, 2010).

The four online tests were seen by students as a way to monitor their own progress. These online tests were also a key approach to enable students to be more 'theory ready' before performing actual clinical skills. Staff certainly noticed students more prepared and knowledgeable during clinical skill sessions than in previous years.

The final class test was a summative assessment of the module learning but was completed in week 8 so as not to coincide with other module assessments. Students performed very well during this test and they reported they felt the previous four formative tests had helped them prepare as they went along thus avoiding the stress usually associated with final test approach. This was a core element in our module assessment design and were delighted to hear it positively evaluated by students.

The final assessment was a group scenario and was a direct response to previous years feedback, where students felt they invested a lot of time perfecting clinical skills and the associated communication and team management approaches to have receive no opportunity to receive a formal grade.

Student evaluation did not raise any concerns or feedback as to the load or effort as they felt it was a cumulative approach and less anxiety provoking than other methods.

Meaningful network - recognising the mutual exchange of expertise. Throughout the module we had guest teachers from the Continence team for the catheterisation skills session and this link to 'real practice' was positively evaluated to the module team.

Guest lectures were also provided by our Trust partners on end of life care and hemovigilance.

Teaching Excellence Support and develop our staff to deliver excellence in teaching and learning The final assessment of group scenario was a very novel approach within the school and enhanced staff ability to accurately determine the students breadth and depth of knowledge in the assigned clinical skill.

Student experience - Create an environment that facilitates creative, independent learning was achieved throughout this module.

Motivation and aims

Whilst students previously evaluated the module positively, they still reported a degree of anxiety when on placement in terms of completing clinical skills. Also, students reported that the previous assignment based assessment did not help with this issue. Staff also reported a concern that the assignment did not effectively evaluate the learning outcomes. Learning through simulation provides the opportunity for students to practice person centred care including complex psychomotor skills, in a safe yet challenging environment. Moreover, the use of simulation in preregistration nursing education has been endorsed by the NMC (2018). A range of vignettes to reflect real-life scenarios relevant to the module learning outcomes through skill sessions and this was then used as a basis for the scenario assessment.

The team drew from a conference presentation given by members of the module team at the RCN Education Forum National Conference 2019 and a desire to further improve on this innovative approach.

Implementation

The entire change was developed to encompass the three dimensions of curriculum design of Knowing, Doing and Being (Barnett and Coate, 2005) to ensure that our students have the 'right' kinds of productive skills and knowledge'.

The online tests ensure students know what is required for their clinical skills. This assessment ensure not only that they know but perhaps more importantly that it gives them the power to respond in an effective and timely manner and have more control over their own learning, development and assessment outcomes. This enabling 'self-regulation as a process' (Dan 2013)

The assessed scenario ensured students could demonstrate their ability To Be a professional, accountable effective practitioner.

The summative test was a way to monitor students were able To Do what is required as student and graduate nurses. This was essential to ensure they have the knowledge to effectively deliver care

Using literature, we reviewed the approaches we felt reflected feedback from staff and students.

The initiative was completed by reworking the timetable to incorporate weekly scenario skills sessions and enable the online tests, final class test and assessed scenario.

Intense support was given by the digital learning team who advised on options for creation of the tests, set up for several sittings of final class test to facilitate large numbers of students (N=242) and critically recording and calculating of all the elements of assessment.

The final class test was reviewed and moderated by the module team in order to ensure the questions were marked correctly and that there were no issues identified by running the question analysis on BBL.

The final scenario was video recorded and the videos were watched for moderation purposes to ensure consistent marks were given.

Successes and lessons learnt:

Students were really engaged and for the most part were well prepared when coming to skills class. The regular 15 minute online tests meant they could see if their learning was relevant and also gave them security that if they achieved over 60% in each test, they would achieve 10% overall for the module. It also incrementally built or scaffolded their learning throughout the module. The final 1.5 hour class test had 90 MCQ's and comprised questions relating to all of the module content. The skills assessment allowed teams of students demonstrate the practical application of the module content. Another benefit of this assessment strategy is that it is less risky than a final summative piece of work where the student has one opportunity to pass the module. Students were given credit and could contribute to their overall mark from work done throughout the module.

Challenges included the big numbers of students we had to deal with during skills class. This led to some students not having enough time to fully explore and practice their skill. During the final scenario assessment, it was evident that most students did not have sufficient skills to competently perform an aseptic procedure using ANTT. It is proposed that the skills lab will be opened for future students where they can avail of a 'drop in' service if they wish to practice their nursing skills. Running the final test on multiple occasions posed a challenge as we had to take into account students with reasonable adjustment requirements who needed smaller venues or a room by themselves to do the final test.

The assessed scenario did cause some anxiety for students however after completing this element they reported they enjoyed it and could see the value of this approach.

Overall we found a strong collaborative approach within the team and with students was essential to making any changes. Not being afraid to try something new is key.

Transferability

This style of assessment is very transferrable to other schools or faculties particularly those that need to provide authentic learning experiences for students. It incrementally builds on their knowledge throughout the module and requires them to competently showcase their knowledge and skills in a practical sense when completing their assessed scenario.

The current programme is undergoing revalidation and this new approach will be incorporated into new modules.

The Bsc in Nursing has just been successfully revalidated and all three elements of this module have been incorporated into new modules.

In addition the BSc Health and Wellbeing programme is currently undergoing revalidation. Aspects of the assessment are being used in the new BSc Nursing Science programme as part of this process.

The short online formative tests are valued by students as they can monitor, react and build on their level of knowledge in real time. They appreciate the opportunity to recognise progress and areas for improvement.

The assessed scenario whilst nerve inducing in the beginning is very well evaluated by students who relish the opportunity to demonstrate their acquired skills and to achieve grades as part of this.

Feedback from Students

"I feel the class test and week 10 scenarios was a great idea this year as we were able to know what was expected of us with clear guidance. Much better than having an assignment "

"I like the idea of the assessment rather than an assignment. This gives us a different way to show how the learning has benefitted us. "

"Skills helped put everything in practice "

"I really enjoyed skills this year. I was glad we had the practice test before the exam."

"Love this module far better than assignment and learned lots through the tests great improvement this year."

"The skills class this semester was amazing!! The lecturers couldn't have done it better. I felt very relaxed and able to process the information in skills practical class. I found the amount of information and topics just right. I didn't feel overwhelmed or swamped. I feel very confident in approaching practice learning this semester. Thank-you

Some relevant literature used to inform our innovation included.

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