

From Transactional to Transformational: Humanizing Online Nursing Education

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THE CHALLENGE

In online and hybrid nursing education, teaching and learning can easily become **transactional** – focused on content completion rather than meaningful engagement.

This is especially problematic in graduate-level courses where students must develop clinical judgment, communication skills, and professional identity. Without intentional design, students may feel disconnected, hesitant to engage, and less confident in practice.

THE APPROACH: SIGNATURE TEACHING PRACTICES

A Structured Connection Model: intentional, sustainable practices that foster instructor presence, psychological safety, and clinical relevance.

1

Humanized Weekly Presence

- Brief weekly video or written announcements
- Highlight key concepts, anticipate challenges, and reinforce real-world application

✓ Strengthens connection and reduces ambiguity

2

Normalizing Clinical Discomfort

- Acknowledge discomfort with sensitive topics (e.g., sexual health, suicide, psychiatric diagnoses)
- Model language students can use with patients

✓ Builds confidence and prepares students for real clinical interactions

3

High-Impact, Targeted Feedback

- Focus on clinical reasoning and decision-making, not just correctness
- Provide concise, personalized guidance to deepen thinking

✓ Promotes critical thinking without overwhelming learners

4

Reflective Micro-Practices

- “What aspect of this topic challenged you most?”
- “How would you approach this in practice?”

✓ Encourages self-awareness and professional identity development

5

Predictable Course Design

- Consistent weekly structure
- Clear “Start Here” guidance and checklists

✓ Reduces cognitive load and supports learner success

WHY IT MATTERS

This approach aligns with evidence-based practices in inclusive, student-centered teaching with emphasis on:

- Psychological safety
- Instructor presence
- Cognitive load management
- Practice-ready learning

Especially impactful in asynchronous graduate programs where connection must be intentionally cultivated.

TAKEAWAY

Transformational teaching in online education does not require **more content**; it requires **more intentional connection**.

By humanizing the learning experience, we better prepare students to lead with competence and compassion in practice.

These strategies are low-burden and highly adaptable across disciplines and class sizes. Small, deliberate changes can significantly enhance engagement, learning outcomes, and student confidence.