Discussion Participation Submission for IBOE module

Student Number:

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**Introduction**

At the start of this module I was slightly hesitant about the use of the discussion board for two main reasons. Firstly, I was late at enrolling due to a number of technical problems and had actually considered not continuing with enrolment as a result. Secondly, I do enjoy reading and then discussing thoughts and issues emerging from the readings with similarly informed others. My only previous experience of a discussion board has been on Facebook and although the methods of interacting are similar the intent is very different. I have actually stopped using Facebook as much and Twitter altogether because I find some of the posts very trivial and am not particularly interested in what people have for breakfast.

My initial air of scepticism was tempered by what I was reading on the discussion board and although I only managed to access the site after Unit 2 had closed, I still read the majority of the posts. As a result, I thought I had better ‘jump right in’ when Unit 3 opened. I now have a better understanding of why students find it so difficult to post on discussion boards – the positive feedback needs to be provided very quickly.

Another aspect that was difficult initially was the asynchronous nature of the discussion board. I am more used to discussion being akin to debate – quick thinking and riposte. I think there is still a place for this but the discussion board allows more of an academic focus – the use of relevant and appropriate references in the posts, the time delay allows pause for thought and the questions are carefully designed to provoke discussion.

**Unit 3 Principles & Practice**

The question ‘what learning means to me’ is probably the one that I felt most comfortable and engaged with as it is a question that I have often asked myself over the 30 years I have been involved in education. I have always asked questions and wanted to know more about particular subjects, as an educator, as a sports coach and as an individual. I have often wondered why others do not always view learning in the same way. Learning is comprised of a mix of formal sources, non-formal sources and informal sources (Nelson et al, 2006).

As I said in my post, to ‘me, learning is very much dependent upon the context and my particular context is generally a sports facility’. Now I have been trying to reconcile the practical aspects of sports coaching with the blended and online approaches to the principles of good practice espoused by Laurillard (2002). The difficulty is not always gaining information and constructing knowledge but being able to create the authentic environment to allow the construction of knowledge in the practical environment - the transfer of theory into appropriate practice. Experts in different domains manage to do this and if in the earlier stages learners can be introduced to wider educational concepts of knowledge development, problem-based learning, decision-making and reflective practice (Moon, 1999; Schön, 1983). I was hesitant as to whether blended and online approaches would allow this to happen but having read articles (Oliver et al, 2006; Littlejohn & Pegler, 2007) and engaged with discussion around some of the issues, I believe that much depends upon the innovation and creativity of the teacher/lecturer or course deliverer. It also follows that like any form of learning, the course designer must have a clear understanding of the principles of learning as well as the intended outcomes of the course.

This links nicely with thought question 3; online tasks and activities, where the online tasks should be designed to support and encourage learning and development. As I said previously, there must be an understanding of what you are trying to achieve and I think that the blended and online approaches do much to foster reflection and discussion, quite often hard to achieve in the classroom. It may be easier to achieve this in an online, more anonymous and perhaps for some, more comfortable environment. There is much more variety of tasks and activities available than I was previously aware of and again allowing the authenticity of the learning to be put at the forefront (Oliver et al, 2006). There are numerous examples of how this can be done, for example, I found Salmon (2004) particularly useful.

**Unit 5 Emerging Issues**

There were a considerable number of very interesting and relevant discussion posts under all of the questions within this unit. The idea of lecturers being out of touch with students, not just due to technological knowledge was intriguing and one that I would have liked to participate in more. I would think that within this type of environment there are always going to be emerging issues so the unit is extremely topical.

Thought Question 3; Designing for mobile and wireless learning highlighted the article by Kukulska-Hulme & Traxler (2007) and the vast potential that all of the mobile devices in everyday use have for learning and development. The posts discussing e-portfolios was of interest as there appear to be a wide variety of types available for all situations (<http://electronicportfolios.com/categories.html>). I did investigate these for use within a coaching module but am not sure that it would work on a rugby pitch in the pouring rain but neither does a paper copy of the logbook/portfolio. I do wonder if it will become mandatory for students to have some mobile wireless device in order to access module material as it used to be required books for reading. I disagree with Sottong (2001) that books are still the dominant form of medium for learning and from personal experience I think that the Kindle which allows you to download books anytime, anywhere solves my perennial problem of my baggage allowance being comprised of books.

While answering Thought Question 4; Low-tech and free to use, I was very surprised not just by the amount of freeware that it was possible to access but in many cases the quality was extremely high prompting me to ask myself why this was not better publicised or marketed. A lot of the copyright and licensing issues that cause problems with commercial products would appear to be avoided with the open-source material. For example, one license for a commercial product cost £800 and only allows it to be used by five students at a time. Kinovia (<http://www.kinovea.org/en/>) offers a comparable product, is easy to install and use and appears to have no licensing cost. I have found myself looking for open-source material that I can access and highlight to students to help them with various aspects of their modules.

I think that this Unit really made me realise the potential for Blended and Online learning and that it was much more complex than I had initially thought. I am now convinced that it is possible to personalise and individualise learning in certain contexts, for example sport coaching and provide a worthwhile and authentic learning experience for each of the students.

**Conclusion**

I have been very interested in reading the posts and reflecting on the different views presented – another aspect is the exposure to literature in different areas where ideas are relatively easy to transfer to your own context. From initial scepticism, I have now been thinking how i can utilise some of these aspects into my own teaching. In particular, I think the discussion board will be very useful to support students undertaking coaching placements and the group discussion boards will provide a useful forum for students to share views and work – especially with the wikis.

I think my own experience in using the discussion has shown me that I must incorporate some form of assessment connected with using the board in order to ‘encourage’ students to do so. I feel that if they have to use it they will see the benefits and may be more motivated to utilise discussion forums in future modules. One of the difficulties I encountered was the time issue – reading the references around the questions, reading the posts and formulating responses in the timescale – however that is down to my time management.

**References**

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Appendices: Discussion Participation Submission

**Unit 3 Principles & Practice**

Thought Question 1 – what learning means to you.

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| **Subject:** What learning means to me | **Topic:** Unit 3 Thought Question 1. What learning means to you. |
| **Author:** | **Date:** 08 October 12:09 PM |

To me learning is very much dependent upon the context and my particular context is generally a sports facility – a pitch, a pool, a hall or even just a wide open space. That does not mean that teaching is not undertaken in a classroom but learning is viewed and usually assessed in the practical context, necessitating an understanding on the part of the learner as to how theory translates into practice. Oliver, Herrington & Thomas (2006) make this point clearly when discussing the authentic learning environment.  
Learning also involves a developmental approach which infers that learners (in my context coaches) need to be aware and have knowledge and understanding of learning theory, self-reflection, motivational climate and knowledge construction as well as the technical detail of their sport. They also need to develop communication and decision-making skills along with management and analytical proficiency, which challenges existing learning environments. It requires that coaches are familiar with the construction of knowledge, a principle where learners make sense of their knowledge with emphasis on a quality-supporting environment, reliance upon scaffolding, necessity for self-organization and promotion of deeper learning structures, reinforcing the concept of apprenticeship in coaching. Vygotsky (1978)proposes that scaffolds or supports should be provided to facilitate the learners’ development but this does assume knowledge to be able to appropriately challenge the learner in a productive manner. This shifts much of the emphasis from the learner to the teacher/lecturer, agreeing with Laurillard’s (2002) concept of student centred learning.   
In the world of coaching and coach education much of my research has investigated the development of expertise. Much of this has been shown to follow developmental pathways consistent with other professions; nursing, medicine and teaching but what really appears to make the difference in learning situations is the ability of the coach/learner to engage within communities of practice and their own commitment to the developmental process. I think the challenge for me is to be sufficiently innovative and creative to enable this type of learning to occur in an online situation. Certainly an online community would be a good starting point as coaches wish to learn from one another but the practical applications may be slightly more problematic.  
  
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| **Subject:** Re:What learning means to me | **Topic:** Unit 3 Thought Question 1. What learning means to you. |
| **Author:** | **Date:** 18 October 7:43 PM |

hi Donna  
  
Actually a lot of the work that I have undertaken in the sport context has been underpinned by research undertaken in the medical context. I think that there are many similarities between the 'training/learning' environment but that the medical side is much better documented and researched. I have made much use of the frameworks developed by Scholes in nursing and Boshuizen & Guest in medicine. What I find to be so useful is the actual theory-practice link which is crucial in subject areas like sport and nursing.   
  
You mentioned Oliver and the use of PBL scenarios in the authentic context and whether the learner realised they were 'learning'. I have tried PBL scenarios within sports coaching and my instinct tells me that the learners need a considerable base of knowledge before they can actually engage within this type of activity. If they have no understanding of the authentic environment, no practical experience, they generally skim the surface of the issues. I had a student tell me last week that 'coaching was easy' and when I heard the collective intake of breath from the rest of the group I tried to get more information. He told me that you had a coaching plan, you followed it and that was all there was to coaching. No adapting to different situations, as I agree with you, no two situations are the same, no individualising of the information or practices or even deviation from the written script. This is definitely not coaching or engaging with any form of learning.   
  
  
  
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Thought Question 3. Online tasks and activities.

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| **Subject:** Things 'tried' and thoughts for future trials | **Topic:** Unit 3 Thought Question 3. Online tasks and activities. |
| **Author:** | **Date:** 13 October 6:27 PM |

Whe I discussed what learning means to me I made much of the context, in my situation the practical coaching context. Historically coaches develop develop with little reference to books and scant regard for traditional coach education courses (Campbell 1993, Nash & Sproule, 2009). Their preferred method of learning is from observing one another coach. Unfortunately given the nature of sport coaching this is quite difficult to accomplish and more importantly, few coaches demonstrate practice worthy of repition (Gilbert & Trudel, 2004).   
Currently I am running a 3rd year module, Practical Coaching, where students, after an initial 10 hours lecture, undertake 40 hours of coaching in a sport of their choice. As these students (n=80) often need to access information at different times I have already included 4 online lectures using Camtasia. These allow students to access procedural knowledge (how to access their logbook and how to complete their logbook) and more reflective knowledge (Developing your coaching philosophy and thinking about Reflective practice). These have been relatively successful, judging by student feedback but one of the issues I would like to address in the future would be the development of an online learning/support forum. The coaches tend to be quite isolated when out coaching and have little actual contact with me. They have to identify a 'mentor' at their coaching placement who is able to assist them but the actual input of the mentor varies considerably. If the students can be encouraged to discuss coaching issues and solutions in a VLE then this may both support and challenge them through their 40 hour experience.  
  
Campbell, S. (1993) Coaching education around the world. Sport Science Review (Champaign, Ill.), 2 (2), 62-74  
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Nash, C. & Sproule, J. (2009) Career Development of Expert Coaches. International Journal of Sports Science & Coaching, Vol. 4, No. 1, 121-138

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| **Subject:** Re:Things 'tried' and thoughts for future trials | **Topic:** Unit 3 Thought Question 3. Online tasks and activities. |
| **Author:** | **Date:** 22 October 10:45 AM |

I have been thinking about other tools that I have used within my own learning and teaching environment and the ability to engage with the authenticity as highlighted by Oliver et al (2006). Coaching is a very unpredictable business and often situations arise very quickly, requiring decisions that necessitate that coaches are masters of the instantaneous response. One of the aspects that has worked is to set a task and then add to the complexity of the task by the use of podcasts. Sometimes these podcasts can be just adding further information but other times they require quick action. To give an example, imagine you were taking a team away, you are in the departure lounge of the airport and your plane is delayed. You have training times organised for when you get there and a competition taking place the following day. You also have a bus meeting your plane. What do you do? How do you ensure that the team is properly fed and hydrated in the departure lounge? This has actually happened so it has real-life relevance and I was not prepared so giving these students situations that can throw the best laid plans into disarray can be both stressful and beneficial.  
  
I quickly realised that the students actually liked this method of learning so now I have extended it to give assessment feedback. I can attach a headset and give each student approximately 10 minutes of individual feedback on their work. They (well not all of them) actually listen to it and I have had some very positive feedback from the students. On a plus side it is also easier now for me to give this type of feedback and also quicker - a win-win situation.  
  
Oliver, R., Herrington, J. & Thomas, R. (2006) Creating authentic learning environments through blended learning approaches IN Bonk C Graham C the handbook of blended learning: global perspectives, local design.

**Unit 5 Emerging Issues**

Thought Question 3. Designing for mobile and wireless learning.

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| **Subject:** Re:Mobile and Wireless Learning in Nursing | **Topic:** Unit 5 Thought Question 3. Designing for mobile and wireless learning. |
| **Author:** | **Date:** 10 December 2:27 PM |

Hi Mark  
In sport and sport coaching especially we have a lot of practical experience built in through placements. My students are similar to your in that they feel quite isolated when they are on placement. I have tried to solve this situation by using a mentoring or buddy scheme – many of the individuals do not feel qualified to act as mentors but are happy to accept the role of ‘buddy’. Students have found this to be useful but still miss the support that the university and module leaders provide (Nash, 2004). I also read Kukulska-Hulme & Traxler (2007) and once I saw your post I started thinking about other types of support mechanisms that could be built into the practical experience. The ‘individual’ and ‘personal’ aspects that you highlight fit very well within the coaching context as the students start this module with very different levels of qualification, experience and knowledge as well as the different sporting contexts, swimming, football, basketball and rugby. It is difficult to manage and support all of these students at the differing stages and difficulties that they encounter. I have encouraged them to use one another as support networks and tried to set this up as a discussion board topic on WebCT.  
Perhaps an approach could be to group them into smaller groups, based on sport or experience, and enable them to use their mobile phones/iPads as support networks. Certainly within the coaching environment books are the least popular method of gaining knowledge which conflicts with Sottong (2001). Methods which encourage coaches to gain knowledge and experience should be encouraged and the more mobile and immediate these sources can be the better.

Kukulska-Hulme, A. and Traxler, J. (2007) Designing for mobile and wireless learning. Chapter 14 in Beetham, H. and Sharpe, R. (Eds) Rethinking pedagogy for a digital age: designing and delivering e-learning, pp. 180-192. Routledge  
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Thought Question 4. Low-tech and free to use.

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| **Subject:** Learning resources for Sport | **Topic:** Unit 5 Thought Question 4. Low-tech and free to use. |
| **Author:** | **Date:** 25 November 5:26 PM |

I’m wondering if all of the open source material is low-tech – as it suggests in the question. Certainly some of the sites that I have found for sport are quite sophisticated and, in my opinion, quite cutting edge. The UK government is creating a "public data corporation" with the initial aim of generating a central repository by 2011 (DBIS, 2009). There seems to be a trend toward creating ‘open source’ information portals which could be of use to new graduates hoping to enter the world of work. New research shows that 80% of UK businesses say few graduates are equipped with the skills they need to enter the workplace. The key skills businesses are looking for include critical thinking (nominated by 78% of businesses leaders as key), advanced analytical skills (76%) understanding and interpreting complex data (71%), and importantly for this advanced technology skills (HECUS, 2010). This would suggest that engaging with these sources could be a key asset for graduates in the world of sport.  
For example, http://www.kinovea.org/en/ is a site which offers free, open source video analysis software specifically designed for sport coaches. Having used some of the commercial products available at quite considerable cost to Edinburgh Napier University in licence fees, this product is actually very user-friendly and in some ways easier to use as it is compatible with more of the available software. Many coaches and clubs cannot afford the expense of the commercially available products and I would certainly recommend this one.  
Similarly many sports participants own watches or similar devices that monitor heart rates during exercise but do not have the software for detailed analysis. http://www.linux.com/archive/feed/60528 is another site which enables participants or coaches to access an open source application to track their activities. It allows graphing of distance, time, heart rate, exertion etc. This application does not allow you to integrate GPS data but consider the following: http://www.mapmytracks.com/. This allows you to plot courses/routes for various sports, cycling, running, sailing, skiing and walking. Given the obesity crisis that is threatening this country’s children, imagine the use of this, not just as a teaching tool but as a motivation to exercise (lobstein et al, 2004).   
I have made much use of Utube – there are many video clips concerning most aspects of sport, both good and bad practice. I have used some clips to create a student resource around aspects of coaching philosophy – it is good to embrace all viewpoints and encourage the students to engage in deeper thinking. This type of technology is easy, convenient and fun for them to access and used appropriately can become a useful teaching aid.  
  
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