Anglia Ruskin University

How do an online learning community of sport coaches develop an ability to critically reflect on their coaching practice?

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The aim

To investigate how a theory-based pedagogy of 'reflective conversations' developed students' ability to reflect critically on their sports coaching practice across a 12-week online distance learning module.

Benefits

- Implement theory-informed pedagogy in module design, delivery and assessment

- Enhance the initiation, support and sustainability of reflective skill development

- Provide an evidence base for future learning

- Support a central focus on tutor skill and personal relationships for facilitating successful online distance learning

The approach

Reflection is a key ability that underpins effective practice in sport coaching, meditating the translation of experiences into knowledge. At the same time, reflective skill development is challenging for sport coaching students and teaching practitioners. There is limited evidence to guide initiation and support in sport coaching; models of reflection are often borrowed from other educational disciplines, yet it is unclear whether this is helpful in guiding learning. Research that does exist in sport coaching suggests that 'reflective conversations' play a key role in learning from experience (Gilbert & Trudel, 2001; Stodter & Cushion, 2017).

This project implemented 'reflective conversations' between a tutor and two Level 4 module cohorts of online distance learning sports coaching students (N = 35), based on four theoretical stages of reflective learning; issue setting (following video of coaching practice), strategy generation, experimentation, and evaluation. In this way, theory was used to design, deliver and assess (through a written reflective portfolio) module content. The following data was collected:

- 21 x reflective conversations via Skype or Phone (mean duration = 20 mins)

- 4 x follow up individual interviews and 4 x focus groups with a total of 14 student participants, 5 – 17 months post-module

- 1 x tutor interview

A total of 665 minutes of audio data was generated, transcribed verbatim, and subjected to thematic analysis to provide evidence on the learning processes at work.

The outcome(s)

The following themes were identified:

- Issues conceptualising reflection: "it is not something I really ask myself or really know how I would know this"

- Growing self-awareness and meta-reflection: "I didn't know I neglected it until I did the module"

- A lasting change, for some: "Now I know more about it and I've had experience that actually it does work"

- Theoretical support: "To actually have a process and model to reflect it is quite good."

- The tutor: "that human connection…is nice because you can feel isolated"

Profile

Tutor name:
Dr Anna Stodter and Dr Ed Cope

Faculty/Service:
FST: Department of Sport and Exercise Sciences

Future Development

The tutor plans to:

- Delve deeper into the role of the online tutor and the knowledge and skills that enable effectiveness.

- Set up reflective groups or communities to encourage better collaborative reflection between students, through canvas discussion boards

- Additional presentation assessment to enhance authenticity and allow students to better showcase their reflective skills through personal interaction.

Recommendations

The tutor advises anyone interested in this approach to:

- Help student practitioners to conceptualise reflection more clearly and engage in meta-reflection through reflective conversations

- Consider the underpinning theoretical framework of adopted pedagogies, and/or what frameworks could enhance design, delivery and assessment

- Tutors and the 'human connection' are central to success, particularly in an online distance learning context – ensure appropriate knowledge, experience and skills in supporting reflection as well as the specific subject area.