**Individual Reflective Report – Mark Keyes**

This is my first time taking part in an online programme so I was a little apprehensive. I found that the pre-module induction session was very helpful as I was familiar with the technology before the first webinar and was confident that it would work on my PC. It also gave me a good understanding of how to interact within this environment, helping my confidence when it came to making a first post later in the week (Schultz & Beach, 2004).

It is obvious that forward planning and organisation is critical in online delivery. I believe that, if teaching online in the future, I would be spending a lot of time in advance preparing learning objects and testing equipment. It was obvious from the early discussion thread on the technology wish lists that apprehension around technology working is a universal theme.

I was particularly interested in this module as I would have reservations about a lack of ‘connectedness’ in online delivery. One of my main concerns about online teaching is that I, or my students, will be unable to project personality or individuality in this environment, i.e. the perceived ‘added value’ that a real classroom offers. I feel that my experience in Week 1 was a little skewed due to my familiarity with the tutors and some of the participants from the MSc programme. I definitely felt more of a connection with the MSc participants where there was already a relationship established.

In Week 2 the module workload ramped up significantly. Having two separate group activities running concurrently was very challenging. It became increasingly difficult to keep up with the number of posts and successfully navigating Webcourses was a problem for me initially. I found myself having to consciously consider time management and allocate time to separate activities and tasks in order to meet deadlines. I had an opportunity to reflect on this in Week 4 as it was one of the topics under the “Problem Based Scenarios” discussion activity. It was interesting that another post in this thread led me to an article that highlighted the importance of developing a time management strategy as an online student (Roper, 2007). I have come to understand that this is equally applicable to the e-moderator.

The engagement across the two group activities was affected initially by the mix of team members. For the group discussion design project, the team was comprised mainly of fellow MSc participants while the debate activity was in fact the opposite. This led to a slower start with the debate activity. I believe there were two reasons for this. Firstly, the majority of the team members were unfamiliar with Webcourses and were finding it difficult to navigate. The second issue centred on the need to nominate a chair to coordinate the activity, a particularly difficult challenge for a group at a ‘forming’ stage of development.

I was the first to post on my debate team discussion forum with my contribution to the opening statement against the motion of “online learning involves too much clicking and not enough learning”. The point that I raised was that online learning can offer learning opportunities outside of the prescribed learning outcomes for a programme. I was referring here to the possibilities for discovery learning and the opportunity for participants to enhance their digital literacy skills in an online environment. The posts here from other team members made some really strong arguments such as:

* The importance of focussing on the pedagogy rather than the technology, reference here to the sentiments of Dr Mark Glynn from this week’s webinar.
* The importance of meeting students where they meet themselves, alluding to modern generations use of technology for communication (Stommel, 2015)
* The access that the internet and online learning provides to a seemingly limitless pool of information, enabling learners to “create new relationships with knowledge and new representations of knowledge” (Conceição-Runlee and Daley 1998, p. 41)
* How an online environment can provide intrinsic motivation for learners to develop communities of interest in areas of their choice

While Week 2 was challenging for the module participants, it was obvious that it was at least equally so for the tutor’s. This topic of time online for tutors was a recurring one over the module. It was conspicuous from the earliest discussion on the COFA videos right up to the Week 4 Problem Based Scenarios where it was raised again in relation to the demands on e-moderators. I found the insights of Joan Goloboy (2003) useful here in relation to advance expectations of time commitments and a need for online teachers to “trade time for flexibility”.

For the debate task, I thought that the approach of not allowing visibility of posts until you made one yourself was very clever and consistent with a strategy to move participants from being “Lurkers to Posters” (Schultz & Beach, 2004). It also meant that each team member was not influenced by the other contributions which left us with five separate and honest perspectives on the debate motion.

The design activity progressed more quickly at first. The group benefitted from early asynchronous discussions and having team members who are technology proficient. The Slack app was selected for asynchronous communication and Adobe Connect was chosen for weekly virtual meetings. As I am not particularly strong on the technology side, I really valued the learning opportunity of being exposed to applications which were new to me.

The project provided an excellent opportunity to consider the design of online activities and how they should be managed. This moved the focus away from my experience of being an online participant to the perspective of the e-moderator. I found it useful to reflect on my experiences from the module thus far and consider the work that had been going on behind the scenes. While I found the workload surprisingly intensive and demanding as a participant, it was obvious that the tutor’s faced a significant challenge to monitor and respond to the multiple activities. Despite this, it was apparent that they continued to model best practice and behaviour in e-moderation (Schultz & Beach, 2004, p.14 and Goloboy, 2003).

**Word Count:** 992 (excluding references)

**References:**

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