

Concrete Experience:

Learning is described as a process whereby concepts are derived from and continuously modified by experience (Kolb, 2015, p.37).

Through the format of David Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory (Kolb, 1984) I was able to develop my mentality and maturity after my first time coasteering. As part of the Ecology Of Adventure module of my Adventure Filmmaking degree, seven of us, including the two lecturers, recently took an excursion to St Non's Bay in St David's Wales to explore the intertidal zone at the base of the Pembrokeshire cliffs. The purpose of the activity was to be able to start assessing risk for ourselves, gain knowledge and increased understanding through practical experience, and to think about how we as filmmakers could apply our knowledge of that medium to this environment safely.

Date:	7th November 2023
Activity:	Coasteering
Location:	St Davids
Weather:	Mostly sunny all day
	Air temperature: 14°C
	Feels like temperature: 9°C
	Wind speed: 14 mph
	Wind direction: West

Shortly after arriving we changed into wetsuits, buoyancy aids and helmets, and made our way to the cliff edge to look at the intertidal zone we'd be entering. Beginning with a visual analysis of the environment helped create a personal correlation between the weather data we'd looked at before leaving, and the physical description of the ocean, which we could then base future experiences around. This would be built upon further after entering the water, as we could then connect how the appearance of the ocean aligns with its physical impact on us.

We walked along the coast path and found our access point to the shoreline where the rocks fade into the sea. We tightened our helmets and were reminded of how we were now in a live, hazardous environment. Due to our course's focus on filmmaking, one of us brought a GoPro while our lecturer brought an Insta360 camera. The day then consisted of traversing over rock pools, swimming and wading between platforms of rock, ascending and then jumping off small sea stacks and then interacting with large waves, keeping note of the wave frequency, wave period and how the water itself flows around large waves (e.g when water recedes backwards just before a wave's crest). All the while experimenting with how we could incorporate the cameras to get the footage we wanted.

Reflective Observation:

Immediate or concrete experiences are the basis for observation for observations and reflection. These reflections are assimilated and distilled

into abstract concepts from which new implications for action can be drawn. These implications can be actively tested and serve as guides in creating new experiences. (Kolb, 2015, p.51)

Therefore, in order to effectively learn from any experience, it's vital that there is reflection on the activity to evaluate both the successes and flaws, so that you can adapt to both next time. The biggest area of reflection, and hence improvement, is surrounding my mental attitude both beforehand and during coastering that led to careless actions and potentially dangerous outcomes. However, I think it's important to note what was successful beforehand, as these are just as important as the "failures" should I repeat this activity again, as I can work around what actions/thought processes were productive for an equal but hopefully better overall experience.

I love climbing and scrambling, and (when it's not cold) I'm a big fan of swimming. To have all three culminate into one activity meant I had a lot of fun. Most of my dislike around being in the ocean and water sports in general is regarding the cold. To combat this, I wore a thin, skin-tight thermal base layer under my wetsuit to improve the insulation without degrading the wetsuit's ability to trap water (Cooper, 2022). This meant I was significantly more comfortable both in and out of the water which allowed more of my focus to be on the activity itself, increasing my enjoyment. It also helped that the sun was shining which likely added a level of subconscious happiness (Beecher M.E; Egget D, *et al*, 2016), as well as some extra warmth.

With nice weather and a fun activity, I was excited before we even started. But this is where my poor mindset begins, as I generally start outdoor activities subconsciously overconfident. This is because not only am I quite confident in my abilities, but I don't know if I'm afraid of anything, which would usually keep an overconfident attitude balanced, making me more cautious, methodical and ultimately, safe, like it did with some of my peers. This is coupled with the unfortunate fact that, assuming I'm the only one affected, I don't particularly care if things go wrong, which is likely where that reckless fearlessness comes from. This led to a general lack of focus and care, which was evident at two key moments. First, while idly floating, I got caught off guard by a large wave I both wasn't paying attention to, and was too close to, meaning that after the wave suddenly crashed over me, I got forcefully pulled backwards over a rock shelf as the water washed back out to sea. There was a second, similar incident later on, where I pushed out from behind a rock too late to get carried by a wave, and instead got violently pulled backwards over the whole rock shelf and caught in an eddie, before being thrown back over the rock by the next large wave, smacking my hands on the barnacles and tearing a small hole in the back of my shorts. While I enjoyed these two incidents in the moment, and they added to the positive experience I had, upon reflection both immediately after and since, I've realised how potentially dangerous they could've been, and while I care less about my own safety, I need to be able to adapt my mindset to incorporate the safety of others.

Abstract Conceptualisation:

The abstract conceptualisation section of Kolb's (1984) experiential learning cycle derives from his analysis of John Dewey's concept of social learning (1938). This is where I compare my experience to recognised theories to act as either support or points of contention. My experience relates most similarly to Simon Priest's Adventure Experience Paradigm (Martin & Priest, 1986), which describes the relationship between an individual's competence and the activity's level of risk in order to achieve "Peak Adventure". Figure 1 depicts the five conditions of challenge (expanded from Mortlock's four) which arise from the interaction of risk and competence in the adventure experience (Priest & Carpenter, 1993, p.54)

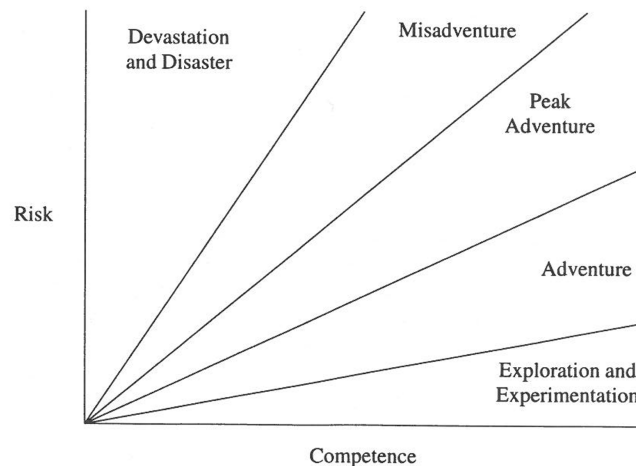


Figure 1. The Adventure Experience Paradigm (Martin & Priest, 1986; Priest, 1990, 1999)

I believe the reason I reacted so positively to coasteering overall and the two dangerous incidents I mentioned in my reflection, was because of that element of risk conflicting with the limits of my competency. As it was my first time in that environment, I have a poor understanding of the risks associated with it and the severity of danger I put myself in due to my lack of focus. That uncertainty makes me believe that I inherently associated those two incidents with a higher level of danger than I was likely in, putting my mentality considerably more in the "Peak Adventure" condition (Figure 1). This also aligns when I was simply traversing the rock pools at the base of the cliffs, as my competency and confidence counterbalances the risk, leading to a less actively exciting reaction, but a more curious and explorative mindset.

Active Experimentation:

While I am yet to go coasteering again, I can still outline the actions I'll take next time in order to have a more adventurous and enjoyable experience. Firstly, and most importantly, I will aspire to keep my mentality controlled to both recognise the inherent danger in the activity, but also the consequences of carelessness on not only myself but also my peers, particularly if I lead an expedition or a crew to film there in the future. I am continuously in the process of trying to develop my mindset to overwrite my lack of care for myself, which is ultimately where the recklessness stems from.

With that said, I'll also continue to incorporate appropriate layering systems and respond accordingly to how my body reacts to the environment. Wearing a skin-tight base layer was an effective and successful method of combating the cold. But, especially when the ocean temperature was near its warmest seasonally (Coast Radar, no date) after the seasonal lag left after summer, I should keep in mind other effective ways to warm up in colder seasons or climates.

Overall, following Kolb's experiential learning theory (Kolb, 1984) has guided me to better realise the actions I need to take in order to both make the most out of this coasteering experience, but also capitalise on future experiences to inform my next adventures. I had a lot of fun and learned a lot about both the activity as a whole but also the mindset I need to have beforehand and during any experience. I will attempt to more consciously utilise this process of reflection and conceptualisation in particular in future excursions, as I'll continue to explore and hunt for other more adventurous concrete experiences.

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