

Experiential Learning Essay

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Introduction

Adventure should include self-determination, risk, uncertainty, and transcendence due to an ecstatic or managerial experience (Dickson & Gray 2012). But what happens after I experience an adventure? Can I learn from this experience? One way to learn after an adventurous experience is by reflecting on it. Reflective models by Piaget, Lewin and Dewey dive into different themes including; feedback on concrete experiences, the significance of an experience, and specific developmental benchmarks while ageing (Kolb 2015). Their models are based on a traditional education process, David Kolb utilized the key themes but used a less conventional way of learning to create his reflective model in 1984 with the Experiential Learning Model. The model is divided into four parts; concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation. Using the Experiential Learning Model (Kolb 2015 p.48) I will relate a personal adventurous experience by going in-depth into the four key parts while also highlighting the specific environmental conditions, (weather, temperature, elevation) so that I can learn from my adventurous experience and be more appropriately prepared for more in my future.

Kolbs model

Before I reflect on my experiences, I will expand on Kolb's Experiential Learning Model (Kolb 2015 p.48). Concrete experience is the first part of Kolb's model. It focuses on the experience and the direct engagement with the environment physically and consciously. There has to be something memorable that makes the participant think about what led them to make that decision. There is no reflection during this stage of the model. It is the foundation that will be the focus on reflection and learning later on. The second stage of Kolb's experiential learning

model is reflective observation. In this stage the participant is making sense of their experience, considering different viewpoints and recognizing patterns. The individual needs to ask themselves “What worked?”, “How did I feel?”, and “What didn’t work?”. It is going past the description of the event into reflection and critical thinking. The third stage is abstract conceptualization. In this stage, participants start to create generalizations and theories on their experience. It is answering the questions asked in the reflective observation. At this stage, there is more logical and analytical thinking rather than emotional feelings from the experience. This stage could also include researching and discussing with peers about the experience. The last stage is active experimentation. This stage involves putting the theories and ideas discussed in the abstract conceptualization and reflective overview into play. The individual can use the concepts to predict and test their new behaviours. They can apply what they have learned in different contexts and adapt as they go.

Concrete experience

In late June, I went on a hike with my best friend and a couple of peers up a mountain called Tangled Ridge in Jasper Provincial Park Alberta. What I thought was going to be a 5-kilometre hike turned into a 10-kilometre round trip to peak Tangled Ridge. The tangled ridge's base is 1850 meters above sea level and its peak is 3000 meters above sea level and the hike takes about 7 hours (Giants Gate Journey 2011). I went in late June so the average temperature is about 20 degrees Celsius at the base and about 16 degrees Celsius at the peak. The wind at the peak of a mountain is also usually stronger at the top. I had my work jacket on, leggings, and my running shoes. I was asked to go on this hike 10 minutes before they were supposed to leave so I didn't bring water because I thought it was going to be an easy 5km. The hike was only uphill.

My shoes got wet because we crossed a river. I was dehydrated and didn't have any food with me. We barely took breaks and an hour away from the peak we reached snow. We decided to keep going so my feet and lower legs were wet and cold. When we were descending the group left me and my best friend to play catch up because we desperately needed a break. When we finally made it home I was so hungry and dehydrated that I broke down in tears with my friend.

Reflective observation

The hike was overall a bad experience. There were warning signs at the beginning of the day that would have allowed me to avoid my fail too. I was told to get ready for a hike 5 minutes before they left; I didn't know where the hike was taking place; I was unfamiliar with the area; and two of my group members who planned the hike brought backpacks filled with essential items like water, hiking poles, and extra layers. I also could have turned around at any point during the hike when I felt it was becoming too much. Why I didn't do that because I didn't want to seem unfit, or lazy compared to my peers. I was blindly following the group members because I just met them and wanted to make new friends. One thing that made me upset about the hike was that the people who found the hiking spot did not warn me and my best friend that we were way over our heads. They said it would be a 5km hike and in my mind that would be easy but I was wrong to assume that. It was a poor decision to go so unprepared.

Abstract conceptualization

In settings like this, I usually assume that my group members have my best interest in mind and I won't have to do any research beforehand because they know best. I learned that is not how things work the hard way during this experience. Being briefed before a hike is

important and allows the group to get to know each other strengths and goals (Barton 2007). This could have prevented the resentment I had for my group members when we were halfway up the mountain. I understand that I put myself in a compromising position by going on this hike. I did not review the hazards in the hike, I didn't even know where we were going. Knowing the hazards beforehand would have helped me prepare better so I could limit the risks that I was exposed to (Beames, Mackie, & Atencio 2019). I also should have advocated better for my personal needs and safety. When I felt like I needed a break I should have told the group to stop instead of biting my tongue. When I felt overwhelmed and tired I should have turned around and went home. Understanding myself and what I wanted to get out of the hike instead of trying to impress my peers might have given me the courage to back out when I felt it was getting too overwhelming. (Beames, Mackie, & Atencio 2019). The reason why I had such a bad experience was a mix of lack of communication, lack of preparation beforehand, and a lack of self advocacy.

Active experimentation

Having a poor outdoor adventure experience; making bad decisions and owning up to it; and sharing those mistakes are all good ways to start learning from the experience (Buhay 2023). After I acknowledged the poor decisions I made I changed my actions. I went on a hike with my best friend a couple of weeks later and she suggested a hike that was a two-hour walk to the hike and then an 11km hike. I knew that I did not want to hike for that long so I told her and we discussed an alternative route. We discussed what our goals for the hike were and compromised on a trail. I wanted to hike somewhere that was not challenging and she wanted a hike with beautiful scenery. Using an app called "All Trails" we found a hike that could accommodate both

our goals and had all of the info that we needed to prepare accordingly. It had the length in kilometres and the time it usually took to finish. It also had elevation gain and reviews by real people on how hard it would be. The whole experience was great and a lot better than the hike from a couple of weeks before. We communicated our goals, I advocated for myself, and we were prepared for the hike.

Conclusion

Using Kolb's reflective model (2015 p.48) I have reflected on my outdoor adventurous experience in a way that I have not considered before. The model is a great way of analyzing my behaviour in an outdoor setting, what I can change about it, and actively changing it. I know that I will continue making mistakes and bad decisions in the future, I am not perfect. However, using this model and reflecting is what will help me learn to adapt in the future. I knew it was important to research a hike before going on one but after living through that experience I have actually started to research hikes before I go on them. Using this reflective model has also gotten me to reflect on some of my interpersonal issues, like self-advocacy. I will continue to use Kolb's reflective model in the future so that I can continue learning what works and what doesn't work for myself and others in the outdoor industry.

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