

Experiential Learning Essay:

Experiential learning with reflection is an integral part of personal growth and development (Leberman & Martin, 2007). Miettinen (2000) states that experimentation encourages active theoretical thoughts that liberate the mind from societal traditions and decrease laziness. Additionally, observation of reoccurring events or activities stimulates empirical thinking and decision-making (ibid). In this reflective essay, I will use Kolb's model (2015) to reflect on an experience I have had using observation and experimentation.

Kolb (2015) suggests that experiential learning is a branch of education that integrates experiences, behavioural and cognitive theories, and perception to form a holistic approach. He emphasises the need for learning methods that promote growth and development through reflection, and how analysing experiences allows individuals to modify and adapt their behaviours when presented with new experiences (ibid). Kolb (2015, p. 32) introduces the Experiential learning process, a four-part cycle that includes a "concrete experience, observation and reflection, formation of abstract concepts and generalisation, and testing implications of concepts in new situations". These stages encourage an individual to reflect on an experience they have had and discern factors that had negative and positive effects.

Stage One (Concrete Experience):

Date: Spring 2023

Activity: Wingfoiling.

Location: Brighton Beach.

Conditions: Wind 20-30kts, onshore South-Westerly, wind against tide; tide going out.

Weather: Overcast. Temperature unknown.

Early 2023, I was preparing to complete my wingsurfing instructor course. The sea temperature average for spring in Brighton was 9.6 degrees Celsius (World Sea Temperature, 2023). I wore a 5.3mm wetsuit with a neoprene hoodie and I was a comfortable temperature. The wind was South-Westerly heading onshore, with the tide going out, this meant the sea state was wind against tide, Tide School defined (no date) this as "When the wind opposes the tidal stream", this can cause rough waves. Hove Lagoon is a sheltered area of water with a sea wall surrounding it on the south and houses to the north. On the lagoon, south-westerly wind gets caught by the sea wall and loses most of its power. I was wingsurfing on the Lagoon with a 5.0m Wing and a 219L Starboard Rio, when a colleague of mine, a Wingfoiling instructor, suggested we practise on the sea. Admittedly, this was nerve-racking as I believed I was not ready to go on the sea. Despite my fears, I trusted my colleague and listened as he taught me how to use a Wingfoil board.

After we were confident in my understanding, we prepared our kit, helmets and impact jackets. I recall using a Fanatic Sky Air 5'8" (Fanatic, 2023) board with a low aspect hydrofoil and a 5.0m Duotone Unit wing (Duotone, 2023), I had never used a board this size before. Getting into the sea was challenging, the shore dump was large, and I found it difficult to manoeuvre through the

waves while carrying the board and wing. Every wave hurled me back to the beach, resetting my progress. At this point in the activity, I was quite exhausted and frustrated, but my determination and excitement urged me to carry on. After a while, I broke through the shore dump and had to try getting onto the board. This involved flipping it over so that the hydrofoil was in the water while trying to hold the wing away; I struggled but persevered and was successful in getting onto the board, wing in the air, ready to fly.

My first few attempts were futile, I would lift the wing and immediately get thrown off the board resetting all my progress. After several attempts, I finally got moving, arms shaking with exhaustion, gripping the wing in fear of falling off. It was exhilarating when the board was propelled forward, the speed was incredible, and I could feel the hydrofoil underneath wanting to lift. Adrenaline filled my body, the previous exhaustion forgotten, replaced with glee and a feeling of achievement. However, this was fleeting, fatigue crashed down on me fast with my muscles aching terribly and my concentration waning. I took in my surroundings and realised with dread that I was a long distance from the shore; I had drifted downwind. I attempted to turn around, causing the board to flip and me to fall in. I fell in repeatedly until eventually, I got to the beach, dragging myself and my kit a safe distance from the water and collapsing with exhaustion. I must have looked unwell as a woman came to check if I was okay. I was two beaches downwind, shaking with fatigue.

Stage Two (Reflective Observation):

This stage of Kolb's (2015) model involves identifying potential problems that occurred during the concrete experience.

Reflecting on my experience, I understand that the wing was too big, and the board was too small for my abilities, and this fatigued me quickly. A study on Wingfoiling injuries discovered that most errors from riders were a result of fatigue (Gangl *et al.*, 2023). After researching this, I realised I could have had a worse experience, and I was sensible to quit when I did. The conditions were also out of my capabilities despite my experience of the sea and my experience Winging, perhaps I had a false sense of security practising on the Lagoon. In addition, I trusted my colleague who had seen my Winging ability, I thought they were knowledgeable as a qualified Wingfoiling instructor, so I understand why I felt this way. Before the activity, I doubted myself and I turned out right, however by giving it a go; I learnt about the sea when it is against the tide and about myself and my capabilities.

Reflecting on this experience in the present, I realise I had no clear objective for going out on the sea. If I had identified what I wanted to achieve, I might not have stayed out for as long and not fatigued myself. I realised I should have checked my position in relation to the shore more frequently, if I had drifted further, my experience could have been a lot more serious.

Stage Three (Abstract conceptualisation):

Kolb (2015) introduces this stage for the evaluation of the problems that happened during the experience and their consequences. This stage considers solutions to the incident (ibid).

Kolb (2015) suggests that learning and reflecting are significantly influential in the adaptation of humans and our behaviour. The wind against tide sea state created a challenging environment with large waves and strong gusts, although I am familiar with these conditions, this knowledge did not apply to my Wingfoiling. Mortlock (2000) describes this kind of experience as a 'misadventure', a state which an individual is outside of their capabilities and will have negative feelings such as panic. Undoubtedly, I felt a strong feeling of panic during this activity. Dewey (1938) states that habit, as an attitude, affects our abilities to modify future experiences by first reflecting and identifying conditions that impact the experience. Using this, I can highlight that this activity caused personal misadventure, and I can adapt my approach by preparing sensibly for subsequent experiences. I believe that the conditions had a detrimental impact on my experience, had the sea state been calmer, it may have been a more enjoyable activity.

Barton (2007) highlights that in adventurous settings, such as organisations, accidents are perceived as chance misfortunes, and no effort will be made to reflect on an incident unless a reaction is forced. From an individual perspective, ineffective risk management, as a result of gross misconduct could lead to serious injury. Barton (2007, p. 150) quotes accidents are "inevitable manifestations of the fact that we have imperfect control over some of the important variables (most notably people and the great outdoors) that affect what we do". My interpretation of this emphasises the need for thorough preparation as a consequence of conditions. Reflecting on my experiences I can learn to identify conditions outside of ability that may cause future misadventures and be more aware of my environment to prevent an incident.

Stage Four (Active Experimentation):

In this final stage, it is important to choose a goal that will improve future experiences or reflect on a later experience that was influenced as a result of reflection (Kolb 2015).

Later in the year, I practised more personal training and qualified as a Royal Yachting Association (RYA)Wingsurfing instructor (RYA, 2023). During the course, my colleagues and I went out on the sea with a safety boat and took turns using the kit in offshore winds, I was diligent in checking my position relative to the coast and the safety boat. I managed to get lift with the hydrofoil and use the wing while learning how to control the board, a different experience from when I first tried. I attempted a smaller board but quickly recognised that it wasn't within my ability. I changed to a board that better suited my capabilities in the conditions to allow learning without frustration. The wing that I chose to use was more suited to my weight too (4.5 metres), a fact I learnt on the instructor course.

Without much conscious thought, as a result of reflection, I knew to use a larger board and not push myself to my limits too soon. After having these experiences, I feel as though I have a deeper understanding of my abilities and when to trust myself.

In conclusion, personal reflection on an experience is beneficial to me as it helps to identify weaknesses and strengths that I have during an activity. Using Kolb's (2015) model, I can easily break down an experience and utilise what I learn in future activities. Despite the panic I felt, I'm glad I had the experience and was able to get back safely.

Word Count: 1603

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