

17th October – 24th October RLSS Water Safety Course - Reflection

“Learning is the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience” (Kolb, 1984). Kolb’s Model sets out the key components that are crucial for learning from outdoor experiences. These are as follows; Concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualisation and active experimentation. (Kolb, 1984)

An experience that I found to be particularly useful to reflect upon was my participation in an RLSS water safety course. Throughout a few sessions (one on the 17th of October and one on the 24th of October), I was able to build up skills and knowledge to keep me safe and comfortable in a water environment. I was then able to put these to use while coasteering in St. Davids. I found the developed skills and knowledge to be invaluable while truly in such an environment and was able to keep myself comfortable and focused throughout the coasteering session.

During the first session of the course at the Llandysul Paddling Club we started by being introduced to throw bags. These bags were very easy to understand and we were allowed a lot of practice to learn how to throw and re-pack them. Later in the day, we moved on to using these bags to save casualties. To do this we paired up, one person entered the water, pretended to drown and then the other threw the bag out to them to rescue them. After, we practised rescuing a casualty without a throw bag. This included us having to rescue each other by swimming out and then back in towing another person. As a step up from this, the casualty then pretended to be unconscious as an added obstacle for the rescuer. We then progressed to a casualty who was panicking in a way that was dangerous for both them and the rescuer. The day went very well for an introduction to basic water safety and I felt that as a class we made a lot of progress. In the second week of the course, we started by doing a mock lesson to a pair of instructors of the things we had learnt previously which was an excellent way of gauging how much we had remembered and practising how we would relay that knowledge to other people. In this session, we progressed into learning different positions of swimming in moving water such as offensive and defensive. We then took these skills and practised them in a more fast-paced environment which included saving people from a fast-moving river. Having the opportunity to both be rescued and rescue someone from this situation was very educational as we can now understand what it is like to be the person in danger.

“We do not learn from experience. We learn from reflecting on experience.” (Dewey J. 1882 -1953). To constantly be re-evaluating one's experiences, skills and thoughts is extremely important when it comes to learning. Being able to evaluate both the successes and failures of an activity allows you to decide what you will do next time in a more informed manner. Learning from your mistakes is crucial for improvement. In reflection, the course allowed me to learn in a very hands-on way which I feel enabled me and my class to learn to the best of our ability. The informal, unconventional nature of the lessons allowed us to feel at ease while digesting the lifesaving information that we were being taught. This, in turn, allowed us to retain more information than we would have had we been in a formal classroom setting.

By allowing us to have practical experience by practising the situations for ourselves I feel we managed to understand the concepts and what was needed from us in that moment. This method of teaching and then allowing us to do the tasks ourselves was extremely valuable for our education as it kept everyone engaged and allowed us to experience saving lives for ourselves. During the second session when we were able to place ourselves into a more high-stress situation and taught to deal with it, I felt that the instructors did a good job at making us feel in control of the situation which helped us focus on the task at hand.

The only things that I can think of in reflection that could have been improved upon were simply teething problems that I faced during the first and second sessions of the course. One example of this is, during the first session, I failed to realise and therefore prepare for how hungry I was going to get during the swimming part of the session. Due to us having to burn a lot of energy to swim I felt myself getting very hungry towards the end of the session and was finding it hard to focus. Another reflection I can make was during the second session. Due to it being later on in the year, it was a lot colder than the previous session and I found it a lot harder to regulate my body temperature in my hands and feet. This made it very hard to concentrate, stay in the water and hold onto the rope of the throw bags.

While analysing my reflections of the course it is easy to draw upon different scholars to provide evidence as to why my thoughts and feelings present themselves as they do. One such scholar is Jeffs T. who supports my thoughts on learning in an unconventional practical way. “This creative interplay of theory and practice, ideas and action, with each nurturing the other and each modifying the other, is not unique to outdoor and adventure education; indeed, it is the hallmark of any vibrant profession or area of study” (Jeffs T. 2017) This quote from their book *Rethinking Outdoor, Experiential and Informal Education: Beyond the confines* highlights the importance of not only learning the theory of the subject but also bringing your ideas into it and practising it. When doing the water course there was not a lot of room to bring our ideas into the matter but that was simply the format of the knowledge we were being taught. Additionally, the benefits of having neoprene equipment available when doing water sports has been looked into extensively by many people. An example of this is a group of researchers specialising in the effects of neoprene when surfing. “Neoprene wetsuits aid in thermoregulation and are, therefore, important and widely used pieces of surfing equipment.” (Smith, C., Saulino, M., Luong, K. et al. 2020). The research that the group conducted, while mainly looking at the difference between jersey neoprene and slick neoprene, highlights the advantage of using neoprene in a water environment to maintain a comfortable body temperature. Neoprene that aids in thermoregulation helps to keep participants warmer which allows them to stay in the water much longer and to concentrate on discussions when out of the water. Matt Fuller, Dr Matthew Morrissey and Dr Mark Taylor discuss how vital keeping warm is when participating in activities. “Even small reductions in core temperature can cause reduced coordination, poor judgement and significant discomfort. In a mountain environment this impaired performance can be dangerous, so having the correct clothing and experience is vital.” (Matt Fuller, Dr Matthew Morrissey and Dr Mark Taylor. 2012). Stating how vital it is to stay warm in order to stay safe during activities is a great point. Having

impaired coordination, judgement and being uncomfortable could sometimes make or break the day, making it a waste or potentially very dangerous.

To move forward with all of this knowledge and not use it would be a waste. I have already implemented certain ways of dealing with the problems faced during my time on the course. These are things such as keeping packaged snacks in my buoyancy aid pocket so that when I do feel myself getting hungry, I can eat without having to stop the flow of the lesson by going back to the van for food. Additionally, I have purchased neoprene socks which I tested while coasteering on the 7th of November in St. Davids. I found that the socks were very efficient at keeping my feet warm in the sea and I was a lot more comfortable getting in and out of the water throughout the session. This allowed me to concentrate on the discussions we were having when out of the water. I will say however that if I do go coasteering again I will consider purchasing neoprene gloves as well due to having several cuts from barnacles on the rocks, they would have been quite useful to prevent this. On the 21st of November, my class is participating in an introduction to paddle sports lecture and I am looking forward to being able to put my knowledge to use. By reflecting on my experiences I now have the ability to stay warm and well fed even when out on the water. This allows me to not only stay focused on important information being given to me but also perform to the best of my ability.

Words: 1502

References:

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Jeffs T. (2017) *Rethinking Outdoor, Experiential and Informal Education: Beyond the confines*.

Kolb, D. (1984) *Experiential learning: Experience as the source of learning and development*.

Matt Fuller, Dr Matthew Morrissey and Dr Mark Taylor (2012) *Insulation Explained, part 1: Staying Warm*.

Smith, C., Saulino, M., Luong, K. et al. (2020) *Effect of wetsuit outer surface material on thermoregulation during surfing*.