

Write a reflective essay to critically analyse the physical, social, emotional and cognitive aspects of your personal learning during intensive professional development skills programme.

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Learning is a continual process, and everyone learns differently. It involves acquiring knowledge in various aspects, which include cognitive, linguistic, and motor skills, over a period of time (Schunk, 2012). Understanding ourselves is an important requirement to personal development, as it allows for people to utilise strengths and moderate weakness (Riding and Rayner, 1998).

I spent four weeks completing my powerboat level 2 qualification, throughout my experience at university I have learnt to critically reflect on my learning and appreciate the learning process. In doing this I have gain a deeper understanding of myself and have become a better learner. It is argued that having an understanding of personal style awareness creates a more effective learner (Riding and Rayner 1998).

In this essay I explore my social, emotional and cognitive aspects of my learning whilst participating in the powerboat level 2 qualification. Although the scheme requires a basic level of physical activity (Royal Yacht Association, 2017) I do not believe that the skills programme heavily influenced my learning, hence this essay focuses on the other aspects of learning.

Cognitive learning refers to the preferred style of learning an individual may have (Sincero, 2011). How individuals process information determines what, when, and how they learn, and what they do with that information (Schunk, 2012). By previously, evaluating my performance using Honey and Mumford's learning theories I can conclude that I am a reflective and theorist learner. I learn more effectively when I have all the information to make logical solutions and take time to think through the experience (Honey and Mumford, 1982). Whilst powerboating I was able to develop my reflective learning by keeping a blog about my experience on the water and by watching others in the powerboat, I was able to evaluate my own techniques. In addition to these, casual discussions during lunchtimes and journeys to a from Mount Batten added to my reflections. It is argued that "learning depends on active involvement in the learning process and interactive communication with other learners" (Fosnot, 1989 cited in Sugerman et al, 2000:3) By sharing stories with friends we unconsciously sort through the information and learn from it.

It is concluded by Piaget (1965) that the way in which an individual learns is a result of two related factors: thinking process and thinking capacity. The process can be defined as how a person obtains information (Sugerman et al, 2000). Everybody has preferred learning styles which can be conveyed using the VAK (Visual, Audio and Kinaesthetic) model, Honey and Munford learning styles and Gardner's theory of Multiple Intelligences. From previous research I know that I am a kinaesthetic learner, who excels at learning through physical and emotional experience (Malone, 2003). Applying this to my powerboat experience, the fact that we were able to learn on the water with opportunities to play, enhanced, not only my learning but my enjoyment of the activity. As seen in photograph 1 (Page 10), the weather providing some challenge situations at times; however, we continued to persevere thus provide us with the skills needed in difficult weather as well as in fair conditions.

Furthermore, Gardner's theory of multiple intelligence can also be used when analysing my cognitive process. Gardner defines intelligence as "the ability to solve problems or to create products that are valued within one or more cultural settings" (Gardner 1983:6) and suggest there are seven distinct intelligences; mathematical -logical, verbal linguistics, bodily kinaesthetic, musical, visual-spatial, interpersonal and intrapersonal. When powerboating I was developing my bodily-kinaesthetic, interpersonal and intrapersonal skills. Bodily kinaesthetic intelligence focuses on the individuals fine motor skills and bodily movement (Gardener 1983). Although powerboating is not physically demanding, I was still developing my bodily- kinaesthetic intelligence

Extract for Batman Begins Power Boating Blog

The day was drawing to end, and we headed back to the Marina to tie the RIB back up. I managed to avoid what would have be a spectacular fall in the water we were getting ready to exit the RIB. Cat pulled alongside another RIB and I was ready to step out of the front; however, I didn't realise Fiona was stepping out at the same time! The force of both of us pushing of the boat caused me fall forward and straddle the other RIB and Fiona to full back in to our RIB. It was great to end the day laughing; I have yet to master elegance and don't feel that will change any time soon!

Interpersonal intelligence is “the core capacity to notice distinction amongst others, in particular contrasts in their moods, temperaments, motivations and intentions” (Gardner, 2008:23). I have been known in the past to misjudge situations and people’s emotions. However, powerboating provided some opportunities to develop this skill. I was confident whilst driving a powerboat and really enjoyed high speed manoeuvres but was aware that other wasn’t as confident. Therefore, I would make a conscience effort to slow down when driving or offer advice as a crew member, when asked. Furthermore, I work best alone and when it comes to working with others I sometimes neglect their considerations. Having the small, lecturer student ratio forced me to interact with crew members. In terms of my future learning it has made me aware the importance of recognising people’s emotions and acting accordingly.

Intrapersonal intelligence refers to an individual’s ability to assess one’s own feelings and draw upon them to guide behaviour, knowledge of strengths and weaknesses (Gardner and Hatch, 1989).

When I was feeling confident it reflected on my powerboat performance, I would make decisions decisively. Furthermore, when I had negative emotions, such as fear of embarrassment due to lack of balance when entering/exit the powerboat, or fear of failure, I would make conscience decisions to avoid these outcomes even if it meant at a cost of my learning experience. At the beginning I would enter the powerboat first, so I would not be attempting to get into the powerboat whilst it was not attached to the pontoon. In doing this I had less understanding of how to untie correctly.

Returning to Piaget’s theory of how learning is related to two factors, thinking capacity refers to how learners understand and make sense of their learning experience (Sugerman et al, 2000). For example, when powerboating a basic understanding of knots is essential. For some, they can be told it once and remember it for ever. However, for me this took time, I would follow 3D model tutorials and spend a lot of time practicing in order to perfect the skill. When learning new information, I have become increasingly aware that I take more time to process and synthesize the details in order to fully comprehend the information.

Following from the cognitive aspects of my learning Vygotsky theorised that social aspect of learning acts a facilitator of development. He stressed that “the social environment is critical for learning and thought that social interactions transformed learning experiences.” (Schunk, 2012: 241) This was further supported by Bandura’s theory which follows the belief that humans do not work in isolation instead form a collective agency, whereby collective agency is “concerned with people working together on shared beliefs and with common aspirations to improve their lives” (Pritchard, 2014:29). Applying both philosophies to my learning experience I feel that my learning was enhanced due to the people I was surrounded with. As seen in photograph 2 (page 12), I enjoyed the company of the people in my powerboat and in turn it created a relaxed environment for learning to occur. The fact that we all share common interest and our attitudes towards the activity was positive further added to the learning environment. We felt comfortable to support each other, correct each other when necessary and joke about peoples experience. For example, when riding waves, when I was in control Cat and I would joke about to see who could make the bigger splash. (For the record Cat won!) This playful environment taught me the skills need to control a powerboat at speed as well as looking ahead and reading the water.

As previously stated, during lunchtimes and journeys to and from mount batten we would share our experiences with each other and reflect on them. It is suggested that story telling is a basic human creation with sole purpose of gaining a deeper understanding (Beard & Wilson, 2013). Having casual discussions with friends not only developed my learning but also strengthened my relationship with friends. Story telling requires of various aspects of learning that can be transferred into everyday life, it requires “powerful use of communication, appropriate use of language, sensitivity, and accuracy... memory and visualization skills” (Parkin, 1998:3).

In addition to this, the way that we were taught had an impact on my social aspect of learning. On the first session we requested to have a more instructional approach which allowed for the basic needs of powerboating to be explained clearer. Furthermore, when in a boat with Fiona the

approach was *lassiez-faire*, and at times she was distracted by Instagram. This created a relaxed and humorous environment to learn. In addition to this particular situation, I was in a boat with Maddie and Katie, whom I consider to be my best mates on the course. It is argued that good group cohesion is linked to performance. This is supported by Maslow's Hierarchy of needs which suggests that social needs are the third stage in achieving a state of self-actualization (McLeod, 2017). Self-actualization can be measured through peak experiences, whereby individuals feel fulfilled, extremely satisfied and deeply happy (Loeffler, 2004). Photograph 2 captures these moments of peak experiences, it is a group image shot on day one, and captures the social connection that the group has. It shows the enjoyment of the activity. In relation to my learning, working with others and the relationships that have been formed created a positive learning environment that provided a catalyst for learning. I believe that if there wasn't strong cohesion I would not have learnt the skills required to complete the certification.

Following on from my social aspects of learning, I continued to develop my emotional aspect. Emotional intelligence "the ability to perceive and express emotion, assimilate emotion in thought, understand and reason with emotion, and regulate emotion in the self and others" (Mayer, Salovey, & Caruso, 2000: 396). Daniel Goleman (1998: 318) suggested that "there are 5 stages to emotional intelligence, self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, social skills and empathy." This was further developed into four clusters with 25 elements, as seen in figure 1 (Goleman, 2001). He argues that our emotional intelligence "determines our potential for learning the practical skills that underlie the four emotional learning clusters (Goleman, 2001:27).

	Self Personal Competence	Other Social competence
Recognition	Self-Awareness <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Emotional self-awareness - Accurate self-assessment - Self-confidence 	Social Awareness <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Empathy - Service orientation - Organizational awareness
Regulation	Self-Management <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Self-control - Trustworthiness - Conscientiousness - Adaptability - Achievement drive - Initiative 	Relationship Management <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Developing others - Influence - Communication - Conflict management - Leadership - Change catalyst - Building bonds - Teamwork & collaboration

Figure 1 A Framework of Emotional Competences (Goleman, 2001:28)

Self-awareness refers to individuals knowing how they feel in the moment and that impacting our decision making (Goleman, 2001). As seen in image three I was clearly enjoying the thrill of the activity. These feelings positively impacted my learning process as I was more engaged and willing to try new manoeuvres.

Self-regulation is how individuals controls their emotion, and so that it doesn't interfere with the task a hand (Goleman, 2001). Reflecting on my powerboat experience, at times the atmosphere was incredibly relaxed and humorous, and I became distracted from the original goal.

Extract from Batman Begins Powerboating Blog

Yet the most difficult part during this time was the not the steering; but trying to figure out how to add a live video to Instagram. As if this wasn't difficult enough on dry land it was decided to do the circuit in reverse whilst trying to work out how to upload a video.

During the first day I became focused on Fiona's failed attempt with Instagram and the joking atmosphere that I had not paid attention to the instructions given and was driving around not focusing on the skills. This impacted my learning directly it provided me with a moment to question what I was actually doing and request guidance to develop my skills but also impacted my learning

for the future as I need to recognise the importance of having a balance between a playful atmosphere and needing to provide an educational environment.

Motivation is questioning your own actions and reason why you are completing an activity, it has evolved to look at what benefits an individual is trying to achieve and can be categorised into personal, social, economic or environmental (Ewert & Sibthorp, 2014). At the beginning of the semester we were given some options for our intensive skills programme, eliminating the belief that I must do powerboating because it is a course requirement. Having the options provided me with the motivation to learn as it is something that I wanted to participate in. "Self-determination theory posits that when behaviours originate from autonomous volition or choice they are more likely to continue [the activity]" (Ewert & Sibthorp, 2014:89) Furthermore, "motivation can propel learning" (Ewert & Sibthorp, 2014:89). I believe the fact that I was motivated enabled me to get a deeper understanding of the skills needed to drive a powerboat, because I would put extra reading in between sessions so that I had the information to perform the practical skills.

Goleman's model can be supported by Bandura's social cognitive theory (1977), which argues that a person's behaviour and the environment is each determined in part, with social efficacy being at the core of the theory. Social efficacy is "one's confidence in his or her ability to perform a certain task" (Ewert & Sibthorp, 2014:81)

On day three we were in the RIB's by ourselves and started the day feeling confident and this feeling was shown by my ability to instruct crew members to untie from the pontoon to launch.

However, the feeling of confidence, negatively impacted my decision making and I forgot the most basic requirement to driving a powerboat, attaching the kill cord. This made me feel frustrated and angry at myself. Going through this emotive process instantly developed my learning as I will forever remember the feelings of frustration and humiliation and not make the mistake again.

One of the most pivotal aspects to my learning was the feeling of comfort, because of the atmosphere created by lecturers and peers, I didn't feel pressurized when making decisions or feel judge by my actions. The implications that it had on my learning can be expressed through the comfort zone model, which is based around three zones, the comfort zone, growth/learning zone and the panic zone. It can be argued that "the greatest amount of change and growth comes from a place of comfort, security and acceptance" (Davis-Berman & Berman,1994). I was in my element whilst Powerboating, I love being in the outdoors and despite the weather I felt secure. I believe that because I felt comfortable in the learning environment I was able to learn more effectively as I was focused on the goal of learning to drive a power boat. This can be presented in photograph 3 (page 13), as seen by my expression I was relaxed and was in my element when driving or as a passenger.

In summary, learning to drive a powerboat has influenced various aspects of my learning, although it may not have been recognised at time I have reflected how much of an impact it has had on my social, cognitive and emotional aspects. Through reflection I discovered the importance of understanding my learning process, group cohesion and my emotional intelligence in developing my learning. It has also enabled me to look at how others learn, and that everybody is different. This in turn will hopefully impact my future as an outdoor educator as I can take what I have learnt about my self and apply when teaching others.

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Appendix



Photograph 1 A Wet and Wild day (Nicholls, 2017)



Photograph 2 Group Selfie (Percival, 2017)



Photograph 3 Anna's Enjoyment! (Nicholls, 2017)