Streaming in Esports: Lessons Learned From Student Reflection Journals

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Feedback and lessons learned from personal reflection journals submitted by students in an Introduction to Esport course. Students were responsible for marketing, creating content, problem solving (troubleshooting), and streaming a minimum of 30 minutes for an esport game title of their choice. Students were then asked to submit a link and reflection journal of their experiences. This exercise was completed by students four times over the course of a semester.

Keywords: esport content creation, experiential learning, student perspectives

Recently, esports have developed into a multibillion dollar industry with professional leagues, franchises, teams, and players (Hedlund, 2021), as well as growth at the collegiate level. Esports are “video gaming competitions between individuals or teams which take place in person and/or in an interactive online environment” (Darvin et al., 2020, p. 36). Esports competitions and tournaments are organized with similar rules, regulations, and broadcasting of traditional sports. A central practice related to the esports industry is streaming (Ruotsalainen & Friman, 2018). There are various livestreaming platforms with Twitch being the most popular, where streamers broadcast themselves playing video games and other activities, in real time, to an audience (Hilvert-Bruce et al., 2018). Streaming provides real-time interaction between the streamer and their viewers, where they can watch, listen, interact, and respond to the streamer (Hilvert-Bruce et al., 2018).

Given that Esports is an emerging industry, and streaming is an important aspect, it is important for students to develop an understanding of what streaming is, and experiential learning is a valuable way for students to learn and prepare themselves (Payne et al., 2011). This paper outlines how Kolb’s experiential learning theory (ELT) was applied to an assignment for an undergraduate introduction to esport course.

Learning Theory and Implementation

Experiential learning theory framework based on Kolb’s (1984) ELT was utilized in developing and delivering this assignment. Kolb’s theory is based on a holistic model of learning that is achieved from a student’s experiences (Kolb & Kolb, 2009). The assignment was assessed by the experiential learning practices of students in an undergraduate introduction to esport class. Eighteen students were part of the course that aimed to explore the management principles related to the business of esports. The purpose of this course was to provide a historical background on esports from its inception in the early 1980s to its current state as a multibillion dollar industry. It included personnel, programs, marketing, media, financial management, organizational structures, and an overview of career possibilities. One of the course outcomes was for students to create and reflect on streaming content through Twitch.

Kolb’s (2009) model for ELT contains a four-step activity model. The ELT model has two connected forms of grasping experience—concrete experience and abstract conceptualization, and two connected forms of transforming experience—reflective observation and active experimentation (Kolb & Kolb, 2009).

First, Kolb suggests that students attain information from their personal lived experiences (i.e., concrete experience). During this phase, students reviewed articles on esports streaming, examined popular streamers on Twitch, and answered questions during class discussions. In addition, students took notes during a question and answer session with two varsity esport coaches in charge of streaming on Twitch for the esports programs. In addition, the coaches provided a live demonstration and tutorial for setting up streams on Twitch. This provided students a foundation and learning experience toward their own streaming, leading them to the next stage of reflective observation.

In the second stage, students need to reflect on their experiences through a form of reflective exercise (i.e., reflective observation). This was done by having students stream a minimum of 30 min of esports content and then reflect on the experience by keeping a journal. Reflective journals are an appropriate method, as they permit students to explore their beliefs, values, experiences, and assumptions about a specific subject (Dyment & O’Connell, 2011), such as esports and streaming.

The journal contained guiding questions to help students through the reflection process. The following prompts were provided:

- Did you promote your stream via social media? Did you promote your stream in other means?
- What strategies from the course did you employ? What worked? What did not?
- What did you enjoy about your stream and how will you change your stream in the future?
- What challenges did you face and how did you try to resolve them?
- What are you learning about streaming?
- How do you feel about streaming and creating content?
- What has surprised you about this experience?
• What skills if any, do you feel streamers must possess to succeed?
• What skills do you feel you are developing or would like to develop as it relates to esports and/or streaming?
• Any additional comments reflecting on producing original content are welcome.

Students were also asked to include at least one outside source relevant to esports and/or streaming, where appropriate.

Third, students can modify their model of thinking resulting from their new observations through their personal experiences, that is, students can learn from their experience (i.e., abstract conceptualization). During this phase, starting from the first journal and moving to the fourth, students were asked to reflect on the questions above. Students were asked to show progression with regard to promoting, dealing with problems/troubleshooting, employing course materials, what they were learning, what changes they wanted to make for future streams, and what skills they were developing. This was done through the content students created and shared with their streams and the instructor through Twitch, as well as through their journals. In addition, students would discuss in-class their experiences with their peers and the instructor.

Finally, students can then change their conduct by applying their recently formed philosophies by experimenting (i.e., active experimentation). “This process is portrayed as an idealized learning cycle or spiral where the learner touches all bases—experiencing, reflecting, thinking, and acting—in a recursive process that is responsive to the learning situation and what is being learned” (Kolb & Kolb, 2009, p. 6). Students presented their active experimentation by answering the guiding questions for their reflection journals. Having consistent questions allowed for the students to show progression and reflect on their experiences from what they did differently to market their streams, the challenges they faced, and overall, what they were learning about esports and streaming.

Through streaming and the journals, Kolb’s four aspects of the ELT model can be measured, where students enrich their learning by identifying relationships among theory and practice, asking questions, and by engaging with higher order ideas (Dyment & O’Connell, 2011).

Class Preparation and Journal Assessment

During the first class meeting, all assignments for the class were provided to students and an overview of the course requirements was shared. Specifically, students were informed that streaming was a requirement for the class. Students were asked to inform the instructor if they did not have the capabilities and/or equipment/technology (e.g., personal computer, gaming console, capture card/open broadcaster software [live streaming software]) to stream so that alternative arrangements could be made. All 18 students indicated they had the ability and technology to stream. During the second half of a 16-week semester, students were asked to start their streaming and submit their reflection journals. A total of four streams and four journals were submitted. Students were asked to stream a minimum of 30 minutes of esports content. As part of the assignment students were asked to include a link to their stream, along with their journal reflecting on their experience.

The ELT guided the assignment by applying and developing questions to direct students in their reflection journals. Students were asked to answer and reflect on questions related to their own experiential learning practices during their learning, creating, and application of course discussions and materials to their esports streams. Students were required to submit their own stream and journal on specific dates, but were encouraged to compete, play, and stream with one another. Most students chose to play and stream on their own.

Table 1 represents the rubric of how journals were assessed. Each week that a journal was submitted, the instructor graded, reviewed, and provided feedback for students to consider before their next stream and journal.

Discussion

There were challenges with creating an assignment that required students to stream esports and submit a reflection journal related to their experiences. One of the challenges undergraduates faced was experience in streaming. Some students were part of the varsity esports team that had been streaming already, while others had never streamed before, and this assignment would be their first exposure. These different levels of experience with streaming lead to different student comfort levels with streaming to a live audience and varying knowledge on how to stream. To address the lack of knowledge for streaming, students were given a tutorial and had a question-and-answer session with the varsity esports coaches to provide the basics on how to set up, market, share, and save their streams.

Another challenge that students faced was related to information technology. This was also a challenge faced by the instructor as they have limited knowledge in this field related to troubleshooting for PCs, consoles, capture cards, and connecting to the internet on campus. Internet issues reported by students living on campus indicated lag with the internet that impacted their streams while playing. To address the issues related to information technology, students discussed among their peers and the instructor during class meetings, and it was understood that streaming during peak internet use time on campus could not be avoided. Students also discussed their general streaming experiences, what games they were playing, and who wanted to connect on the next stream. Many students enjoyed the assignment, and it even prompted the students to create a Discord channel, where they all could interact and help one another with any problems and issues they faced when creating and uploading their streams. It was great to see a community and connection forming between the students and the instructor.

Finally, a challenge related to the journals themselves was from the first journal there was a range in detail provided by students. Some students provided little detail in their reflection, while others provided rich details. As the journals went on, students addressed the feedback provided by the instructor and started providing more examples and details in their reflection journals.

Kolb’s experiential learning was used to design this assignment to provide students with experience in esports streaming. The reflection journals were used to address the four phases outlined by Kolb (concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation). The assignment was well received by the students as their journals indicated that they enjoyed streaming and noticed their own comfort levels with streaming increased. In addition, students indicated that they had a new appreciation for streamers and how difficult it can be to succeed with it. The journals submitted showed that students continued to reflect on their growth, experiences, and knowledge related to streaming and esports.
Table 1  Reflection Journal Rubric

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Critical elements</th>
<th>Exemplary (100%)</th>
<th>Proficient (85%)</th>
<th>Needs improvement (55%)</th>
<th>Not evident (0%)</th>
<th>Value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Stream</td>
<td>Student streamed for 30 minutes and archived the stream correctly.</td>
<td>Student streamed and archived correctly, but the stream was 20–29 minutes.</td>
<td>Student streamed and archived the stream correctly, but the stream was &lt;20 minutes.</td>
<td>Student did not stream or archive correctly.</td>
<td>20</td>
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<tr>
<td>Problem solving and decision making</td>
<td>Identifies potential problems in the example and provides a detailed and appropriate solution.</td>
<td>Identifies potential problems in the example and provides a solution but lacks detail.</td>
<td>Identifies a potential problem but does not provide a solution.</td>
<td>Does not identify a problem.</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reflection</td>
<td>Thoroughly evaluates the stream and addresses all of the questions in the prompt.</td>
<td>Evaluates the stream but does not fully address all of the questions in the prompt.</td>
<td>Incomplete evaluation of the stream.</td>
<td>Does not evaluate the stream.</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support</td>
<td>Includes at least one external resource that supports the entry.</td>
<td>Includes at least one external resource, but it does not apply to the journal entry.</td>
<td>Includes at least one external resource, but it does not apply to esport or the journal entry.</td>
<td>Does not include an external resource.</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Articulation of response</td>
<td>Submission is free of errors related to citations, grammar, spelling, syntax, and organization and is presented in a professional and easy-to-read format.</td>
<td>Submission has no major errors related to citations, grammar, spelling, syntax, or organization.</td>
<td>Submission has major errors related to citations, grammar, spelling, syntax, or organization that negatively impact readability and articulation of main ideas.</td>
<td>Submission has critical errors related to citations, grammar, spelling, syntax, or organization that prevent understanding of ideas. Earned total</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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References


