Debriefing

Debriefing is a term used in experiential education to describe a question and answer session with participants. These talking sessions are generally thought to be a ‘sit down’ circle where the counselor asks questions and the campers answer. Although this can be an effective debriefing technique, if it is the only technique used, campers can become bored with it and can become easily distracted.

Debriefing an experience helps campers connect lessons and activities they learned at camp to the outside world. It is a very important piece of camp and learning as a whole. If campers are not allowed to reflect on their experiences and relate them to the outside world, then a lot of the learning may be lost. So including debriefing is really valuable after powerful experiences at camp. And mixing up your debriefing activities will keep campers engaged in what they are learning and allow you to create more teachable moments.

The Value of Reflection:

An important concept to consider when implementing experiential education activities is providing opportunities to process, or reflect on their educational experiences. The educational philosopher John Dewey (1933) who is known as one of the forefathers of experiential education believed that in order to truly learn from experience there must be time for reflection.

Processing helps learners make connections between their educational experiences and real life situations. It helps them recognize their skills and strengths by naming them. By recognizing and naming, the skills and strengths used in an experience, they become more cognizant of their inner resources that can be used in future life situations. The practice of reflection itself is one of the most useful human skills in that it develops insight one of the hardest important tools to teach and learn. Experiential activities followed by processing help people develop insight skills.

There is no one set way to debrief or one perfect time to debrief. Using a variety of techniques and using activities that give campers the power to take the lead in the debriefing is the most engaging and effective way of viewing debriefing.

This module focused on Four different techniques to help liven up your debriefing circles.

Pair and Share

With this technique, the counselor first asks participants to find a partner. Once everyone has a partner the counselor instructs the group to discuss a debriefing question together.

The debriefing technique of Pair and Share works well because the participants get a chance to practice their answer before sharing with the large group. Many campers do not like being put on the spot when asked question in front of their peers. Pair and Share also allows for each participant to answer the question, not just one person talking while the rest of the group listens. Everyone gets a chance to answer each question that is asked. Here, on the next page, is an example of a Pair and Share sequence you could use:
Counselor: “OK you guys [or ladies], I’d like you take 1 minute to discuss with your partner who you thought the leader in that activity was and why.”

- This first question is targeting ‘What Happened’ in the activity.
- After a few minutes are up give the pairs another question to answer.

Counselor: “Ok, next I want you to discuss with your partner what behaviors you demonstrated that helped the team solve the problem.”

- This second question targets reflection of specific behaviors from each camper.
- After the pairs have had a few minutes to share with one another, give them one more question to discuss.

Counselor: “OK, great job guys [or ladies]. Focus back here for one minute. Now I’d like you to discuss with your partner what you learned from this activity and how you think you can use what you learned.”

- This third question is targeting forward thinking behavior and how they can apply what they learned to a future event.
- Now that the pairs have had a few minutes to talk one on one, it is now time to have them briefly discuss what they shared with their partner.

Counselor: “OK, let’s all sit in a circle now and hear from a few people what you discussed with your partner. Let’s start with our first question. Who do you think was the leader in the activity?”

- Review each question with the large group.
- Utilize active listening skills by repeating back what was said and framing it in a way that emphasizes a job well done.
- Thank campers for sharing.

Many icebreaker games you might already know could also be used as great pair and share debriefing activities. Think about some icebreaker games you already play. If they involve campers pairing up for a discussion question, you could use the same activity as a debriefing activity.

Metaphoric tools combined with Frontloading are amazing techniques that really let the props do the talking for you. They also give more ownership of the debriefing process to the participants themselves. Debriefing activities can be just as dynamic and engaging as challenge course initiatives or group initiatives especially with a new frame of mind from facilitators towards recognizing that reflection is not that ‘boring thing’ that comes at the end of the activity. It is not. It is that thing that creates the value and wonder in learning; it is the way ideas come together as a lasting lesson.

**Metaphoric Tools**

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Using objects, as symbolic representations of an experience, or personal attribute can be a very effective approach to processing. These activities engage participants in creating or choosing symbols representing a group success or individual strength or accomplishment. The strength of these types of activities is that they are not threatening to participants and facilitators, and leave the opportunities for creative and meaningful interpretation of an experience wide open. Participants can attach their thoughts to a tangible object that they can touch and show to a group during group discussion or take away with them to represent their experience. This helps thoughts and ideas reach depth and character in a way that doesn’t happen with dialogue alone. Because
the participants can talk about the object or image rather than about themselves directly they sometimes express thoughts that otherwise would be left unsaid (Cain, Cummings and Stanchfield 2004). Objects and images can be used to liven up the traditional sharing circle by providing interactive, kinesthetic ways to engage participants in group dialogue.

**Frontloading**

In its simplest form, **Frontloading** refers to giving an example *before the experience* rather than afterwards. By giving the campers and example of the type of answer you are expecting, it makes the debriefing process much easier. Kids learn by example, so if they hear a good example they will most likely follow your lead. Frontloading gives participants a sense of the task purpose, expectations for behavior and motivation for coming up with their answer.

**A few of my favorite Metaphoric Tools:**

**Metaphor Cards**

Metaphor Cards are reflective tools that use metaphors or symbols to represent participant’s reactions to an experience. These cards are useful as introductory activities, for processing a specific experience, for closure, or even as tools to help participants resolve conflict.

This engaging tool uses pictorial images, metaphors or symbols to represent a participant’s or group’s reactions to an experience. Providing a tangible image upon which participants can attach their thoughts helps give these ideas substance and shape in quite profound depth. Metaphor Cards are useful as introductory activities, for processing a specific experience, for closure, or even as a tool to help participants resolve conflict. Metaphor Card Activities are appealing to participants, can be used in many different ways, and are appropriate for all age groups.

Groups seem to go more in depth about their ideas and feelings when they attach their thoughts to a symbol or picture. Because participants share about a card rather than directly about themselves they are often more willing to share. Often more reserved members are drawn to expressing themselves through the use of these symbols.

**Directions for Metaphor Cards:**

- As an introductory activity participants can choose the card that best represents a strength they bring to the group, or a goal they have for the day, course or program.

- As a pre brief in the early parts of a program spread the cards out before the group and have them pick a card that best represents where they are at that moment. At the very beginning of the day/program, spread the cards out before the group and have them pick a card that best represents where they are at that moment. Ask them how they are feeling and to pick a card that matches where they are mentally coming into the day. Go around the group and ask each participant to share why they picked the card they did and why that card represents them or where they are. If you start the day with this activity, it is good to end the day with this same activity.

- Spread the cards out before the group and have them pick a card that best represents an experience or a feeling that they had during the activity or at the end of the day. You can do this at the end of the day or after an activity. Go around the group and ask each participant to share why they picked the card they did and why that card represents them or an experience they have had. Participants can each pick their own card, then draw it or write about in their journal.
Body Part Debrief™

The Body Part Debrief™ activity is a great activity for both new and seasoned facilitators. It is simple enough in nature that groups of any age will use it with ease. The body parts have a ‘coolness’ factor to them that fosters a safe environment for people to talk. If you are having a hard time getting your participants to share or reflect, this activity will help solve that problem.

The basic concept for this activity is that you have different balls or objects that are shaped like body parts. Each part can represent a metaphor related to that part. For example:

"Eye"
- Could represent something new that you saw in yourself or someone else.
- What vision do you have for yourself/the group?
- What qualities do you see in yourself?
- How did you see yourself perform within the group?

"Stomach"
- Could represent something that took guts for you to do.
- What pushed you outside your comfort zone?
- What sick feelings have you felt before?
- Was something hard to stomach for you?

"Brain"
- Could represent something new that you learned about yourself, a teammate, or the group.
- What thoughts do you have?
- What did you learn through your experience?

"Heart"
- Could represent a feeling that you experienced.
- What things come from the heart?
- What means a lot to you?

"Hand"
- In what way did the group support you?
- Could represent someone you would like to give a hand to for a job well done.
- How did you lend a hand during the activity?

"Ear"
- Could represent something you listened to.
- What was a good idea you heard?
- Could represent something that was hard to hear—did you receive constructive feedback or not-so-constructive feedback.

Intervention Tools

Sometimes at camp we have to stop the fun and games and have hard conversations with kids. This could result from a negative behavior from an individual or a group behavior that needs to be addressed. This next tool is one of my favorite tools to use when you have to have a hard conversation.

(continued next page)
Traffic Debrief

A traffic light is used to help direct motorists while driving to keep them from crashing. The lights signify things a driver should do to keep things flowing smoothly. The three colors on the stoplight can be used as metaphors for behaviors: What are you doing well? (green light) What do you need to be careful of? (yellow light) What do you need to stop doing? (red light)

Present a stoplight to the group to set the stage for targeted metaphoric processing. When a group has started to show negative behavior patterns, or if a conflict arises, use the metaphor of the stoplight to debrief the situation. Frontload your discussion with examples for each color. You could also have the group give suggestions for each color. Following are examples of processing questions and information that relate to the Stoplight.

- **RED**: What are things happening in the group that need to STOP in order for us to be more successful? The usual answers are to stop teasing, horseplay, put-downs, blaming, etc.
- **YELLOW**: What are things we need to be CAREFUL of as we continue? Suggestions have included keeping everyone safe, listening to all ideas, being aware of personal choices and boundaries, etc.
- **GREEN**: What are things we want to GO for? This could be group goals, as well as behavior suggestions. Ideas have included being respectful, encouraging more, setting time limits, etc.

If it wouldn’t be a distraction, the stoplight can be handed out to a specific individual who will monitor those ideas for the group. This person can be asked to report on what they observed at the end of the activity or session. For example; the person designated to carry the stoplight is asked to let the group know any time he sees an infraction of behavior norms. He could call a group discussion, point to the yellow light and say, “We had stated we wanted to be careful of listening to everyone’s ideas before we started. Are we listening to everyone?”

Twists on the Traditional Sharing Circle

Traditionally processing has involved sitting a group of participants down in a circle after an activity and having the facilitator ask participants questions regarding their reactions to experience. Though this activity can be effective, it can be tiresome for everyone involved if it is the only processing method used. Also in this method, the facilitator is directing the participants rather than students interpreting the experience for them. Some variations of this activity that will "liven it up" and give more control to the campers are listed below:

**Shuffle Left, Shuffle Right**

Debriefing in Motion

Some folks have remarked that it takes more energy for an 11 year old boy to stand still, than it does for them to move! For participants that need to move during a debriefing session, here is a perfect solution.

**Concepts**: Providing some kinesthetic movement during a reviewing session can maintain the energy of the group, and keep those high energy folks engaged by being active.

**Directions:**

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Begin by asking the group to form one large circle. Groups may decide to place their arms around their neighbors, hold hands, or simply stand unconnected next to each other.

The facilitator offers the group the chance to 'have their say.' This may be related to a particular question, or the previous activity, or be open to any viewpoint that a person in the group wishes to share. It is often helpful for the facilitator to go first, and demonstrate the style (and length) of response.

The activity begins with the group shuffling to the left.

At some point, the facilitator says "stop!" and then gives their comment to the group.

Next, they say "shuffle right," and the entire group shuffles right, until someone else says "stop" and has their say.

There is no one set way to process; using a variety of techniques and activities that give learners the power to take the lead in reflection is an engaging and effective way of viewing processing. "Participant Directed" methods of processing are a term coined by Steve Simpson of The Institute for Experiential Education (1997). In this orientation towards processing participants decide what meaning to attach to the activity. Rather than being involved in more didactic discussion, there may be some guidance from the facilitator/teacher initially, but for the most part these activities allow for the spontaneity of individual interpretation of the experience. Many participant directed methods involve the use of props or symbolic representations of the experience that provide a tangible object upon which participants can attach their thoughts.

Notes:
Recommended Reading/Debriefing Publications


Where to Purchase the Props used in the Video

All of the props used in the video are sold by Training Wheels. Training Wheels has over 300 different portable teambuilding activities and experiential activity books. These activities are designed to challenge, energize, and re-focus any team. The activities can be tailored to the desired learning outcome of any group—from corporate to youth groups. The activities can reinforce a variety of common teambuilding goals such as communication, problem solving, decision making, cooperation, creativity, trust building, conflict resolution, and community building. The activities can be used indoors or outdoors, making it great for rainy day back ups and off-site programs.

Specific activities used in the video are:

Metaphor Cards

Body Part Debrief™

Traffic Debrief (the stoplight is included in this set)

Visit the Training Wheels online store at www.training-wheels.com.