The De-Brief: Experiential Learning Through Reflective Questioning

Why engage in experiential learning?

In addition to the many studies showing adults learning more through activities, experiential learning can add layers of different kinds of learning dynamics in a single teaching moment. Experiential learning can include lab experimentation, simulations, case study analysis, games, roleplays, and even internships to name a few. While one can learn from experiencing something, the goal of the experiential learning activity is the de-brief – the process that develops the knowledge gained in the process of engaging in the exercise.

What is de-briefing?

De-briefing is a facilitated conversation with the goal of advancing the student’s understanding, build reflective practice and critical thinking, close gaps in knowledge (especially the gap between the lecture and the application process), develop skills, and advance student’s self-directed learning.

There are several different kinds of de-briefing processes including: small groups reporting out to larger groups, large group discussions, fish bowl activities with group members taking turns joining an inner circle conversation, and at times, non-facilitated processes where the participants organize their discussions organically, or individually through a post-activity exercise such as reflective journaling. The facilitator can also take on the role of a co-learner or as an authority.

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**THE DEBRIEF PROCESS**

- Before the exercise-
  - Set learning objectives
  - Set enough time aside for the exercise and the de-brief to follow
- Setting up the room
  - Create a safe space for the students
  - Tell the students there will be a de-brief process at the end.
  - Tell the students what kinds of things to be aware of if possible,
- Conducting the exercise and de-brief
  - “De-role” the participants
  - Keep the group together
  - Go through the process
    - Awareness of what happened, - facts, emotions
    - Analysis
    - Application

**TOOLS AND BEST PRACTICES**

- Think about what want out of the discussions, then, over plan.
- Like Brainstorming- there are no judgments, anything goes, go for quantity, promote collaboration
- Help develop their ideas,
- Listen to really understand what saying,
- Stay curious, avoid building counter points,
- Be open to changing your mind in the moment (about the direction and learning objectives- be flexible),
- Ask clarifying and deepening questions,
- Help resolve disagreements amicably between students.
- Manage dominant voices and give space to quieter students.
- Check room ‘temperature’ before the students leave.
Facilitation/De-Brief Process

What?  
Facts, Emotions

So What?  
Explore and Measure

Now What?  

Frame questions based upon each of these sections.  

Effective Debriefing Questions:
- Ask questions within each of the frameworks presented here (→)
- Ask open questions
- Paraphrase responses (to link to learning objectives)
- Deepening on the ideas presented vs. probing the person
- Watching for feelings
- Use silence

Core Facilitation Values for the Ethical Practitioner

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<tr>
<th>1. Integrity</th>
<th>2. Authenticity</th>
<th>3. Mutual Respect</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>b. Clarify confidentiality</td>
<td>b. Minimize self-deception</td>
<td>b. Clarify group norms</td>
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<td>c. Be sensitive to Conflicts of Interest</td>
<td>c. Be clear about intentions</td>
<td>c. c. Respect exchange times</td>
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<td>d. Avoid collusion</td>
<td>d. Acknowledge Problems</td>
<td>d. d. Encourage direct interaction</td>
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<td>e. Ask questions fairly</td>
<td>e. Be honest</td>
<td>e. e. Be patient; whose silence is it?</td>
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<td>f. Determine Authorship</td>
<td>f. Be present; tune in</td>
<td>f. f. Respect the energy in the group</td>
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<td>g. Address imbalances in power and information</td>
<td>g. Hear your group’s/clients perspective</td>
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