



## REFLECTION TOOLS

### **The Value of Reflection:**

An important concept to consider when implementing experiential education activities is to provide opportunities for young people 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.

### **Debriefing**

Debriefing is a term used in experiential education to describe a question and answer session with participants. Debriefing an experience helps youth connect lessons and activities they learned to the outside world. It is a very important piece of an activity and learning as a whole. If youth are not allowed to reflect on their experiences and relate them to the 'real' world, then a lot of the learning may be lost. So including debriefing is really valuable after powerful experiences. There is no one set way to debrief or one perfect time to debrief. Using a variety of techniques and using activities that give youth the power to take the lead in the debriefing is the most engaging and effective way of viewing debriefing.

### **Processing**

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.



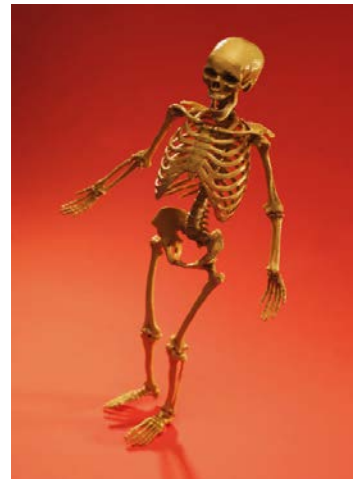
## 1. Think, Pair, Share

With this technique, the leader first asks youth to think about a topic silently. Then, the leader asks participants to find a partner. Once everyone has a partner the leader instructs the group to discuss a debriefing question together. The leader may ask youth to sit “knee to knee” so that they are facing just close enough for their knees to touch. After sharing with a partner, ask partners to share a “aha” moment with the large group. The debriefing technique of Think, Pair, Share works well because the participants get a chance to practice their answer before sharing with the large group. Many young people do not like being put on the spot when asked question in front of their peers. Think, Pair, Share also allows for each participant to answer the question, not just one person talking while the rest of the group listens.

## 2. Body Parts Debrief

Ask each participant to select a body part from the bag. Then respond verbally to the large group or written in a journal entry using the following metaphors:

- **Heart:** *Name something you felt, or a feeling you experienced.*
  - What is something you experienced that pulled at your heart strings?
  - How did you feel?
- **Brain:** *Share something new you learned about yourself, a teammate, or the group.*
  - What thoughts do you have?
  - What did you learn through your experience?
- **Stomach:** *Explain something that took guts for you to do, or pushed you outside of your comfort zone.*
  - What pushed you outside your comfort zone?
  - What sick feelings have you felt before?
  - Was something hard to stomach for you?
- **Hand:** *Share how you felt supported or someone you would like to give a hand to after this experience.*
  - In what way did the group support you?
  - Who is someone you would like to give a hand to for a job well done?
  - How did you lend a hand during the activity?
- **Ear:** *Describe something you heard, or something that was hard to hear.*
  - What was a good idea you heard?
  - What was something that you really listened to?
  - Was there some feedback that was difficult for you to hear?
- **Eye:** *Share a vision you had for yourself or the group, something you saw, or an observation you made.*
  - What was 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?



- What was an important observation you made?
- **Spine/Bone:** *Tell about your group's strength or "backbone."*
  - What do you consider your backbone / the group's backbone?
  - Who/what is integral to the group's success?
  - What is a strength you have identified for yourself or the group?
  - Have you ever felt broken?
- **Foot:** *Reflect on what you will leave the activity with.*
  - What is something you will "walk" away with after today?
  - Did you stick your foot in your mouth and say something you wish you hadn't?
  - What direction would you like to see the group go?
- **Nose:** *Tell what you feel "stinks" about the experience.*
  - Have you ever stuck your nose in somebody else's business?
  - What was something that "stunk" about the activity?
  - What is something that "smells fishy" (or you are still questioning) to you about what you learned?
- **Liver:** *Explain how you felt things did not go as expected.*
  - Where/how/why did things "break down"?
  - How did things go not as you expected?
- **Lungs:** *Share about how the experience challenged you or motivated you to think differently.*
  - When was a time when you needed to take a deep breath?
  - Was there an experience when you felt like you wanted to scream?

### 3. Traffic Debrief

Ask each participant to select a traffic symbol by rolling the traffic cube. Then respond verbally to the large group or written in a journal entry using the following metaphors:

- **Stoplight:**
  - 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)
- **Traffic Cone:**
  - What problems do we need to avoid?
  - What do we need to be careful of?
- **Tire:**
  - What do we need to keep the wheels turning?
  - How do we continue forward motion?



- **Hard Hat:**
  - What areas are you being hard headed in?
  - What do you need to protect yourself from?
  - Often hard hats are worn in construction/dangerous areas. When do you put on your construction hat each day?
- **School Bus:**
  - What did you learn today?
- **Police Car:**
  - Who do we go to if we need help?
  - Who protects us?
  - Do we follow the rules all of the time or just when the 'rule enforcer' is nearby?
  - What emotions do you feel when you see a police car?
- **Yield Sign:**
  - What do we need to be cautious of?
  - Are we going at the right speed?
  - Are we watching to be sure everyone is involved?
- **Do Not Enter:**
  - Are there some places we shouldn't go with our group?
  - What are some things that have made you feel we are going the wrong way?
- **Fire Extinguisher:**
  - Where's the fire?
  - What started it?
  - What do we need to do to put out the fire?
  - How do we prevent the fire from getting bigger?

#### 4. 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 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.

## Activities for Metaphor Cards:

- ❖ 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. 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.
- ❖ Use as an introductory activity to “break the ice” and complete introductions, help group members get to know each other, and set the tone for the program. This activity is especially useful during the pre-group gathering time, as participants enter the room to start a program. Choosing a card gives people something to focus as they wait to begin.
- ❖ 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. Spread postcards out on a table or floor where they are accessible to all group members. Ask group members to choose a card that represents the answer to one or more following questions:
  - What is a goal you have for the program?
  - What are your expectations for the day?
  - What is a strength or unique perspective you bring to the program or group?
- ❖ Depending on the group you could pose a question that fits what you know about the group’s make up or purpose for coming together. For example, when leading a program with a group of camp counselors you might ask participants to choose a card that represents one of these ideas:
  - Why you love being a counselor
  - A quality do you think is most important in a counselor
  - A strength you bring to your position
  - A hope you have for the upcoming camp
- ❖ Use as a processing or debriefing/reflection activity. Have individual participants choose a card that represents:
  - Their role in the activity or group process



- Their perspective on what the group achieved
  - A challenge they experienced
  - A rewarding part of the program
- ❖ Another way to stimulate group dialogue and consensus is to have the group come to agreement on one card that best represents what they all accomplished together. Or, have the group agree on three cards that tell a story of the groups “journey” together. For example have them choose a card that represents where they started, then a second to describe where they went as group, and a third to describe their “next steps”.
  - ❖ For group goal setting ask the group could choose a card or cards that represents one of the following ideas:
    - what they want to achieve together
    - a symbol of the groups strengths and purpose
    - the specific positive behaviors they want to make sure are present in their group
  - ❖ For individual self-reflection participants could choose a card and then write or draw about it in their journal. The postcards make great creative writing prompts.

## 5. Allegory Objects

Allegory objects work similarly to Metaphor Cards. They are reflective tools that use metaphors or symbols to represent participant’s reactions to an experience. These objects are useful as introductory activities, for processing a specific experience, or for bringing an activity to a close.

This engaging tool uses small objects as a symbol to represent a participant’s or group’s reactions to an experience. Providing a tangible object upon which participants can attach their thoughts helps give these ideas substance and shape in quite profound depth. Allegory objects activities are appealing to participants, can be used in many different ways, and are appropriate for all age groups. *See Metaphor Cards above for sample activities to use Allegory Objects.*

## 6. Chiji Processing Cards

Chiji (chee’ – jee) is a Chinese work meaning important moment or significant opportunity. Whether this moment leads to a positive or negative path depends up on the action of the individual. The Chinese character “chi” literally means key. If a person has the right tools and the appropriate attitude, the important moment may open door to and valuable experiences.





### **Directions for using Chiji Cards:**

During the processing phase of an experiential program spread the Chiji Cards face up in front of the group. Then give instructions similar to the following:

*Pick one or two cards that, for any reason, describe your feelings, thoughts, or emotion from today's activities. In a minute or two I will ask you to explain why you chose your cards. Your feelings, thoughts, or emotions can be personal, or they may be about the group. They may be about today, or a memory of another time that was brought up by today's activities. I don't care what you want to talk about, but I do want you to pick an insight that you are willing to share with the group.*

## **7. Chiji Processing Dice**



Chiji Processing Dice are an example of participant-directed processing. They help to shift some the responsibility for successful processing from the facilitator to the participants. The sequence of fact-finding, analysis and feelings, and transference not only takes participants through a progression for processing a special event, but also presents an overall lesson of proper processing. In other words, it trains people about processing to encourage self-reflection.

### **Directions for using Chiji Dice:**

The question dice are rolled in sequential order: red, orange, yellow. The roll of each question die is accompanied by the roll of the blue control die. The blue die instructs participants who will answer the question and the red, orange and yellow dice provide the processing question to be answered.

**Red Fact Finding Die:** This is the most basic question die. It asks factual questions to summarize the events of the experience.

**Orange Analysis Die:** The questions on this die elicit feelings from the participants. They help the participants analyze an experience and discuss what went well, what did not and why.

**Yellow Transference Die:** This die ties the specific experience to future experiences and asks participants to apply what they learned to their everyday life.

**Blue Control Die:** The blue die determines who answers the questions on the other dice and is always rolled simultaneously with one of the others.

## **8. Chiji Pocket Processors**

The Pocket Processor is a processing tool based on the theory of the yin and the yang. This theory describes two ends of a continuum (not a set of dichotomies), with each end having the seed of the other. A healthy being does not stay at one point on the continuum, but flows continuously between the two extremes. This tool helps

participants examine the flow along the continuum by forcing individuals to understand that both sides of an issue are valid, and moving in one direction means giving up something else.

**Directions for Basic Use:**

Use the Pocket Processors to debrief an activity by spreading all cards out and asking each participant to choose the card that best represents some kind of progress made (either individual or group process.) Then allow each participant to explain his or her choice. For example: “I choose the competing/cooperating card because I am naturally very competitive, but I successfully fought off my desire to complete the initiative faster than the other group.”

**Group Variation:**

Rather than allowing each person to pick a card, the facilitator may ask the group to choose the single card or the top 2-3 cards that best exemplifies progress made by the group. The narrowing down of the cards then may become the topic of discussion. For example: “After stretching the rules all day, why didn’t you pick the ‘Working Outside of the Rules’ card?”

Take it a step farther by asking group members to make a commitment to apply what they learned. For example the facilitator might say, “Too often groups make progress at a special event like today, but then when they return to the ‘real world’ they go back to their old, natural ways. I want you to choose one card that represents one aspect of today’s success and make a commitment to carry that theme forward with you once you get back.” Then if appropriate, have the group list three or four specific things they will do to implement the goal represented by the chosen card.

**9. Human Continuum**



This debriefing uses physical participant movement and placement to process individually as compared with the group. Ask a question that has a scale or “continuum” and then ask participants to physically represent their response by placing themselves in the continuum. For example, the facilitator might say, “this side of the room is ‘learned very much’

and this side of the room is ‘learned very little’, put yourself on the continuum. Or, this side of the room represents disagree (1) and this side of the room represents agree (10); place yourself on the continuum.



For additional reflection, ask participants to share their reasoning for placing themselves on the human continuum where they did. Continue by having participants reflect on how they feel about their response and how they feel they compare to others, if appropriate.

## 10. Rope Responses



This is a reflection activity that has participants gauge if they agree, disagree, or are unsure about a statement regarding an experiential learning experience. The facilitator makes a reflective statement and asks participants to respond by placing themselves on one side of the rope if they agree or the other side of the rope if they disagree. A participant can straddle the rope if they are unsure or neither agree or disagree. For additional reflection, ask participants to share their reasoning for placing on either side of the rope or their choice to straddle it. Facilitate discussion surrounding responses.

Other options a facilitator could use instead of a rope could be a line drawn in the sand, the crack created by floor tiles, or painter's tape placed on the carpet.

## 11. Treasure Chest

Treasure chest reflections take the form of a fun pirate analogy, yet encourage thoughtful reflections. Use a "treasure chest" full of gold coins to spark participants to reflective questions. For each question have youth pull out a gold coin from the treasure chest to keep as a reward for reflecting. Try some of the following prompts:

- What about the experience made you feel like you were worth more (or less) than 'gold'?
- To you, what is most 'treasured' (most valuable) about today's experience?
- If you were to keep something in your 'treasure chest' to remember after you leave today what would it be?
- What did you learn from the experience that could be added to your 'wealth' of knowledge?

### **Variation:**

Have participants add gold coins to the treasure chest by utilizing the reflective questions as writing prompts. Print paper gold coins and have participants write their responses on the gold coins and add them to the treasure chest. If appropriate, after reflection is complete pick out paper gold coins from the chest randomly and read the responses to the whole group keeping the participants anonymous.



## 12. Thumb Ball

This processing tool is simply a ball with feelings denoted in sections on it. It is particularly useful in reflecting on highly sensitive experiences. Participants stand in a circle and toss the ball to fellow group members. After three tosses, the participant who has the ball locates where his or her right thumb landed on the ball. The participant reads the emotion listed and responds with a time in the activity he or she experienced that feeling. Or, tells a time he or she had a similar feeling that relates to the learning experience. After one participant responds, activity continues until all participants have responded.



## 13. Debriefing Dice

Use large numerical dice as an effective processing tool. Dice can be used to facilitate many quick debriefing discussions:

- Have each participant roll a die and the number that is rolled will indicate how many responses they must share about what they learned
- Assign each number on the die a reflection question, when the participant rolls the die they must answer the question that is assigned to that number
- Set up rules about how the participants must reflect based on roll the dice; for example if they roll a six they will respond with gestures, if they roll a total count less than five they respond to a written prompt or if they roll a pair (i.e.; snake eyes or boxcars) they are excused from this reflection question

## 14. Story Cubes

Use the story cubes to have participants share about their experiential learning experience. Participants chose cubes to design a story about what they learned, what was challenging, what was rewarding, or how they will apply it to their daily life. Then share it with a partner or the large group. A variation could that participants roll the cubes and use (all or most of) the symbols that are rolled to design their story. For an even more exciting challenge, have participants the opportunity to swap one or more of their cubes with other group members before designing their story.

## 15. Clapboard Skits

Clapboard skits are an opportunity for participants to role play what happened in an experiential learning experience and how they feel about it. Use movie clapboard and allow one participant to be the director who facilitates the processing and the skit. Other participants should be the performers. The director will call "Lights, Camera,



Action” and the performers will act out how they are feeling or what they learned.

A good addition is the use of an audience if the group is a large one. Participants who are not performing can be the audience members who provide feedback about the quality of reflection. The louder the applause, the better the reflection.

## 16. Fortune Cookies

Use fabric fortune cookies as a fun way to debrief at the close of a special event and have participants “take out” (or take away) some important reflection to remember in the future. Place pre-determined reflection questions on fortunes inside the fabric fortune cookies. Allow each participant to choose a fortune cookie then respond to the reflection questions individually, in pairs or as a large group.



If the experience is one that reoccurs frequently, turn the reflection activity upside down and ask participants to then leave a fortune related to the experience for future participants.

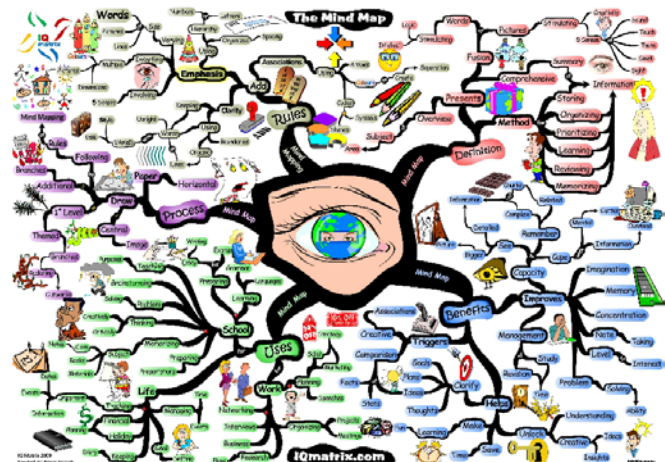
## 17. Block Exchange

Use colored blocks to create a tower of reflection. Before participants arrive, assign each color block a specific debriefing question that encourages transfer. Have participants get acquainted by playing a game of “tumbling tower” (Jenga©). After game is complete, tell participants that for each block they collected they will respond to a prompt. For example, if they have two red and three blue blocks they must share two ways they are a group leader and three examples of effective group communication.

An interesting supplement to the reflection can be included by adding reflection words like rewarding, challenging, emotion, learning, etcetera to the blocks. Each time the participant selects a block they need to share a three sentence story about a time or experience they had that uses that word in it.

## 18. Mind Map Graffiti

This tool allows for individual reflection within a group processing technique. Mind Maps are graphic representation of one’s thinking about a topic or experience (sometimes called a brainstorming web). In this reflection activity, provide groups of 3-6 participants with large sheets of paper to create a mind map about a



topic related to the experiential learning experience. The center of the mind map should be the topic and related ideas and thoughts connected to that topic will surround it with drawings, words and symbols that illustrate one's thinking. The groups' members must work together to accurately represent and connect each participant's thinking. Display the graffiti for everyone to see.

When multiple topics of discussion exist, use several different mind maps and ask participants to rotate to each different mind map after a set amount of time. Each time they rotate participants should pick a new graffiti and new mix of group members to mind map with.

**Topics to utilize with mind maps:** 1) what was learned, 2) what presented a challenge, 3) what was most rewarding, 4) how the experience transpired, 5) emotions elicited, 6) how the experience applies to my life, 7) what can be changed and many more processing and debriefing topics.

For an additional twist, try using different mediums to create your graffiti. For example, use a dry erase board, use the sand area at the beach, chalk the sidewalk or spray paint a grassy area.

## **19. Consensus Cards**

This is a method of better understanding how each participant is thinking, feeling, responding to an activity, topic or comment. Provide each participant with a set of consensus cards (red, yellow and green).

- ❖ Ask a question and ask participants to respond with a consensus card. A facilitator might ask a participant to explain why that consensus card was chosen. For example: Should we proceed to the next activity or should we take a five minute break? Green means go ahead, Red means stop for a break; Yellow means we can proceed, but I might need a break soon.
- ❖ Use consensus cards to determine group processing, for example:

**RED:** What things do we need to STOP in order for us to be more successful?

**YELLOW:** What are things we need to be CAREFUL of as we continue?

**GREEN:** What are things we want to GO for?



## **20. Shuffle Left, Shuffle Right**

This is a method of debriefing in motion. Providing some kinesthetic movement during a reflection session can maintain the energy of the group, and keep those high energy individuals engaged by being active.

- 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 share. 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 one person 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.