A Teachable Moment, Processing the Experience

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Michelle Cummings, Presenter—Contact info above
Michelle is the owner and creator of her business Training Wheels Inc. She has been in the Experiential Education field for a decade and has devoted her business to being a creative resource for facilitators and working teams. Training Wheels is a leader in the portable equipment industry and prides itself in creating quality, affordable activities, books, and trainings for those seeking experiential resources. Michelle holds her Bachelors degree in Psychology from Kansas State University and her Masters degree in Experiential Education from Minnesota State University Mankato. Michelle actively seeks and/or creates new activities to enhance her workshops and to provide new resources for facilitators.

Michelle, along with Dr. Jim Cain and Jennifer Stanchfield are the authors of the renowned book, *A Teachable Moment, A Facilitator's Guide to Activities for Processing, Debriefing, Reviewing, and Reflecting*. The book has over 120 different processing tools, activities, and techniques for facilitators.

Michelle is also the author of *Bouldering Games for Kids, an Educational Guide for Traverse Walls*.


Michelle is currently working on 4 other titles. Sign up for Michelle’s free games newsletter to receive updates on these titles and for free activities online at www.training-wheels.com.

Processing Activities galore! Different processing activities we may discuss during workshop:

- Twists on Traditionals
- Treasure Chest
- Buzz Ring
- Concentric Circles
- Caterpillar/Butterfly
- Celebrations
- Processing Cube
- Body Part Debrief
- Tool Cards
- Consensus Cards
- Deck of Cards Debrief
- Metaphor Cards
- Chiji Cards
- Feelings Cards
- Fortune Cookie Debrief
- Talking Stick
- Index Card Castles
- Knot Around
- Domino Debrief
- Postcards
- Crossword
- Hollywood Clapboard
- Moving debriefs
- Stop N Go Pre-Brief
- Community Puzzles
Reflection or Processing The Adventure Experience
Excerpt from “Adventures In Learning” Jennifer Stanchfield 2001

The value of reflection:
An important concept to consider when implementing experiential education activities is setting up 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.

Participant Directed 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. This workshop will describe a variety of processing methods including Processing Props, Twists on the Traditional Sharing Circle, Exploration of Journaling methods including audio and video.

Processing Props
Using tangible objects, as symbolic representations of an experience, or personal attribute can be a very effective method with students. These methods provide a tangible object upon which participants can attach their thoughts. 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.

Chiji Cards
Our students participate throughout the semester using props such as the Chiji cards developed by Buzz Bocher, Steve Simpson and Dan Miller at The Institute for Experiential Education. Chiji is a Chinese word meaning important moment or significant opportunity. The Chiji cards are a useful tool that uses 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. As an introductory activity students can choose the card that best represents a strength they bring to the group, or a goal they have for the day or course.

The group can be asked to come to consensus on one card that best represents their experience as a group, the strengths of the group or something they achieve.

Students can use the cards to relate the “story” of their experience by lining up four or five cards that demonstrate how they progressed through the activity, the day or the course as a whole.

Students can each pick their own card and then draw it or write about in their journal.
The students can use their creativity in coming up with a variety of ways to use these cards. We found them very effective in our class, the students referred to the cards a great deal throughout the semester, even naming one of the challenge activities after the cards.

**Post Cards**
Post cards can be used in a similar way to the chiji cards. (Sugerman et al 2001) Post cards can have some interesting images. This can be a great way to use those piles of postcards left over from exotic vacations.

**Clip Art**
Public domain software contains some interesting and useful metaphoric images that can make great cards.

Similar activities include using regular playing cards, bandanas; magazine cut outs, even cereal boxes, in a similar way. Use your creativity; the possibilities for this type of activity are endless.

**Brief Descriptions of different Processing Activities**

**Hollywood Clapboard**  Take Two! Just like in the movies, give the participants a chance to tell you how they would do it differently.

**Metaphor Cards/Feelings Cards**  This is a great way for people to express their feelings. Spread the cards out before the group and have them pick a card that best represents an experience or a feeling that they have had. 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.

**Body Part Debrief™**  Ask your participants to relate an experience they had in your program to one of the body part balls before them. The heart might represent a feeling they had, the stomach might represent something that took guts to do or pushed you outside your comfort zone.

**Tool Cards**  This is a great way for people to express their feelings. Spread the cards out before the group and have them pick a tool that best represents an experience or a feeling that they have had. 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.

**Processing Cube**  This colorful cube has clear vinyl windows on each side. Slip processing questions into each window and toss the cube around the group. Whatever question lands face up is the question that participant answers.

**Domino Debrief**  After the activity give each participant a domino. Give them a question to discuss about the activity and tell them to find someone that has similar numbers on their domino and share their answers.

**Community Puzzles**  Each participant gets to color their piece of the puzzle. After everyone is finished coloring, they can tell the group about what they drew/wrote and then add it to the puzzle.

**Caterpillar/Butterfly puppet or Butterfly Life Cycle bugs**  This is a great one for recovery groups or any group experiencing a change of some kind. Start out with the puppet in the caterpillar shape and talk about what happens during changes and the metaphors around caterpillars. Once a good discussion has taken place ask about the butterfly and it's metaphors. After the discussion is nearing the end create the change in the puppet.
Postcards  This activity would work a lot like Metaphor Cards. Dig out all of your old postcards and use those the same way you would Metaphor Cards. Some Postcard manufacturing companies will donate these to your cause. Most postcards run $.25 or 5 for $1.00.

Index card Castles  Great for large group debriefs. Give a stack of index cards to each group. Let them write different things they learned throughout the day. Have each group build a castle with their index cards. They must connect their castle to at least 2 other castles.

Index Card Debrief  Write a processing question on an index card and pass one out to each participant. Instruct them to find a partner and discuss whatever question they have on their cards with one another. After a few minutes tell them to switch index cards and then find a new partner. And the process continues. After a few exchanges bring them back into a large group and ask for volunteers to share some things they heard.

Knot Around, Feeling Knotty, Knot Feelings! Or whatever you want to call it! This is a good way to debrief any experience. Tie the two ends of your webbing into a knot. Have the group stand or sit in a circle. Wherever the knot is in the circle, have that person start. Whoever has the knot can share a thought, experience, compliment, etc. As the facilitator you can designate what can/should be shared when the knot is received. Pass the knot around the circle until everyone has gone.

Treasure Chest  A collection of items from your junk drawer. Get out your Treasure Chest and set out all of it's contents before the group. Let the group pick up individual items that metaphorically represent an experience they had during the activity/day/program and then share them with the group. Sometimes it's fun and less intrusive if you let participants partner up or do this in small groups.

Twists on the Traditional Sharing Circle
Traditionally processing has involved sitting a group of participants down in a circle after a challenge course 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 students are listed below:

Dyads and Triads  In this activity students are sent off in groups of two or three to reflect together on the experience. This can mean that there are predetermined questions, an art or project assignment of some kind or just a loose unstructured conversation.

The Solo Experience  The solo experience is a traditional part of multi-day Outward Bound Programming, where a participant goes off by themselves for an extensive time overnight, with limited food and supplies and no reading material other than their journal, to reflect upon themselves and their experience. This idea could be used in shorter-term program out on a challenge course, or other adventure activity. Allowing for participants to take 15 or 20-minute time separate from the group could be very effective. Students could be given a journal or drawing assignment during this time.

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1. Did you Notice.....
2. Why do you think that happened?
3. Does that happen in real life?
4. Why do you think that happens?
5. How can we use this information?
Teachable Moments for Large Groups

The following activities are great to use with large groups.

**Concentric Circles** An inner circle and an outer circle….participants paired in the circle greet each other and engage in a fun activity together, like “finger fencing” or “one hand shoe tying” and then answer a question that the facilitator asks about the activity or experience the group is processing. After these partners visit, everyone switches by moving the inner or outer circle to share again with a new partner. Use it as an icebreaker, a debriefing circle or excellent closing activity.

**All My Neighbors Who...** Each participant needs a spot marker. One person in the middle calls out, "All My Neighbors Who…..had fun today" all those that had fun today leave their spot, give high fives in the center, then find a new spot. Person left without a spot asks the next question.

**Handshakes**

*High 5 Greeting, Low Five Greeting, Ankle Shaker:* Partners lean and greet a partner by shaking their ankle.

*Cappuccino handshake:* hold imaginary coffee in left hand, high five overhead with right hand, bend over and shake raised foot of partner without spilling coffee!

*Dairy Farmer handshake:* one person interlaces fingers and points thumbs down creating the udders, the other person milks the udders.

*Lumberjack handshake:* partners create the lumberjack saw with their thumbs. One person gives a thumb, grab thumb, grab thumb, grab thumb…then repeat each others names in low; lumberjack voices 2-3 times.

*Crab handshake:* standing close together, partners reach hand behind and through their legs to shake hands. (determine appropriateness for your group.)

**Face to Face** Have participants find partners and stand back to back. When 'Face to Face' is called out each person finds a new partner and begin discussing the question that is asked. (i.e. What is your favorite holiday?) When 'Back to Back' is called out the duo turn and place their backs together. It's amazing how the talking will stop as soon as people are not facing one another! Then 'Front to Front', each person finds a new partner and begins a new discussion.

**Index Card Castle Debrief** Give each group a stack of index cards. Have them write their 'foundations of learning' on the cards. Use these cards to build a card castle. Each castle must connect with at least two other castles. The global village effect takes place!

**Well Oiled Machine** Have each participant come up with a sound and an action. Start with one noise and action, have everyone connect somewhere to the machine. In the end you will have a bustling well oiled machine.

**Shuffle Left Shuffle Right** In a large circle, everyone starts by shuffling to the left. If someone has something they want to say, they call out, "Stop!" They have a moment to share and then they give the group a direction to shuffle by saying, "Shuffle Left" or "Shuffle Right". When the group gets to a lull the facilitator starts a count down from 10, 9, 8, 7, 6….. until no one has anything left to say.

**Domino Debrief/Onimod** (onimod is the word domino spelled backwards) Give each participant a domino. Ask them to get into groups of 2 or 3 by matching the numbers they have on their domino. For example, if I have the 4-3 domino, match with someone that had a 4 or a 3 on their domino. Ask appropriate processing questions so each person has a chance to answer the question in their small groups. Getting individuals comfortable sharing in small groups will help them when it comes time to share in a large group.
Index Card Castles Have your large group get into small groups of 5-10 people. Give each group a stack of index cards and markers. Ask them to write their foundations of learning on an index card. Use those cards as the foundation for your card castle. Ask each group to build a card castle and connect it to two other castles. After you are finished it will look like global villages all connected with different pathways.

Pass the Rain Have the group form a large circle and turn to the right. You should have a single file circle. Ask your participants to close their eyes. One person (usually the facilitator) starts the rain. The passing of the rain starts with a rub on the shoulders, then to a snap of the fingers, then to a pat on the shoulders, to a hard pat on the shoulders, you can also add a stomp of the feet. The circle then reverses the actions from the stomp of the feet, to the pat of the shoulders, to the soft pat on shoulders, to the finger snap, to the rub of the shoulder. It will sound like the coming and going of a rain storm. Talk about the metaphors around making a ripple in the pond, letting the learning soak in after the storm, etc.

Celebrations This great icebreaker activity can be used to celebrate achievements, highlights, and teachable moments from a program. Have the group stand in a circle. Teach the group a short cheer: Two leg slaps, two claps, two snaps and a yeah (with fingers drawn). Once they have mastered the cheer, instruct the group that when you call out something experienced during the session anyone who shares this thought or experience is to come to the middle to participate in the cheer with others who shared the same experience. For example “Anyone who helped someone else today” “Anyone who tried something new” “Anyone who was challenged”. Have group members start to call out their own thoughts and moments from the day. End on a positive note bringing everyone into the circle.

Puzzles Universal puzzles are a great way for large groups to share their ‘piece’ of the puzzle.

PROCESSING RESOURCES
Training Wheels  www.training-wheels.com  888-553-0147


Open to Outcome, Micah Jacobsen and Mari Ruddy, 2005, Wood N Barnes Publishing. Can be purchased through Training Wheels.

