Why engage in experiential learning?

In addition to the many studies showing students 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, fishbowl 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.

The Debrief Process

- Before the exercise
    - Discuss expectations
    - Set learning objectives
    - Help students develop engagement rules (code of conduct)
    - Make sure to 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 debrief process at the end
    - Tell the students in advance what kinds of things to be aware of if possible

Creative Commons Copyright: Attribution Noncommercial 4.0 International (CC BY-NC 4.0)
You are free to share and adapt this resource under the following terms. You must give appropriate credit, provide a link to the license, and indicate if changes were made. You may do so in any reasonable manner, but not in any way that suggests the licensor endorses you or your use. You may not use the material for commercial purposes. You may not apply legal terms or technological measures that legally restrict others from doing anything the license permits

- Conducting the exercise and debrief
    - "De- role" the participants (get out of character)
    - Keep the group together
    - Go through the process
        - Awareness of what happened
        - Differentiate facts from emotions
        - Analysis
        - Application

Tools and Best Practices

- Think about what you want out of the discussions, then, over plan (expectations)
- Like Brainstorming - there are no judgments, anything goes, go for quantity, promote collaboration
- Help develop/articulate their ideas
- Listen to really understand what students are saying
- Stay curious and 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 transform disagreements between students into learning opportunities
- Manage dominating voices and give space to quieter students
- Check room 'temperature' before the students leave

Effective Debriefing Questions

- Ask questions within each of the frameworks (What? So What? Now What?)
- Ask open questions
- Paraphrase responses to link to learning objectives
- Focus on deepening on the ideas presented instead of probing the person
- Watch for emotions and feelings and redirect accordingly
- Use silence

Creative Commons Copyright: Attribution Noncommercial 4.0 International (CC BY-NC 4.0)
You are free to share and adapt this resource under the following terms. You must give appropriate credit, provide a link to the license, and indicate if changes were made. You may do so in any reasonable manner, but not in any way that suggests the licensor endorses you or your use. You may not use the material for commercial purposes. You may not apply legal terms or technological measures that legally restrict others from doing anything the license permits