

# Teachable Moments Workshop

## Processing the Experience



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**Michelle Cummings, MS Presenter** Michelle is the owner and creator of her business Training Wheels Inc. She has been in the Experiential Education field for a more than 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 processing activities to enhance her processing workshop and to provide new resources for facilitators. Michelle is author of the new publication *Playing with a Full Deck: 52 Team Activities Using a Deck of Cards*.

### 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.

## 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.

## Metaphoric Objects and Images

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.

## A few of our favorite metaphoric processing tools and techniques:

**Image Cards: Post Cards and Chiji 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.

**Postcards** can portray a variety of interesting imagery. This can be a great way to use those postcards left over from exotic vacations.

**Chiji Cards: Chiji** is a Chinese word meaning important moment or significant opportunity. Chiji cards developed by Buzz Bocher, Steve Simpson and Dan Miller at The Institute for Experiential Education. The Chiji cards

**Clip Art and Magazine** cutouts can be used in a similar fashion

**Body Part Debrief™** Michelle's popular innovation for engaging groups in reflective discussion is a collection of foam "body parts" that represent feelings and experience. Ask your participants to relate an experience 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.

**Community Puzzles** Participant can portray their "piece of the puzzle" with artwork and discussion and reflect on how their piece fits into the whole as the group completes the puzzle.

**UFO Ball:** This UFO Ball may look like a simple ping-pong ball with two pieces of metal, but when both pieces of metal are touched simultaneously, the ball lights up and makes noise!. Use it to teach the value of connection in your team. The ball will activate if you have a group of 10 people all connected fingertip to fingertip--if one person disconnects from the team the ball will stop making noise. This can be a powerful metaphor to reflect on the effects on a team when someone is not giving 100%

**Group Drawing:** Use artwork in reflection. Have small groups work together to create a pictorial/symbolic representation of their experience and share it with the group

**Conflict Animals:** Evaluate how you and your group deal with conflict by comparing them to the behaviors of animals for example:

- Turtle (withdraw)** - withdraws from the conflict (hides until it is safe to emerge)
- Shark (force)**- forces and tries to make opponents accept his/her
- Bear (smooth)**- avoids the conflict when possible
- Fox (compromise)**- sly, sneaky, tricky and is able to persuade others to give up part of their most important and valued positions
- Owl (problem solver)**- known throughout children's books as the wise old owl...the owl views conflicts as -problems to be solved, confronts, seeking solutions that will satisfy both parties

## 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:

**Handshakes** – Have Partners Greet each other in the following ways and share reflective questions great for introductory conversations, closings and to reflect on specific activities:

- *High 5 Greeting, Low 5 Greeting*
- *Ankle Shake*- lean forward and greet a partner by shaking their ankle
- *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.
- *Fishing Partner*

**Fortune Cookie Debrief** Add spontaneity to your question and answer session with intriguing reflective treats. One of Michelle's newest innovations. These silk version cookies (also found in novelty stores) are easily filled with reflection questions or closing quotes.

**Hollywood Clapboard Take Two!** Just like in the movies, give the participants a chance to share how they would do it differently. Or to stop action and "freeze frame" and reflect on what is happening in the group.

**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.

**Processing Dice:** Questions at the roll of the dice... add a sense of spontaneity and fun to the traditional sharing circle. I.E.E creators of the Chiji cards have created this colorful light facilitator friendly tool.

**Traffic Debrief:** Using the metaphors of a traffic scene, these parts are sure to get your group talking.  
**Stoptlight:** 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) **Hard Hat:** What areas are you being hard headed in? **School Bus:** What did you learn today? What does the school bus represent to you? **Traffic Cone:** What problems do we need to avoid? What do we need to be careful of? **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? **Tire:** What do we need to keep the wheels turning? How do we continue forward motion? **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?

For more ideas and detailed descriptions of activities see *A Teachable Moment*

## Processing Publications

*A Teachable Moment*, a Facilitator's Guide to Activities for Processing, Debriefing, Reviewing, and Reflecting. Jim Cain, Michelle Cummings, Jennifer Stanchfield, 2004. Kendall Hunt Publishing, Dubuque Iowa 2004.

*Lasting Lessons*, Clifford Knapp, 1992, ISBN 1-880785-06-4, ERIC Publishing, PO Box 1348, Charleston, WV 25325

*Reflective Learning: Theory and Practice*. Sugarman, D. Doherty, K., Garvey, D., Gass, M. Kendall Hunt Publisher, 2000.

*Open to Outcome*, Micah Jacobsen and Mari Ruddy, 2005, Wood N Barnes Publishing.

*Processing Pinnacle*, An Educator's Guide to Better Processing by Steve Simpson, PhD, Dan Miller & Buzz Bocher, 2006, Wood N Barnes Publishing.

*Processing The Experience*, Second Edition; John L.Luckner, Reldan S.Nadler, Kendall Hunt Publishing, Dubuque Iowa 1997.