

Idea Notebook

DESIGNING PROCESSING QUESTIONS TO MEET SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES

By Clifford E. Knapp

The ultimate goal for experiential educators is to assist participants in learning from their experiences. Participants should be taught how to apply the skills, concepts and attitudes they have learned to future life situations.

Experiential educators can improve their ability to process or debrief experiences by being clear about their objectives and then by planning strategies to meet them. Processing is a method for helping people reflect on experiences and for facilitating specific personal changes in their lives. The skill of processing primarily involves observing individuals, making assessments about what is happening, and then asking appropriate questions.

There are many personal and group growth objectives that can be achieved through adventure and other types of experiential programming. Among the more important objectives are: communicating effectively, expressing appropriate feelings, listening, appreciating self and others, decision making, cooperating, and trusting the group. If the leader has one or more of these objectives in mind, the observations, assessments, and processing questions may be better directed toward achieving these ends. The underlying assumption of this article is that if the leader and participants know where to go and how to get there, the participant is more likely to arrive. The following questions, organized by specific program objectives, are designed to assist leaders in more effectively processing experiential activities for personal and group growth.

Communicating Effectively

Can anyone give an example of when you thought you communicated effectively with someone else in the group? (consider verbal and non-verbal communication)

2. How did you know that what you communicated was understood? (consider different types of feedback)
3. Who didn't understand someone's attempt to communicate?
4. What went wrong in the communication attempt?
5. What could the communicator do differently next time to give a clearer message?
6. What could the message receiver do differently next time to understand the message?
7. How many different ways were used to communicate messages?
8. Which ways were most effective? Why?
9. Did you learn something about communication that will be helpful later? If so, what?

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3. Do you consider yourself a good follower? Was this an important role in the group today? Explain.
4. How does refusal to follow affect the leadership role?
5. What are the traits of a good follower?
6. How can you improve your ability to follow in the future?

Making Group Decisions

1. How were group decisions made in completing the activity?
2. Were you satisfied with the ways decisions were made? Explain.
3. Did the group arrive at any decisions through group consensus? (some didn't get their first choice, but they could "live" with the decision)
4. Were some decisions made by one or several individuals?
5. Did everyone in the group express an opinion when a choice was available? If not, why not?
6. What is the best way for this group to make decisions? Explain.
7. Do you respond in similar ways in other groups?
8. What did you like about how the group made decisions? What didn't you like?

Cooperating

1. Can you think of specific examples of when the group cooperated in completing the activity? Explain.
2. How did it feel to cooperate?
3. Do you cooperate in most things you do?
4. How did you learn to cooperate?
5. What are the rewards of cooperating?
6. Are there any problems associated with cooperation?
7. How did cooperative behavior lead to successfully completing the activity?
8. How can you cooperate in other areas of your life?
9. Did you think anyone was blocking the group from cooperating? Explain.

Respecting Human Differences

1. How are you different from some of the others in the group?
2. How do these differences strengthen the group as a whole?
3. When do differences in people in a group prevent reaching certain objectives?
4. What would this group be like if there were very few differences in people? How would you feel if this were so?

5. In what instances did being different help and hinder the group members from reaching their objectives?

Respecting Human Commonalities

1. How are you like some of the others in the group?
2. Were these commonalities a help to the group in completing their task? Explain.
3. Were these commonalities a hinderance to the group in completing their task? Explain.
4. Do you think you have other things in common with some of the group members that you haven't found yet?
5. How did this setting help you discover how you are similar to others?

Trusting the Group

1. Can you give examples of when you trusted someone in the group? Explain.
2. Is it easier to trust some people and not others? Explain.
3. Can you think of examples when trusting someone could not have been a good idea?
4. How do you increase your level of trust for someone?
5. On a scale of 1-10, rate how much trust you have in the group as a whole. Can you explain your rating?
6. What did you do today that deserves the trust of others?
7. How does the amount of fear you feel affect your trust of others?

Closure Questions

1. What did you learn about yourself?
2. What did you learn about others?
3. How do you feel about yourself and others?
4. What new questions do you have about yourself and others?
5. What did you do today of which you are particularly proud ?
6. What skill are you working to improve?
7. Was your behavior today typical of the way you usually act in groups? Explain.
8. How can you use what you learned in other life situations?
9. What beliefs about yourself and others were reinforced today?
10. Would you do anything differently if you were starting the activity again with this group?
11. What would you like to say to the group members?

Expressing Appropriate Feelings

1. Can you name a feeling you had at any point in completing the activity? (consider - mad, glad, sad, or scared) Where in your body did you feel it most?
2. What personal beliefs were responsible for generating that feeling? (What was the main thought behind the feeling?)
3. Is that feeling a common one in your life?
4. Did you express that feeling to others? If not, what did you do with the feeling?
5. Do you usually express feelings or suppress them?
6. Would you like to feel differently in a similar situation? If so, how would you like to feel?
7. What beliefs would you need to have in order to feel differently in a similar situation? Could you believe them?
8. How do you feel about the conflict that may result from expressing certain feelings?
9. How do you imagine others felt toward you at various times during the activity? Were these feelings expressed?
10. What types of feelings are easiest to express?... most difficult?
11. Do you find it difficult to be aware of some feelings at times? If, so, which ones?
12. Are some feelings not appropriate to express to the group at times? If so, which ones?
13. What feelings were expressed non-verbally in the group?
14. Does expressing appropriate feelings help or hinder completing the initiative?

Deferring Judgment of Others

1. Is it difficult for you to avoid judging others? Explain.
2. Can you think of examples of when you judged others in the group today?...when you didn't judge others?
3. What were some advantages to you by not judging others?
4. What were some advantages to others by you not judging them?
5. How does judging and not judging others affect the completion of the activity?
6. Were some behaviors of others easy not to judge and other behaviors difficult?

7. Would deferring judgment be of some value in other situations? Explain.
8. Can you think of any disadvantages of not judging others in this situation?

Listening

1. Who made suggestions for completing the activity?
2. Were all of these suggestions heard? Explain.
3. Which suggestions were acted upon?
4. Why were the other suggestions ignored?
5. How did it feel to be heard when you made a suggestion?
6. What interfered with your ability to listen to others?
7. How can this interference be overcome?
8. Did you prevent yourself from listening well? How?
9. Did you listen in the same way today as you generally do? If not, what was different about today?

Leading Others

1. Who assumed leadership roles during the activity?
2. What were the behaviors which you described as showing leadership?
3. Can everyone agree that these behaviors are traits of leaders?
4. How did the group respond to these leadership behaviors?
5. Who followed the leader even if you weren't sure that the idea would work? Why?
6. Did the leadership role shift to other people during the activity? Who thought they were taking the leadership role? How did you do it?
7. Was it difficult to assume a leadership role with this group?
8. Why didn't some of you take a leadership role?
9. Is it easier to take a leadership role in other situations or with different group members? Explain.
10. Did anyone try to lead the group, but felt they were unsuccessful? What were some possible reasons for this? How did it feel to be disregarded?

Following Others

1. Who assumed a follower role at times throughout the activity? How did it feel?
2. How did it feel to follow different leaders?