

The Importance of Reflection Outside of Outdoor & Environmental Education Settings

In order for educators to maximize their time at the H.R. Frink Centre and allow programs to run efficiently, reflection activities are important to introduce before and after visiting. Days go by quickly at the outdoor education centre and in order to get the most meaning out of the learning you will be doing here, it is recommended you use the activities in this article. By introducing reflection activities with your group, you can make further curriculum connections, assess students, have a positive impact on their self-esteem, improve the classroom community and make real world connections.

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for

The H.R. Frink Centre

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Introduction

Reflection is important to consider, particularly when outdoor, adventure, environmental or experiential activities are taking place.⁽¹⁾ John Dewey, a famous proponent of experiential learning believed that reflection is required in order to learn from the experience. Structured reflection allows students to: consider how they feel before an activity, assess prior knowledge, consider what they have accomplished after an activity, how they felt about the experience, share their ideas and communicate the value of others and themselves.⁽²⁾ Through reflection, educators can also gauge the experience of the students and assess for, as and of learning, as outlined in the Ontario Ministry of Education document, *Learning for All*.⁽¹⁵⁾

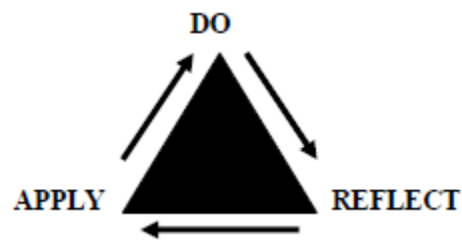


Figure 1: The Experiential Learning Cycle

If we refer to the Experiential Learning cycle, reflection is required in order to apply the knowledge gained during an activity. This style of learning has become standard in outdoor education, perpetuated by the creator of Outward Bound, Kurt Hahn. Experiential learning, reflecting and applying is useful within the context of a classroom as well. Simple, reflection activities commonly used within the outdoor & environmental education context are listed here as a starting point.

When you come to visit the H.R. Frink Centre, your day will be busy and will likely not have reflection activities integrated into your programs. In order to make the most of your time here, it is best if the activities listed in this article as incorporated before and after visiting. The activities listed require little to no resources and be easily accomplished in most settings.

This article breaks down what reflection is, how it can be incorporated into your classroom, why it is necessary for student learning and simple activities that can be introduced for just about any program.

What is Frontloading? What is Debriefing?

Frontloading is a reflection activity used to focus the student on the activity, form an awareness of their own prior knowledge and their feelings as well as the group's feelings toward the activity.⁽⁵⁾ The activity can have a focus or incorporate goals for the activity.⁽¹⁾⁽⁶⁾ In a sense, this is a form of assessment for and as learning. This allows the educator to form an awareness of what the students already know and encourage the individual to assess what they already know about themselves (and potentially what knowledge is lacking).

Debriefing, or processing is the conclusion to an activity. The group discusses the importance of what was learned and how it can be applied to future learning by asking open ended questions.⁽⁵⁾ It can be used to “reinforce what was learned, when participants fail an activity, there is conflict or safety is jeopardized.”⁽⁵⁾ It can help students to relate their learning and make their experience that much more powerful.⁽¹⁾ Many well-known educators have created models for debriefing but they all contain 3 key

steps: Description, Analysis and Application. By following these steps and the guidelines below, you can ensure learners will see your activity as more than just a “stand alone event”.⁽¹⁴⁾

Ground rules for frontloading and debriefing are paramount. Students must feel equally included & safe, have choice in participation, only speak using “I” statements, respect other’s interpretations and keep the conversation within the group.⁽⁶⁾ It is important you encourage students, support them, be an authentic leader, reflect on what students have said and avoid imposing your values, talking too much and over-processing.⁽¹²⁾ There is an assumption made that the activity “requires further consideration and a process is needed the help the student create that meaningful experience” and if this assumption is not true for your activity, it will have no worth.⁽¹⁴⁾

The framework for reflection is similar to the 3 step lesson planning model set out for Ontario Certified Teachers.

Getting Started → Working On It → Consolidation⁽⁴⁾

In a classroom setting, teachers are encouraged to introduce an activity with a hook, have the students experience learning in a hands on way and consolidate their learning with knowledge application. In outdoor education, reflection is involved in a similar framework in terms of communication, team building and assessment.

Frontloading → Activity → Debriefing

By introducing reflection activities thoughtfully into an environmental lesson, or a team building activity, students are required to apply their knowledge. The goal is not only to have students assess what they know beforehand and what they have learned, but apply their learning to real world situations. Without reflection incorporated into your learning, you lose a significant opportunity to create meaningful connections.⁽¹⁴⁾

Curriculum Connections & Assessment

In order to gain the most value of educative moments in outdoor and environmental education, it is important to approach activities with an experiential learning focus. Students will benefit the most if their experience for learning is reinforced with reflection. Students require reinforcement of their learning by restructuring their understanding based on the activity and applying their learning to other areas.⁽⁸⁾ We can apply these concepts to curriculum content, even with changing curriculum. Learning through outdoor and environmental contexts provide connections to curriculum and cross curricular activities as well as providing an experiential component in order to make learning more meaningful for students.⁽⁹⁾

Many curriculum connections can be made at the H.R. Frink Centre. There is an obvious science connection to many of the activities such as: hiking, the survival game, the hibernaculum game, biodiversity Jenga and the great journey (the water cycle game). There are also social studies & geography connections to be made with activities like: snowshoeing and trappers & traders. Mathematics can be a part of the programs you participate at the centre like: shelter building & the great journey. With some creativity and the help of the H.R. Frink Centre staff, curriculum connections can be made for any program offered.

By bringing reflection activities into your classroom, you can create an atmosphere of deeper learning. This could be to prepare for your field trip, reflect on the experience or be applied to a particular lesson or unit in the classroom. These are wonderful opportunities to seize in order to assess for, as and of student learning.⁽¹⁵⁾

Positive Effects on Students

Within the context of environmental education, there are several approaches to teaching.

Emancipatory environmental education engages participants in dialogue within the framework of an individual's objectives. **Instrumental environmental teaching** aims to shift behaviors within the environment. The third type, is what will be focus on here—**transformative learning**. Individual growth occurs through environmental education. This type of learning focuses on personal growth, healthy development, success, etc. by promoting self-reflection, social interactions, goal making and building self-confidence in addition to the feelings that come with a development of a relationship with nature.⁽¹⁰⁾ This type of method can improve skills such as: “collaboration, cooperation, leadership, self-reliance, self-esteem and communication” as well as a decrease in “stress levels, anxiety, and depression”. Results also show that by modelling and practicing reflection, students begin to value strategizing, discussion and cooperation. Overall a change in perception of self occurs.⁽¹¹⁾ Here, at the H.R. Frink Centre, we aim to provide a fun, activity filled day, rich learning and to improve the individual.

By using outdoor education reflection techniques in your classroom, students may find they improve in their self-concept, self-confidence and locus of control. The effects of these activities increase with repetition.⁽¹¹⁾ The possibilities are endless in terms of positive results due to reflective teaching. Unfortunately, the result is often not quantifiable and yet time and time again we are told the importance of a life examined. It is necessary to incorporate reflection into classrooms in order to improve not only learning but promote individual and classroom community growth.⁽¹³⁾

The reflection activities listed here in this paper are to be used more than once. Students will become comfortable with reflection with more practice and may come up with their own creative solutions for reflecting.

Activities

These activities are listed for their low maintenance attributes. The following activities require little to no resources and can be accomplished in any environment. Each activity has a title, a description and what they can be used for (frontloading and/or debriefing). Groups of 5-15 are best, but these may be adapted.

Comfort Circle

Have students draw a circle of comfort. This could be in the form of a circle made of chalk on pavement, or a circle drawn on a sheet of paper. Ask them to stand on or label a place on their comfort circle. Statements could include how they feel about a certain activity (before/after), list potential activities and their comfort level, etc. **FRONTLOADING/DEBRIEF**

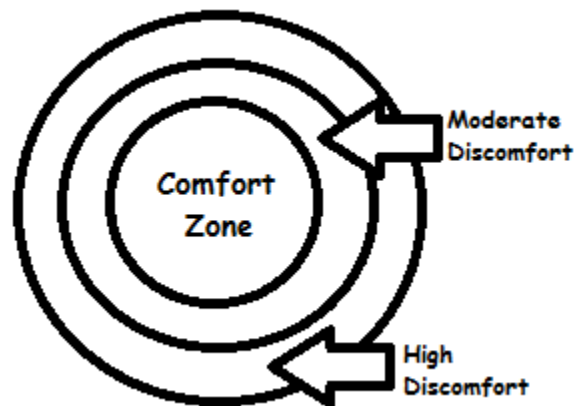


Figure 2: Circle of Comfort

Rose, Bud, Thorn

Have students share 3 memories: a rose represents the best part of the activity, the bud represents something they are looking forward to and a thorn is something they wish they could have changed. This can be done at any point throughout a day/activity. Students may share through writing, sharing with a partner or sharing with a group. **FRONTLOADING/DEBRIEF**

Graffiti⁽²⁾

Using a large piece of paper (as a group activity) or individual pieces of paper (for individual reflection) have the students reflect on what they have learned and draw pictures or write words that represent their experience (ie. What they accomplished, how the activity affected them). Then ask students to display their work where others can view their art. Invite students to describe what they see and if they can answer any reflection questions by looking at the graffiti (eg. I see a lot of red. I wonder if this person was responding to the anger they felt during that activity). This can also be done with what students already know about an activity that is to come and what they think the activity might be like. **FRONTLOADING/DEBRIEF**

Body Part Debrief⁽¹⁾

Have students represent a metaphor from their experience and relate it to a body part. Feel free to let students create their own metaphors. **Figure 3** outlines some of the examples that could be used. **DEBRIEF**

Eye	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Could represent something new that you saw in yourself or someone else• What vision do you have for yourself/the group?
Stomach	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Could represent something that took guts for you to do• What pushed you outside of your comfort zone?
Brain	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Could represent something new that you learned about yourself, a teammate or the group• What did you learn through your experience?
Heart	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Could represent a feeling that you experienced• What things come from the heart?
Hand	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• In what way did the group support you?• Could represent someone that you would like to give a hand to for a job well done
Ear	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Could represent something you listened to or a good idea you heard• Could represent something that was hard to hear - did you receive constructive feedback or not-so-constructive feedback?

Figure 3: Body Part Debrief Examples

Five Senses⁽²⁾

This activity is similar to Body Part Debrief. Students are asked to reflect on an activity using their senses: sight, smell, hearing, taste and feeling. **DEBRIEF**

Popcorn Evaluation⁽²⁾

Have pieces of paper spread throughout the room/space. They may have formal reflection questions prepared and written down on them or be left blank. Allow students to add questions to blank pieces of paper. When ready, students have a writing utensil and travel around the room answering the questions at their own speed. They may go to questions in any order and may choose not to answer a certain question. Students are encouraged to re-visit pages to read other's responses or re-evaluate what they have written. **FRONTLOADING/DEBRIEF**

Nature/Object Debrief⁽⁷⁾

Send students out in search of an object that mirrors the most important thing they learned during the day. Have each student share their story in partners, then give an opportunity to share within the group. The object removes the focus off the individual and directs it to the object making it easier to communicate. **DEBRIEF**

Isolation⁽⁶⁾⁽⁷⁾

Give each student an opportunity to reflect individually. This could include silent sitting, finding a special place for introspection, letter writing, etc. This allows students to give a very personal perspective without the pressure of others. **FRONTLOADING/DEBRIEF**

Thumbs Up/Thumbs Down

Have students close their eyes and put one hand out. Give statements about the activity/day and the students may think positively/agree (thumbs up), feel neutral (thumbs to the side) or feel negatively/disagree (thumbs down). This allows the leader to see how the students feel without drawing attention to their opinions. Feel free to let the students lead the question portion.

This can also be used as a rating scale by having students rate how they felt something went by giving a score on their hands (a fist = 0, one finger = 1, a whole hand = 5, etc.) **FRONTLOADING/DEBRIEF**

What? So What? Now What?⁽⁵⁾

This activity can be used in just about any situation. The educator starts by asking what happened, then asking what does this mean and how does this link to other learning or future learning? The following **Figure 4** gives examples of what questions can be asked. **DEBRIEF**

Components	Focus	Examples
What?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Used to begin processing Low-risk questions Focus on what happened during activity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What strategy did your group use? How did you feel about being blindfolded? What do you think was the main goal of the activity?
So What?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Links activity to lesson objective Allows students to share personal opinions & experiences Open-ended questions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What are some examples of peer pressure? What role does listening play in communication? How did your group determine leaders?
Now What?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Meat of the processing Links concepts of the activity to students' daily lives Provides steps on how students can implement the concepts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> How can we improve our communication with others? What role does personal responsibility play in reaching your goals? If you fall the first time you try something, what can you do to improve your chances of success the second time around?

Figure 4: Processing Questions: What? So What? Now What?

Other Resources

Training Wheels <http://www.training-wheels.com/>

A creative resource for building teams, created by Michelle Cummings, M.S.

Experiential Tools <http://www.experientialtools.com/>

Resources dedicated to the art of experiential group facilitation and teaching, created by Jennifer Stanchfield, M.Sc.

Teamwork & Teamplay <http://www.teamworkandteamplay.com/>

A website of resources created by Dr. Jim Cain, Ph.D., author of several books including Teamwork & Teamplay, The Book on Raccoon Circles, A Teachable Moment, Teambuilding Puzzles and Essential Staff Training Activities.

Chiji Institute <http://www.chiji.com/>

A resource of books and tools designed for educators to improve facilitation skills.

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