

Introduction:

In this document, you will find a compilation of information from various authors on processing techniques for experiential education sessions, presented in a structured format. Additionally, I have created checklists and lists of activity ideas to supplement the content. These original materials were developed by Kerri Hanes and are provided to enhance the usefulness of this document.

The content gathered from various authors has been appropriately cited, and due credit is given to their contributions. You will discover information on four key processing techniques: Facilitator Frontloading (FF), Question and Answer (Q&A), Participant Directed Processing (PDP), and Independent Reflection (IR). Each technique has a checklist in a table format for easy reference, followed by a list of activity ideas tailored to complement the respective technique.

Please navigate through the following pages to explore these processing techniques, accompanied by the corresponding checklists and activity suggestions for practical implementation.

TINDER = Facilitator frontloading (FF)

Facts about tinder: It is the fastest and easiest to light. As long as it's dry and flammable, you are pretty much guaranteed to get a spark. Of all fire stages, it is the most important to get right. It has to be gathered, prepared and kept dry before it can be used.

Facilitator frontloading: This technique involves explicitly stating the purpose of an activity even before it begins (Simpson et al., 2006, p. 55).

Metaphor: Similar to tinder catching fire when properly prepared, if you front load effectively, you're almost certain someone will benefit. Additionally, similar to preparing and keeping tinder dry before use, effective facilitator frontloading requires careful planning and execution to ensure intended outcomes are achieved and understood during the group.

Benefits

- It is the easiest for facilitators to control the intended outcome.
- Because the facilitator is explicitly stating and reinforcing intended outcomes throughout the group, it is the most obvious for participants to understand what they were supposed to learn.
- Because of this, the group doesn't have to be capable of understanding complex thoughts. Groups composed of people with differing abilities and comprehensions can easily gain something from the group.
- This method may be the easiest for participants to understand, but it takes the most preparation and planning from the facilitator. If the planning is not comprehensive, facilitators run the risk of misleading participants.

Pro-tips for using facilitator frontloading

- To use this technique the most effectively, you must have an understanding of the clientele.
- Be specific! The purpose is to be explicit and direct (unless using in conjunction with a participant directed processing technique).
- Remind participants of group intentions Feel free to re-state the intended outcomes throughout the group, using real time examples of what is happening.
- If using a metaphor, you must dress it (see the opening metaphor example in frontloading ideas found below).
- Because processing happens throughout the group, processing at the end can feel redundant. Consider using a closing story, a summary of the session, or a brief closing activity instead.

Should I use Facilitator Frontloading for processing this group?

*If answered yes to most of the questions below, consider using this technique

Yes	No	
		Do I know the needs of the group?
		Did I plan group tasks after (versus before) discovering the group's need?
		Is it important that the intended outcome be understood by everyone?
		Do my participants struggle with understanding new or complex concepts?
		Would creating a safe and neutral space for my group (as in discussing difficult or sensitive topics) be important for this group?
		If I am wanting to use a metaphor: Do my participants struggle to understand and transfer metaphors or difficult concepts to themselves without help?
		Did I have time to properly dress my intended metaphor?
		Does my intended metaphor connect to the group needs?

Frontloading ideas

- **Opening metaphor:** Using two unlike things to draw a comparison between those two things (i.e a fire is like processing), and then re-emphasizing the similarities throughout the session.
 - Dressing a metaphor (81-82)
 - You must understand the metaphor before you use it, otherwise it might become confusing to participants, and/or yourself. In the planning stage, It's helpful to write everything you know about the topic (fire), and then write how the unrelated thing is similar (processing).
 - Understand group needs and context before planning your task (a group of children with autism will have different needs than a group of adults with alcohol addictions).
 - Keep the metaphor relevant to the group's specific goals and comprehension.
 - Use the metaphor frequently throughout the session to remind participants of the goal.
 - Encourage participants to share their own interpretations of the metaphor.
 - Be flexible and adjust the metaphor if it's not resonating with the group.
 - Use cues (like smiles or verbal affirmations) to highlight positive moments.
 - Stop the activity at appropriate times to connect it back to the metaphor.
 - Use props or visual aids to enhance the metaphor's impact.
 - Process at the beginning, during, and sometimes (rarely) at the end.
 - Avoid heavy processing at the conclusion; consider a short closing story.
 - Ensure that the metaphor aligns with the learning objectives of the session.
 - Metaphors should be clear and direct.
- **Setting intentions:** Guided discussion where participants share their expectations, goals and concerns related to the upcoming task.
- **Interactive storytelling:** Share a relevant and engaging story that illustrates the challenges, successes, and lessons tied to the upcoming task. The intention is to captivate participants' attention and offer potential valuable insights to consider during the task.
- **Visualization exercises:** Guide participants through a visualization exercise that allows them to mentally experience the upcoming task. Encourage them to imagine themselves successfully completing the task, visualizing the process and outcomes.
- **Interactive icebreaker**
- **Interactive Simulation:** Organize a brief simulation or role-playing activity that simulates elements of the upcoming task. This hands-on experience provides participants with a taste of what's to come and allows them to explore challenges and strategies in a controlled environment.

KINDLING = Question and Answer (Q&A)

Facts about Kindling: Kindling is a bit bigger than tinder but still not as large as a pencil. It lights easily and stays lit longer than tinder, helping larger fuel catch fire. Like tinder, it must be prepared beforehand, kept dry, and made of flammable material.

Question and answer: This involves having a discussion immediately after a group completes an experiential activity (Simpson et al., 2006).

Metaphor: Just as kindling is dependable to keep the fire going for longer than tinder, Q&A is also reliable. Like adding new kindling to control the fire's growth, facilitators use well-crafted questions to sustain engagement. When sticks keep the fire burning longer without more kindling, facilitators let participants guide discussions. But, like fires going out without attention, facilitators must occasionally add questions or input to the conversation to maintain control.

Benefits

- Safe and dependable for most situations.
- Highly flexible, allowing participants freedom to explore and practice self reflection, but allows facilitators to maintain control.
- Builds on frontloading by teaching reflection skills.
- Encourages participants to take the lead, fostering ownership and learning.
- Promotes critical thinking and sets the foundation for later techniques.
- Questions can be pre-planned.
- Appeals to diverse populations through question selection

Pro-tips

- **Be careful using a “how did you feel” question as your opening question.** If the group isn't ready to discuss feelings, this can lead to a stall in processing.
- Avoid yes/no questions as much as possible (101).
- Welcome silence and listen carefully to answers instead of thinking about your next question.
- Make 2 sets of questions prior to your group.
- Co-facilitate whenever possible. One facilitator can pay attention to the how-to's of the task, and the other can look for important moments/breakthroughs.
- You can pause the group anytime for on-the-spot processing, where you discuss what led to the breakthrough and what changes it brings (not just at the end).
- Sequence your questions (Bloom's taxonomy) and Queensland and Van Ginkel “How to Process Experience”
 - **Step 1:** write down the most important questions (question order doesn't matter right now).
 - **Step 2:** decide important questions' level of difficulty (Bloom's taxonomy model, or similar can help).
 - **Step 3:** sequence questions from easiest to most difficult (i.e. from concrete to abstract, etc).
- Do not process for the sake of processing. If you didn't catch anything worth discussion, plan better next time and move on. Redundant and pointless questions will most likely yield redundant and pointless answers (100).
- Using jargon can be positive if participants understand it. But if they don't, it can create a divide. Not everyone knows our terms, so don't confuse them with unfamiliar words (i.e. “facilitator,” or “comfort zone, etc.” (100).
- Bias: Check your questions. Make sure questions don't show your opinions or push participants to answer in a certain way. For example, instead of asking, “Why is wilderness better than suburbia after a week in the backcountry?” ask, “What differences do you see between wilderness and suburbia after a week of backpacking?” (102).
- You are the gatekeeper of your group. As the gatekeeper, you choose who speaks. You are responsible for redirecting dominant talkers and keeping the conversation focused. Encourage quiet participants to share insights and set and enforce Q&A ground rules. (103)
- Creating Q&A ground rules/guidelines for yourself to carry with you through your career can help you recover the group if and when challenges arise. Share these rules with participants and ask them to follow them too. For instance, decide how you will handle people who talk a lot. Will you require everyone to share, or can it be flexible? Encourage one person to speak at a time, remain impartial, and manage time wisely.

Should I use Question and Answer for processing this group checklist:

*If answered yes to most of the questions below, consider using this technique

Yes	No	
		Are the intended outcomes of the initiative clear to me as the facilitator?
		Do I need to control the outcome, and also maintain flexibility to accommodate differing levels of comprehension?
		Is the group size manageable for a Q&A session?
		Will I be co-facilitating this group?
		Do I have suitable questions ready for the group?
		Are these questions sequenced appropriately?
		Do I have clear guidelines/ground rules established that I can invite the group to adhere to?
		Have I created a contingency plan if the Q&A session stalls or doesn't yield productive insights?

Q&A ideas

Possible questions for dealing with frustration:

Fact Finding Questions

1. Is everyone feeling frustrated? By a raise of hands, who is frustrated?
2. By a raise of hands, who noticed that some of you were frustrated?
3. What caused the frustration? Why are you frustrated?
4. When did the frustration start?

Analysis and Feelings Questions

5. Did the cause of the frustration begin with this activity, or was it there before? Explain.
6. How did people exhibit their frustration?
7. Was frustration an appropriate response to the events? Why or why not?
8. What effect, either positive or negative, is frustration having on the group?

Synthesis and Transference Questions

9. Is frustration a problem that should be addressed with this group? Why or why not?
10. What specifically can we do to address frustration in the next activity?
11. In general (not specifically the last activity), what frustrates you?
12. Are the things that frustrate you important or trivial? If trivial, why do you let these things bother you?
13. How do you deal with frustration in your daily lives?
14. How can the solutions that we've divided to use in the next activity also be used with your daily frustrations?

BIGGER STICKS = Participant-Directed Processing (PDP)

Facts about bigger sticks: These sticks are larger and thicker than kindling, and are roughly the size of your index finger. They are used to feed the fire once it has a strong flame. Finger-sized sticks burn longer and help in transitioning to larger fuel logs.

Participant-Directed Processing: Collection of techniques whereby a facilitator requires a formal processing session, even chooses the processing technique, but asks participants to assume primary responsibility for the direction of the reflection (105).

Metaphor: PDP is like using bigger sticks in a fire. It comes after the group can self-reflect, not before, just as bigger sticks rely on lighting tinder and kindling before it can ignite successfully. PDP helps transition participants to self-direction. It's a step toward self-sufficiency but still needs some oversight.

Benefits:

- Facilitators transition from directors to moderators or guides.
- Facilitators provide freedom for participants to learn how to process experiences on their own, while also giving structure and direction when needed.
- Participants are free to move processing into unexpected, but useful directions.
- In general, there is greater buy-in from participants which increases the chance that sessions can be more meaningful for them.
- Participants begin to self process.

Pro-tips

- This method teaches self-processing. The facilitator is a mentor, not a controller. The group may explore new ideas or get stuck. It's about giving participants tools to reach high points themselves, even if they start slow. Your role is to prevent problems, not lead the way.
- This is where transference not only looks like transferring lessons to self, but transferring excitement and enthusiasm for continued learning.
- Q&A sparks reflection, PDP teaches it. (109)
- Group members need to be mature and skilled enough for serious and independent processing.
- If the group asks, "what do the facilitators want us to do?" they are not ready for this technique (109).

Should I use Participant Directed Processing for processing this group checklist:

*If answered yes to most of the questions below, consider using this technique

Yes	No	
		Have I worked with these participants before?
		Do participants have prior experience with experiential education activities?
		Are group members emotionally mature enough to take processing seriously?
		Do the members of this group have the skills necessary to learn to process?
		Are the pre-determined and/or intended outcomes of the group flexible?
		Does the group need a formal processing session?
		But if I (the facilitator) wasn't present, could the group process together?
		Am I willing to sacrifice guaranteed results?

Participant-Directed Processing ideas

- Processing cards (chiji)
 - Processing cards are tools used by experiential educators to guide and facilitate reflection and discussion after an activity. Each card contains a prompt or question that encourages participants to think critically about their experiences and extract meaningful insights.
- Mandatory journaling
 - Provide participants with individual journals and prompts related to the task they just completed. Encourage them to write about their thoughts, emotions, challenges, and insights gained from the experience.
- Small group discussions
 - Divide participants into small groups and ask them to lead discussions about their individual experiences during the task. Each group can share key takeaways, lessons learned, and strategies employed.
- Peer interviews
 - Pair participants up and have them interview each other about their experiences during the task. This structured conversation allows participants to share and learn from each other's perspectives.
- Reflective Art or Creative Expression:
 - Invite participants to express their experiences through art, music, writing, or any other creative medium. This activity allows for nonverbal processing and can reveal deeper emotions and connections to the task.
- Pair Sharing:
 - Pair participants up and have them share their reflections with each other. Encourage active listening and ask follow-up questions to deepen the conversation. This activity fosters peer learning, empathy, and diverse perspectives.
- Solo Reflection:
 - Allow participants time to reflect individually on the task. Provide prompts or guiding questions related to their experiences, challenges faced, insights gained, and emotions felt. This introspective activity promotes deeper self-awareness.

WRIST-SIZED STICKS = Independent Reflection

Facts about wrist-sized sticks: These are thicker and larger sticks, about the size of your wrist. Once the fire is established, wrist-sized logs are added to sustain the flame and generate a steady heat output. They eventually burn down to create a bed of hot coals, which are essential for cooking or providing long-lasting warmth.

Independent Reflection: Participants have complete control over the outcomes they take away from a group, requiring the least amount of facilitator control. Participants no longer need a facilitator to make connections.

Metaphor: Wrist-sized logs in a fire are like independent reflection in a group. Just like these logs sustain a flame and transform into a bed of hot coals, independent reflection grants participants complete control over their outcomes. Because participants need minimal facilitator guidance, it symbolizes self-sufficiency in making connections. These connections are long lasting and set the groundwork for future fires (or learning).

Benefits

- Promotes self-reflection, leading to greater self-awareness, personal growth and insight into their experience.
- Encourages critical thinking and fosters problem-solving skills.
- Promotes autonomy and self-directed learning which can boost confidence and motivation.
- Reduced facilitator dependence so facilitators can focus their efforts on guiding and supporting participants
- Enhances learning retention because it promotes deeper cognitive processing

Pro-tips

- If your participants are capable, or are independent during the action component of an experience, they are usually capable of being independent during the reflection component as well (116).
- To make this technique work, participants must earn it through a greater commitment (i.e. completing something that was really hard for them).
 - That commitment needs to be within the norm for the group. If the experience has been too far out of the norm, the participants might need guidance to process and make connections (116).
- Because this technique is reflection without a facilitator, the outcome that participants leave with will never be discovered. This needs to be okay with the facilitator (or in accordance with facility guidelines).
- People go home and independently reflect on their experiences no matter what. In this way, IR is inevitable and will happen regardless of your facilitation style in group (117).
- If the facilitator asks participants what they gained from the session, it is no longer independent reflection.

Should I use Independent Reflection for processing this group checklist:

*If answered yes to most of the questions below, consider using this technique

Yes	No	
		Will the immediate surroundings of the session be out of the ordinary, quiet, and distinctive in some way (to spark reflection)?
		During the action component of the group, will the group do something challenging (either physically or mentally) that would cause them to mark the experience as significant?
		Will that experience be slightly outside of what is considered the group norm?
		Will the group have an opportunity to take an active part in making the experience happen?
		Does this group know how to process as individuals?
		Does the group have the capability to reflect on the present moment?
		Is there a strong sense of safety and trust within the group?
		Am I comfortable not knowing the results of the individual self-processing?

Ideas for Independent Reflection

- **Letter to self:** Ask participants to write a letter to themselves, reflecting on their experience during the task. They can discuss their emotions, challenges, successes, and insights. These letters can be collected and returned to participants at a later date to remind them of their growth.
- **Mindful Solo Walk:** Invite participants to take a solitary walk in a quiet outdoor area. During the walk, they can reflect on the task and their experiences. Encourage them to be mindful of their surroundings and thoughts.
- **Artifact Creation:** Provide participants with art supplies and ask them to create an artifact that symbolizes their experience during the task. This could be a drawing, sculpture, or any other creative representation.
- **Audio Reflection:** Have participants record an audio reflection using their smartphones or other recording devices. They can speak about their thoughts, emotions, and takeaways from the task. This format allows for a more conversational and authentic reflection.
- **Silent Writing Retreat:** Allocate a period of time for participants to engage in silent reflection and writing. Provide prompts related to the task or encourage participants to write freely about their experiences, insights, and lessons learned.
- **Mind Mapping:** Ask participants to create a mind map that visually represents their experience during the task. They can include key takeaways, emotions, connections, and areas for growth. Mind mapping encourages creative reflection.
- **Video Reflection:** Invite participants to record a short video or audio reflection. This multimedia approach allows for dynamic self-expression and can capture nuances of tone and emotion.

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