Debriefing Learning Activities with EDIT

By Judith Roberts

Debriefing is a term used to describe an experiential learning process that facilitates reflection, understanding, sharing and linking learning to real life. Debriefing is usually done after active learning, especially—small group activities, case studies, role-plays or hands-on exercises—so participants can discuss what they’ve experienced and extract meaning from the activity. Some experts believe it also facilitates transfer of learning.

Debriefing is structured in a way that guides the learner to recall and discuss what he/she experienced. The guided discussion may include learner participation in:

- Describing and sharing the experience
- Expressing feelings, emotions, opinions
- Reflecting on the learning activity
- Conceptualizing what happened - answer questions or create new ones
- Developing empathy and flexibility
- Visualizing how to apply learning
- Evaluating the process

Debriefing involves open-ended, reflective questions the instructor uses and follows a sequential process I refer to as “EDIT,” which stands for:

1. Experience – Name and discuss the experience (learning activity)
2. Description – Describe what happened
3. Inference – What can you infer from this
4. Transfer – How will you utilize what you’ve learned back on the job, when you are researching, etc.?

Examples of EDIT questions are:

- What happened?
- Why did it happen?
- Who were the people involved?
- What did you do?
- What was the outcome?
- How did you feel as you were doing this activity?
- If this were to happen again (on the “job”) or (when you’re completing your assignment), what would you do differently? How would you change it?
- How can you use this experience in your (academic) life or in your work?
- What further research/practice do you need/want?
Participants often look at learning activities as a random part of training—just something to fill time and space. However; if we make debriefing an integral part of our instructional design and implement it in our sessions, we’ll get participants to reflect on what they are learning, make sense of it, and equip them to transfer new knowledge, skill or behavior from the classroom to the real world.

Recommended Readings
