
INTRODUCTION

The authors state that this paper is an examination of as yet “unresolved theoretical issues” surrounding the debriefing process. However, its major objective is to present a debriefing model and then lead readers into critically thinking why and how to use debriefings in simulations and educational games. Linda Liderman and Fumitosihi Kato trace the history of debriefing from its military roots to its functions in simulations and experience-based learning scenarios. They posit that debriefing not only makes “sense of what has happened, (p. 236)” but also increases understanding, “favors diversity, (241)” facilitates communication and provides the facilitator and/or creator one last opportunity to impose their world view. They also briefly cover ethical and cultural nuances that must be considered by the facilitator.

BODY

They begin by explaining that one form of teaching, called experience-based learning, is grounded in learning by doing. The teacher becomes a facilitator who guides students through the experience and also guides the user through the debriefing at the end of the learning experience. In this way, the students critically reflect on what they have learned while doing the simulation and put this new knowledge into perspective. This debriefing process or “learning through reflection of a simulation experience” (p. 236) heightens the learning experience for both students and facilitator. This type of learning is not limited to the classroom; it is
used in many diverse fields such as business, industry, gaming and in psychology to facilitate healing, learning, understanding, psycho-motor skills, and team building.

The military is given credit as the first to use simulated learning in war game scenarios that include debriefings to “describe what had occurred, to account for the actions that had taken place, and to develop new strategies as a result of the experience (p. 236).” This style of debriefing involves interpretation, evaluation and fine-tuning of new cognitive maps created during the simulation.

Two underlying assumptions of the debriefing process is that the user has been affected by their simulation experiences and that the user will learn more from those experiences by post-simulation reflection and discussion.

According to the authors, the debriefing session is classified into three phases:

  Systematic reflection and analysis
  Intensification and personalization
  Generalization and application (Lederman, 1992). p. 237

While learning and experiences are highly subjective, the debriefing process helps the user focus on the lessons learned during the simulation, it helps to develop facilitator skills, and it helps the creators to develop more effectively designed simulations. All participants, whether developer, facilitator, or user, should ask themselves, “What did I learn from this experience (p. 239)?” The debriefing process helps users to “analyze their experiences, to evaluate them, to interpret them, to incorporate them into own understanding of the issues modeled by the activity (p. 237-238).”
There are ethical issues that facilitators must consider such as the self-disclosing nature of debriefings. The facilitators are required to protect participants from potentially damaging emotional and intellectual experiences. It is the facilitator who must set ethical parameters for forms of behavior and analysis within the debriefing process.

Participants of experiential simulations bring with them their own personal stereotypes, perspectives and biases. Part of the facilitator’s responsibilities is to create an emotionally and physically safe environment during the simulation and the debriefing process. You want growth to take place but you do not want to humiliate the participant, physically damage them, psychologically damage them, nor expose information that could lead to future discrimination/adverse actions against the participants.

The authors point out that the facilitators are also learners in the simulation in that they guide the participants and observe what is happening. … “Experience-based learning is individual and interpretative -- that provides an isomorphy [similarity of structure] between the processing of the experiences and the differences that are culture bound (p 240).”

SUMMARY

This article provides an argument in support of the debriefing process. The purpose of a debriefing is to guide the simulation participants through the reflective process using critical thinking skills in order that they grow intellectually from their simulation experience. The authors present a cyclic model of the relationships within the debriefing process which consisted of three relationships:
1) systematic reflection and analysis, 2) intensification and personalization and 3) generalization and application. The authors also briefly discuss the ethical and cultural dimensions involved in the debriefing process. The bottom line on debriefing is that it helps the participants piece together their experience and learn from it and allows the facilitator one last shot at influencing the participant to think or act in accordance with the simulation’s objectives.

Class Talking Points  (You are required to have these typed at the end of your review.)

1. How is a debriefing designed?
   (p. 240) “To guide them through the process of reflection and self-reflection.”

2. What is the facilitator’s responsibility when dealing with cultural dimensions of the debriefing process?
   (p. 240) “Because cultural breaches of cultural norms or misbehaviors are potentially embarrassing – it is the facilitator’s responsibility to consider the potential consequences for participants dealing with these issues and create a climate in which it is safe and reasonable to explore what emerges.”

3. What is the purpose of the debriefing?
   (p. 236-237) “The purpose of the debriefing is for those who have experienced something (the learners) to be guided into insights about the meanings of those experiences and the lessons they are drawing from them. Their experiences are examined, discussed, and turned into learning.”

4. Why do they say diversity – because we each hold different worldviews and see things – Just look at the different shades of opinion on the war in Iraq.

5. What ways do users reflect and discuss their experiences when they are playing simulations such as Amazon Trail, Sims, and Halo when there are no “facilitators” guiding a discussion to enhance learning?

6. How can you use the debriefing process to critically reflect on and increase your understanding of reading material?

7. Self-directed questioning helps us to evaluate the quality of the simulation we are building and consider what skills we want our user to acquire.