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## Designing the Group Experience

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In past segments of the Friday Lessons series, I have focused on the importance of reflection. I have shared a number of metaphoric and active review activities for educators to use with groups. Facilitating individual/self reflection is also important and can be done in both short- and long-term programs.

Time spent reflecting alone, away from the group, balances and supports the group process. It gives learners opportunity to reflect on issues that might not have come up during a group discussion or that they might not feel comfortable verbally expressing in a group setting. Opportunities for individual reflection activities away from group time ensure that reflection is happening regardless of what happens during program time. Journaling and other self-reflective methods can become lifelong skills that help develop insight, one of the hardest skills to learn, but one of the most valuable skills in life.

Journaling is an effective reflection activity that can be used with almost every kind of program in some way. It gives learners a tangible memoir of their experience and growth. Whether participants are elementary school students or adults, involved in multi-day programs or one-day experiences, journaling can be an incredibly valuable, reflective tool. It can involve a variety of mediums including writing, worksheets, drawings, scrapbooking, photography, and audio or video documentary.

Journaling can provide time for reflection that might not be available during the actual program time. Facilitators of school-based and therapeutic programs may have difficulty trying to fit experiential problem-solving activities into a traditional class or group time period. Processing is often sacrificed because of this time crunch. Journaling time or assignments provide opportunities for participants to reflect.

Facilitators who use journaling as a part of long-term programming report that participants demonstrate increased insightful thinking and improved writing skills from their practice of journaling. When journals are shared, they can give participants and facilitators an understanding of group development, the benefits of activities, and feedback about the progression of the group and program.

## Some Creative Ways to Implement Journaling:

- Create opportunities for participants to make their own journals.
- Include artwork as a part of journaling. Some are more comfortable using artistic representations of their experience.
- Give beginners specific questions to answer to aid the process.
- Have learners create scrapbooks.
- Coordinate with the art department of your school or program to collaborate on projects using alternative forms of media for journaling—such as photography and video and audio documentation.

An interesting and easy style of journaling that works well for day programs involves using a sheet of prepared questions with fun spaces provided for the participant to write/draw their answers. This is far less intimidating than a blank page. I found a great example for this type of journaling in the first edition of *The Me I See* published by Wood 'N' Barnes a number of years ago.

This summer, I had the privilege of working with the team at WNB on the second edition of *The Me I See: Learning Through Writing and Reflection*. This new edition has a broader focus as a resource for educators, counselors, and group facilitators. You might find these simple prompts useful in your programs. I have included a few of my favorite pages from *The Me I See* here (Cam, this is where we insert the pdf of *The Me I See* pages).

Journaling is a powerful reflection tool that helps individuals solidify and understand their thoughts and work through their personal feelings and reactions to the world around them. It stimulates creativity and gives the participants a tangible memoir of their experience and growth. Engaging learners in journaling activities encourages moments of self-reflection and creates a basic foundation for people to recognize and come to value their own personal power, wisdom, and insight.

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This lesson is compliments of **Jennifer Stanchfield**, author of *"Tips & Tools: The Art of Experiential Group Facilitation"*.

To find more information and to contact the author, please visit: [www.experientialtools.com](http://www.experientialtools.com)