Rebirth Educational Screening and Debriefing - Short Films

Donna A. Gaffney, DNSc, PMHCNS-BC, FAAN

There are many ways to debrief and hold a discussion after screening the short films. This document describes one way, but it is by no means the only way. Some educators suggest that this method is particularly useful for academic settings—especially in the social sciences. Many of your discussion points will depend on the goals and objectives related to the course or class you will be teaching. Please explore other materials on the website, in particular the transcripts and teaching points that relate to each film. Prior to using the films in the classroom or community setting, review the following steps to assure that you are fully prepared for the screening.

Selecting and Preparing to Use the Short Film:

Determine the purpose of using the short film by identifying your goals. Be very clear, as you distinguish teaching points and how the film will relate to the objectives of the overall lesson plan or lecture. Determine the characteristics of the subject and how those qualities will relate to the film participants. The materials on the website will include brief summaries and key content contained in each short film.

Watch the short film 2 or 3 times before you screen it for your class or an audience. The first screening is best viewed from a holistic perspective. Allow yourself to experience the film in much the same way as your students or audience would, openly and without any pre-conceived ideas. The second time you watch the film take brief notes at critical or instructive points. For the third time, consider what points you will want to address with your class, and what questions you will ask them after they see the film, in addition to any learning activities you might develop afterwards.

Preparing the class for the film

Briefly describe what the audience or class is about to see, describe the circumstances, the subject and the year of the film. Make a brief statement about how this subject can affect all of us, personally and/or professionally. Tell the viewers that the film may have upsetting content; but if they are too uncomfortable, they can put their heads down, or if necessary leave the room.
Darken the room.

Tell the group to “take an inventory” of their bodies and minds...what are they feeling, what are they thinking, be aware of their body posture, muscle tension, stomach, temperature in the room, etc. Have them close their eyes as they prepare.

Have them open their eyes and begin the film.

**Viewing the Film**  
Observe the audience, be mindful of those who may be having a difficult time. Position yourself in a location where you can see faces and body language. Consider having another person at the back of the room or in the hallway to assist anyone who wants to leave the room.

**Debriefing and Discussion**  
After showing the film allow for a few minutes of silence, slowly raise the lights in the room and tell the audience to take a few slow deep breaths and walk them through the process. The audience will start to move around in their seats, consider having them stand and move in place for a moment or two.

Prepare for the debriefing by writing on each page of a flip chart (blackboard) four words: visceral (gut), affective (emotional), cognitive (thoughts), and behavioral (actions). If using a flip chart allow one page for each category. If you have neither flip chart nor black board, have “scribes” (four people) take notes for each of the categories.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>VISCERAL</th>
<th>AFFECTIVE</th>
<th>COGNITIVE</th>
<th>BEHAVIORAL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Begin by asking the participants to talk about each of the areas noted above, in the order presented below. Using a black board or a flip chart write the list of their reactions under each of the headings. Remind them if they give a response “out of category,” tell them to “hold that thought” until later and then call on them when you review the appropriate category. You will need to do this frequently!

Focus on four critical types of responses:

*Visceral (Physical) Reactions:* ask participants about their "gut" responses, the way their bodies feel, i.e. Nausea, sweaty palms, tension, tightened throat, etc. (these are the reactions associated with peri-traumatic responses). People will want to give thoughts, emotions and actions, don’t let them. Stay on task, remind them “This is about your body…. what is happening with your insides, your stomach, your muscles…. keep reinforcing this aspect.

*Affective (Emotional) Responses:* feelings only here: fear, anger, disgust, sadness, helpless, hopeless, anger, rage, etc. Again, keep them on task, addressing only their emotional reactions.

*Cognitive (Thought) Responses:* what they were thinking, i.e. "I felt so badly for him" or how it reminded them of an experience in their own lives.

*Behavioral Responses:* What did they want to do (in the room at the moment they were watching the film)? i.e. get up and leave the room, cry, etc. Note: There may be one or two people who want to shut off the tape. Ask them why they didn’t! Point out that they had certain expectations about their behavior in the room, they shouldn’t shut it off; compare it to people who are living the experience in their daily lives.

*You can also ask about Spiritual Responses:* Ask if the audience recognizes how the film subjects are exploring their own spiritual growth. Have them give examples.

**Conclude** by comparing the subjects’ experiences to the experiences of the audience. Point out that the audience is safe—in a classroom, watching a film…not in any danger…and still experienced responses similar to those of the subjects.

Ask if they have questions or comments.

Discussion of film content can inform our educational and professional experiences.

Give a break to the group (total exercise may take 30 minutes). If you plan to offer food during this break, tell them to have something that comforts them! Reinforce self-care!
Facilitation Suggestions and Strategies:
You must prod, prod, prod . . . to get people to talk. At first they may be hesitant. After one person raises his/her hand, ask “anyone else?” “Who else?” “What else?”

Give positive reinforcement for their candor, honesty, etc. etc.

Be alert for those who are having difficulty with their own personal experiences or thinking of those they have worked with in the past.

You can also use this exercise to discuss vicarious trauma.