# No Such Thing as Just a Game:
# A Briefing on 3D-Briefing

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## The Back Story

During the sweltering summer of 2001, I went to Netanya, Israel to teach Arts and Society for Lesley University's Masters of Education program. My Cambridge Massachusetts-based institution gave me an envelope containing tips on how to navigate the culturally-diverse experience. The package included a chart detailing how Israeli's perceive Americans, and how Americans perceive Israelis. Being a white Canadian female, I found the chart less than helpful and troublingly stereotypical. The only heartening tip in the package was to have lots of ice-breakers, energizers and simple theatre games on hand. As a playwright, I could do that. These games were to be used as fillers and playful exercises to break any tension, fear or frustration the students may have due to "external factors".

Day two of the five day course was interrupted by one of those external factors: a suicide bomber targeted a Tel Aviv street. All learning stopped, except mine, as cell phones quickly appeared and buzzed into action. Was momma alright? Was grandpa safe? Did sister go to the mall, today? Televisions rolled into classrooms and grainy, chaotic images flickered details across the screen. As abruptly as the commotion came, it dispersed into cathartic laughing, singing and dancing. Family members were safe, injuries were minor, the confusion contained.

This moment was what the envelope anticipated. This moment was my opportunity to guide my students to safety. This moment was for my planned ice-breaker. This moment was a disaster in teaching, but a triumph in learning. This moment altered my pedagogy and practice forever. This moment in 2001 initiated the focus of this paper in 2020. This moment of failure led to the educational innovation I call 3D-Briefing.

## Introduction

I always felt teaching was a performative art: one can prepare, but the outcome is never planned. Three simple questions and over 150 classes later solidified that feeling into a pedagogical belief and practice. Three simple questions repeatedly gave rise to an emergent learning opportunity co-created by everyone in the classroom. Three simple questions honoured learners' diverse experiences, knowledge and skills. Rooted in curiosity, courage and creativity, 3D-Briefing became an all-embracing framework for thinking, communicating and learning. Creating an equitable, inclusive and differentiated learning environment, 3D Briefing is an over-arching pedagogical process that delivers a transparent, reliable system overturning educational paradigms about content, teacher-student identity, responsibility, and assessment.

Momentarily returning to 2001, I want to explain that the contents of the instructional envelope set me up for failure as a teacher, but success as a learner. First, the information was premised on previous evidence collected by other instructors who observed that once a crisis was averted, Israeli students would release anxiety through creative play. This truth, however, was erroneously connected to common Western educational paradigms about play. Namely, that play was for children, not adults, and it certainly was not linked to any serious learning as found at the post-secondary or graduate level.

Prevailing assumptions about play and arts-oriented activities in education place them beneath (STEM) learning. Play is viewed as a "time out", a time filler, a place holder before or after formal learning. As a time out it has little educational or cognitive function. Its purpose is much like a stretch before and after an athletic endeavour. While athletes know the importance of stretching, the audience only sees the race. Ergo, play has little to no serious learning potential and ice breakers, energizers and theatre games exist in an educational vacuum having and leaving no cognitive, social or psychological impact on the individual or the group.

While artists have seen a different picture, neurological studies have since challenged this dismissal of play and arts-oriented activities. But, I wasn't dealing with primary students. My audience were adults and they refused to do an innocuous ice breaker. Stunned and not knowing what to do, I sat on the floor before them and asked my innocent three questions: what just happened? So what is the significance of this? Now what might we learn about this refusal that will influence future interactions? This was the beginning of my journey as a learner and the end of my role as a conventional teacher. Simultaneously, it was the first important step in developing 3D-Briefing as a comprehensive framework for transferable skills such as critical and creative thinking, problem solving, and equitable collaboration manifested through quality, empathetic communication.

## From 'no, but, to 'yes, and . . . '.

Effective communication is about relationship building. Likewise, experience, according to John Dewey, is always a transaction between an individual and the environment (1938). The experience of communication is interpersonal and, especially in its written form, requires critical reflection on this social transaction in order to make it relevant and significant. Unfortunately, relevance, like learning, is not always automatic. The structuring of thoughts can be jumbled, elusive, one-dimensional, and unorganized making verbal and written communication and its relational imperative challenging, and sometimes debilitating for learners.

The 3D-Briefing model is my attempt to rectify communication challenges and a pedagogy of poverty (Haberman, 1991) by using a simple framework that levels the learning playing field.

For over 25 years, I have seen learners struggle with critical thinking and thoughtful writing at various educational levels. Their struggles in applying a reliable critical thinking process to formulate ideas transfers to a structural deficiency in the communication of those ideas. According to Pinker (2014), the way a writer organizes their thoughts is not the same way a reader needs to experience those thoughts. Since none of my learners had read Pinker, they did not realize the distinction between the raw thought and the organized sharing of that thought. As a result, I witnessed student writing that breached the transaction between writer and reader by lacking focus and coherence. Further jeopardizing communication's social contract, these papers displayed a scarcity of genuine purpose based on the writer's interests and passions (Wagner, 2015).

In addition to producing a lacklustre artifact deficient in focus, coherence, purpose and passion, many novice writers leap straight to a point. This *in media res* position leaves readers whirling and questioning the transaction between writer and reader. Insecure, apprehensive and unversed in communicating their thoughts, novice writers ignore clearly identifying what is at issue and dive into familiar, analytical tropes. Not having clear tools to take their thinking beyond the mundane, novice writers also lack confidence in extending their analysis to real-world applications and relevance based on social positioning.

This dreary trend in writing pointed to an educational deficit in the teaching, not the learning, of communication and critical thinking as transferable skills. By the time learners reached my post-secondary classroom, I assumed they were equipped with basic thinking and communicating tools. It didn't take long to realize my assumptions were wrong. Even learners who showed promise applied a randomized talent in their written work that might, or might not, articulate, relevant 360 degree thinking.

Specifically, my post-secondary learners needed help in identifying what was to be analysed, interpreting the significance of their analysis and then exploring how that analysis applied to their daily lives and the lives of others. Besides a thinking framework, they needed a communicating framework that made quality communication accessible to everyone. This framework also needed to be reliable for all communication acts in order for it to be useful and not just another schema they had to memorize. A tall order for sure. Then I recalled the success experienced in Netanya when three simple debriefing questions made the thinking, interpreting, and communicating process transparent, consistent and empathetic.

## From De-Briefing to 3D-Briefing

De-briefing traditionally follows an activity and is reflective in nature. The common method of debriefing uses like, dislike, change as its mantra and is derived from military and corporate training. According to Brians (2016), this method is often controlled and interpreted by an authoritative figure and not the actual participant in the task. Imagine this type of language coming from a teacher. The disparaging tone signals a pessimistic, "no, but. . ." attitude. According to Dweck and others, classrooms are filled with students who have internalized a deficit mindset and the language of the standard debriefing model would only accentuate students' sense of inadequacy and defeat.

My Netanya graduate learners, and my college learners form various disciplines, helped me transform the negative language of common debriefing into a 3-dimensional, reliable and affirming thinking and writing process. 3D-Briefing was not about what a person liked or disliked. "What, so what, now what" was a positive-looking, constructivist, comprehensive way to discover and uncover the curriculum's learning outcomes, real-world significance and relevance, as well as learners' individualized applications of those outcomes based on their diverse world views.

Learners practiced 3D-Briefing on everything we did: community building activities, opening exercises, assigned readings, videos, group work, class interactions and even exams. I could see them gaining confidence in their critical competencies, their individualized ideas, personal voice, and ultimately their writing abilities. In general, by following a scaffold method on exactly how to think and communicate, learners were free to focus on the what and why of their thoughts.

3D-Briefings's progressive, lyrical cluster of "What, So what, Now what" (Figure 1) encourages a constructive, emergent pedagogical approach applicable to a wide variety of learning scenarios. Furthermore, these three simple questions provide a 360 degree perspective on texts, images, actions, and behaviours; they function as a structuring mechanism for critical and creative thinking, solution finding, action planning, and quality written and oral communication. Learners no longer have to struggle with numerous formulas and formats. It all distilled into one model.
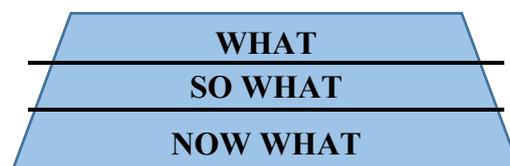


**Figure 1**: 3D-Briefing.

## What is 3D-Briefing

Widely used in corporate and military training, "What, So what, Now what," is prominent in clinical reflective enquiry (Rolfe, 2001), specifically paramedic training; it presents an emergent problem solving attitude based on curiosity, optimism and empathy. Its success in clinical reflection is dependent upon participant input, where the patient conveys information to the professional who then analyzes and acts on that information. In the classroom this method translates into a user-driven process encouraging an open, "yes, and ..." philosophy rather than a closed, "no, but . . ." proposition by an authority figure.

A multi-perspective, exploratory framework applicable to all critical thinking, creative and communication acts, 3D-Briefing synthesizes meticulous enquiry questions with a user-focused, equitable stance toward meaning production. It scaffolds identification, interpretation, evaluation, reflection and action in a user-empowered, three step process operating on diverse cognitive, structural and contextual levels (Figure 2). The three, specific memorable phrases can be used with any content, in any context, for any type of communication or interaction, and doubles as an organizing system moving learners toward deeper thinking.

| Content | Context | Communication Act |
|---|---|---|
| Humanities, Sciences, Social Sciences, Technology, Business Personal, Professional, etc. | Formal, Informal, Individual work, Collective work, Private, Public, etc. | Essay, Report, Presentation, Performance, Discussion, Feedback, Proposal, Narrative, Testimony, Reflection, etc. |

**Figure 2:** Diverse cognitive, structural and contextual levels.

Each 3D-Briefing questioning level invites divergent and convergent thinking, the fundamental actions in creativity, and aligns with Bloom's Learning Taxonomy (Figure 3). Learners move from lower order thinking, identifying and describing, to higher order thinking, interpreting, analyzing, reflecting, and creating new ideas for future actions. In this way, 3D-Briefing makes learning transparent by emphasizing the structural accessibility of critical thinking regardless of the learner's context and ability.

To elaborate, the first level asks learners to identify facts: What is this text, image or behaviour? What were we asked to do? What happened? At this starting point, learners use divergent thinking to list all possible facts relating to the debriefed object or event. Other factual, closed questions, such as who, when, where, can occur here. This identification of what learners are dealing with is essential to the thinking process because without proper identification of the artifact or event the second tier's analytical richness would be depleted. Ironically, this level is often skipped by learners accustomed to a product-driven focus, rather than a process-oriented perspective.

The second inquiry level demands that he content identified in the first level be interpreted and analyzed within specific contexts: So what does this mean? So what is the significance of this to society? So what is the importance of this to 21st Century youth working in Europe? In essence, this is an open-ended, "why" question. Once again, learners use divergent thinking to list every possible significance of the identified facts relating to the object or event. However, unlike tier one's factual list, this list is expansive since meaning and impact derives from individual learners' multiple contexts and viewpoints.

The third level requires learners to apply a personal subtext to the information identified and interpreted: Now what does this have to do with my situation? Now what did I learn about myself and others? Now what new actions will this enquiry motivate us to do next time? Here, learners reflect and evaluate all possible connections between content, contextual significance, and individualized relevance. Basically, this level explores how the issue fits into our lives and future actions. Again, learners use divergent thinking to synthesize all previous material into differentiated action steps appropriate to each learner's developmental competencies, goals, and ambitions.

Convergent thinking, or the selection of key points presented in each tier, may or may not occur. If the point of the exercise is to generate a finished product, say a response or essay, a condensing of ideas from level two and three's divergent list is necessary. Level one is already factually regulated. The reason for prioritizing is because if divergent thinking were carried out properly there would be too many ideas to deal with. So, the list of possible interpretations (so what),

and actions (now what) needs narrowing. Criteria for selection would more than likely come in the form of assignment goals, learning outcomes and objectives, or rubrics.

| 3D-Briefing Questions | Answer Types | Bloom's Taxonomy | Actions |
|---|---|---|---|
| **WHAT** | Facts, Statistics, Empirical Observations, | Remember<br><br>Understand | Identify facts, directions, literal content |
| **SO WHAT** | Values, Beliefs, Attitudes, Assumptions, Biases, | Discuss<br><br>Analyze<br><br>Apply | Interpret data for meaning<br>Explore data for meaning within various contexts and world views<br>Connect significance to other ideas, meanings, contexts and world views |
| **NOW WHAT** | Reflection, Evaluation, Creation of Policy and Action Steps | Apply<br><br>Evaluate<br><br>Create | Relate previous information to one's own context.<br>Objectively judge and evaluate information based on criteria.<br>Generate new thinking and problem solving ideas leading to positive personal growth |

**Figure 3:** 3D-Briefing and Bloom's Taxonomy.

## So what is the significance of 3D-Briefing?

Positioning every learner as a critical thinker, 3D-Briefing practices an equitable, democratic process shifting the centre of meaning and power from one leader to many learners. This shift reinforces the values of inclusive, diverse, equitable education. Multiple perspectives, personal experiences, and individualized learning are encouraged, respected, accepted and validated. The traditional one-way transaction of debriefing and classroom instruction is now a polyphonic process between multiple individuals, their multiple experiences, and multiple worldviews. This multiplicity increases innovation and creative potential.

Second, educational research states that content relevance and learner autonomy are key to academic achievement (Yuhas, 2014). 3D-Briefing encourages learners to become producers, rather than passive receivers, of content. While the instructor may facilitate the originating learning opportunity, the 3D-Briefing process relies on learners' mining the content for individualized relevance based on their level of cognitive ability, prior knowledge, experiences, and personal learning needs.

Ultimately, 3D-Briefing shifts who controls and creates the curriculum from instructor to learner. This shift to a learner-driven process links content to learner relevance, autonomy and competence in the meaning-making process, thereby nurturing learners' self-efficacy in the learning experience (Boyko-Head, 2018).

Highlighting learner sovereignty over what they learn, how they learn it, and why they learn it, 3D-Briefing clearly makes the individual responsible for their own educational development. Since the questions encourage divergent then convergent thinking practices, its user-centred focus also emphasizes the importance of when learning takes place as the systematic questions can be revisited as learners' needs change. Significantly, once learners know the model they have a tool that they can apply to various scenarios throughout their lives. In essence, the hope would be that learners internalize the model's questioning framework, thereby guiding an automatic and consistent critical approach to all interactions.

## Now what are all the ways we might use 3D-Briefing?

3D-Briefing is a universal, flexible framework appropriate for any age group, at any level of learning, with any content area. This versatility means the framework is capable of adapting to the learners' diverse and changing needs throughout their learning life cycle. This legacy of self-generated relevance demonstrates the value of learner autonomy over what and how learning happens. It challenges inequitable structures and mindsets by placing the responsibility of development and growth in the learners' hands as they answer the scaffolding questions from first level identification to second level significance and third level application in their personal contexts.

As our world gains in complexity, our teaching and learning tools don't have to become just as complex. Currently, we are requiring learners to concentrate on memorizing diverse structures, as well as complicated questions for critical enquiry that they may, or may not, have ever been taught. As a result, learners are spending energy on the container rather than the wine within.

On the contrary, 3D-Briefing's structure is simple and repetitive, thus focusing learner energy where it belongs – on thinking and communicating. 3D-Briefing deepens the learner's cognitive and emotional awareness while, like any good wine, it develops depth and sophistication as it matures along with the learner. Put another way, a child learns their alphabet as the foundation for a rich, developmentally-appropriate vocabulary. The alphabet never changes throughout the child's life, yet they learn to combine those letters in ever more complicated and sophisticated ways. Likewise, learners use the 3D-Briefing questions as the foundation for developmentally-appropriate critical thinking. The 3D-Briefing structure remains constant while learners add developmentally – appropriate complexity to their thinking and communicating, not to the foundational framework. This generates a learning environment that "is stronger and more persistent if new knowledge is built in connection with prior knowledge" (Bransford et al, 1999). The 3D-Briefing model allows for such a full-body dynamic to exist.

Now, let's look at why 3D-Briefing's three simple questions are so effective.

## Three important questions

According to Postman (1979), "all our knowledge results from questions, which is another way of saying that question-asking is our most important intellectual tool" (p140). Likewise, Holt (1982) states that "we are by nature question-asking, answer-making, problem-solving animals" (p189). But, Robinson, Wagner, Gardner and others sadly report that the questioning that marks our creativity and imagination is smothered by our education system. Our product-driven, over-assessed educational environment means we often leap to analysis and solutions without considering if we are addressing the right problem in the first place.

To verify this questioning crisis, Venatamanan (2019) draws attention to various disasters within the last few decades that could have been minimized if we practiced better questioning and imagining techniques. Burell also pointed to the catastrophic results of our failure to ask the right questions prior to and even during a crisis. Covid-19, Ebola, 9/11, Chernoble and other global catastrophes impacted millions of people because of a lack in imagination and critical thinking.

Likewise, Morgan and Saxton (1994) highlight the essential role that asking questions play in the learning process. They also state that while it might be human nature to question, questioning is a complicated business. Questioning becomes even more challenging in the internet age where pre-formulated knowledge, and fake knowledge are at our finger tips. Clearly, not all questions are created equal. Not all learners know how to question equally well, either. But, 3D-Briefing can make questioning for deep meaning less complicated.

As mentioned earlier, traditional de-briefing also asks three questions: what did you like, what did you dislike and what would you change. Not only do these terms seek the negative, they point the learner in a specific, limiting direction. In this regard, they are convergent questions when learners haven't even diverged yet. Furthermore, they insinuate a right answer, rather than multiple possibilities.

In contrast, 3D-Briefing consists of three divergent questions: what, so what, now what. These questions organize the critical thinking process within three accessible question clusters classified by intentions rather than type. The words we speak matter. (Johnson, Choice words). Thus, other than in the first tier which elicits factual information, the other two questions encourage multiple perspectives rather than an authoritative, imposed, one-answer sub-text. The second question, SO WHAT, invites and accepts interpretations from everyone. The third question, NOW WHAT, calls for evaluation, reflection and creative action, also from everyone.

## Three important intentions

The first questioning tier asks learners to identify factual information. It can be classified as an "on the line" question. There may be many answers, but they are not infinite as a result of divergent or connotative thinking. Learners' answers should be identical, if they belong to a homogenous cultural and learning environment. *Book, libro, kitab, shu* is still an object consisting of pages with words/images. If a learner identified the artifact under consideration as a movie some clarification would be needed. Finally, this tier is deductive and involves convergent thinking in order to reduce and define the area of inquiry. Consensus becomes a necessary outcome.

The second questioning tier asks learners to articulate their interpretations of the facts presented in the first tier. It can be classified as a between the lines question. Now there *will be* multiple answers as a result of divergent, connotative thinking. These answers may or may not be identical to everyone else's, despite cultural and learning allegiances. In this level, the indefinite object of the first tier, now becomes the definite object in the second: a book is *The Koran, The Bible, The Little Prince*. This tier is inductive and involves an expanding of the area of inquiry as learners make connections between disparate things, articulate their attitudes, biases, points of view, and share interpretations based on their cognitive, social and emotional positionings. In this way, they explore covert meanings, hidden agendas and subtexts. Finally, this tier highlights the model's culturally-responsive and inclusive nature because homogeneous and conforming answers are not a necessary outcome.

The third questioning tier asks learners to share their evaluations, reflections and creative solutions. It can be classified as a beyond the line question. Like the second tier, this tier will elicit many responses that may or may not be identical to everyone else's. The definite object of the second tier, now becomes the personal and political object of this final tier. A book in the first tier, becomes the *Iliad* in the second, and is now *My Book* articulating my individualized learning journey and goals. This tier is reflective and creative. It calls learners to evaluate the past and present in order to lead them toward new perspectives, new thinking and new actions as agents of change regarding what might happen if. . . .

## 3D-Briefing as pedagogy

3D-Briefing is a valuable tool for creating a learning environment based on equitable, diverse, inclusive pedagogy. The three questions subvert the traditional model of teaching and learning where the teacher, as sole authority, pours content, usually irrelevant, into passive students. These students then regurgitate this information in inauthentic assessments. At best, these assessments address 3D-Briefings' first two tiers of learning. Rarely, would a standardized test focus on the third tier.

I began my teaching career as a studious follower of what I had experienced and what the manuals said I should do. Remember that envelope? But, my curiosity, my discomfort, my personality, my thirst for authentic knowledge left me vulnerable and open to change. My experience in Israel was profound because I applied the 3D-Briefing questions to my own failure and became a creative educator because of it.

When I applied the 3D-Briefing questions to that class in Netanya, and to other situations thereafter, the cracks in the traditional educational model revealed themselves. What happened? So what was the significance of these events? Now what did I learn from this that I will take forward into

the next situation? I realized no one person can be an absolute authority on anything. There is always more to learn and to be a true leader one must know when to follow. Furthermore, content is shaped by context, and contexts shift continually due to internal and external factors. In addition to context is the truth of diverse perspectives and the value of recognizing our vision as subjective and reflective of who and where we are in time. Thus, learning is not a solitary process. It is a reciprocal, social event involving and evolving everyone. Finally, as Dewey (1938) wrote almost 100 years ago, we learn not through experience alone, but through reflection on those experiences as they engage with who we are and who we want to be.

3D-Briefing dismantled my approach to teaching by helping me see that my discomfort was not a deficit, but a sign that I was not an authoritative teacher. My strength was for me to remain a learner while just happening to facilitate a classroom. This new role allowed me to model a co-creative process that valued a learner-centred, culturally-responsive, individualized, and highly reflective approach to learning.

From these big realizations came an awareness of other significances of the 3D-Briefing process to teaching. By using this method, each class followed a constructivist arrangement where learners identified and co-created content and meaning (What, so what, now what). This meant that while I might be responsible for the originating learning moment/artifact (though not necessarily), learners were responsible for their own growth. Only they could surmise their next steps through reflection on and the creation of personal and professional action steps (Now what). This display of agency stemmed from valuing learners prior and current experiences, knowledge, social and emotional contexts. When explained, their analysis and interpretations were never wrong because they were individualized (So what, now what). This allowed for the creation of an equitable opportunity for all learners to engage with the artifact/moment (What, so what, now what), and to integrate interdisciplinary viewpoints and learning outcomes (So what, now what). These disparate connections and synergies granted space for minimizing the familiar and maximizing the diverse through challenges, questions and new discoveries (So what, now what).

This innovative environment also meant that we could address important, yet non-curricular issues such as character traits, cultural-responsiveness, inclusion, equity, diversity, self-awareness, resilience, grit, etc. (So what, now what). Finally, the ritualized practice of 3D-Briefing meant that the recipe for fine wine was revealed. The three simple questions made thinking and communicating a transparent process accessible to everyone (What, so what, now what).

A versatile, pedagogical practice, 3D-Briefing can become an internalized script applied to every scenario inside and outside the classroom. Its general benefits to education, as well as other sectors where analysis and action steps are required, include:
1. offering an easy to remember, all-inclusive, transferable framework for creative, critical thinking and communication;
2. reducing intimidation, fear and self-doubt around critical thinking and communicating by making the process transparent and scaffolded;
3. building confidence and self-efficacy by valuing prior knowledge, skills and experiences;
4. increasing engagement by encouraging divergent answers that are culturally and personally relevant;
5. creating time for personal reflection that leads to increased responsibility and self-efficacy around actionable plans for the future;
6. transferring the framework to other processes such as problem solving, feedback, assessment, etc., thereby simplifying the form and increasing content quality;
7. reinforcing the importance of user-focused design;
8. giving everyone the opportunity to articulate their thoughts in a differentiated, individualized manner;
9. providing a positive, non-judgmental learning and growing space; and,

10. creating value-added components to every moment, even ice breakers and games.

These ten points indicate a creative, positive learning environment. While not everything of value can be measured, our education system requires just that – measures of success. How do we measure empathy and leadership? How might we assess for critical and creative thinking? Learner success relies on the demonstration of acquired and mastered skills. Traditionally and consistently, these skills are measured by standardized assessments. Most assessments play to the strengths of specific learners while disregarding the learning preferences and styles of others (Wagner & Dintersmith, 2015, p 206). Character traits, such as perseverance, self-discipline and resourcefulness, are almost impossible to measure by filling in blank bubbles. Likewise, the core competencies that matter most for work, learning and living in the 21st Century, critical thinking, creative problem solving, communication and collaboration, also burst the testing bubble. What learners must do to demonstrate core competencies is to articulate their learning in established and expected written and oral genres. The application of 3D-Briefing to communication acts is what we will explore next.

## 3D-Briefing as a Communication Structure

Many have pointed to the fact that humans are inclined to speech, but writing is not a natural tendency. Is it any wonder that learners struggle with written communication when they can clearly present their ideas orally?

According to Pinker (2014), the order of thoughts within a writer is different from the order in which those thoughts can be easily recovered by a reader (p115). The reasons can vary: writers are too close to the information; they overlook the reader's need for clarity, scaffolding and coherence; they can't order and code their mental arguments into clear linguistic structures; and, many writers falsely believe that academic writing needs to be complex and convoluted in order to be acceptable.

According to Mauk, Stayer, and Mauk (2014) the expression of complex thinking has made the essay ubiquitous on college campuses. Other subject-specific genres, such as the report, review, profile, memoir, etc., give learners the opportunity to externally articulate internal thinking processes. Terminology can lead learners astray and rather than clearly sharing their ideas, they can worry about over the form. Is this a report, or an essay, and what is the difference? Returning to our wine metaphor, the container can take on different shapes and sizes, but the liquid it holds must be good for us even to care.

3D-Briefing mirrors quality thinking by asking questions that help learners to step from low order thinking to high order thinking. It scaffolds complexity of thought without adding complexity of structure. The systematic journey from text to context, and context to subtext moves learners along a critical continuum appropriate to every level of the writing process from sentence, to paragraph, to entire essay. This structural repetition is what makes it accessible and easy to use for any writing level. Figure 4, below, illustrates how this agile system works.

| 3D-Briefing Question | WHAT? | SO WHAT? | NOW WHAT? |
|---|---|---|---|
| Cognitive Level | Literal | Analytical/Interpretative | Reflective/Evaluative/Creative |
| Evidence | Empirical Facts | Values, Beliefs, Biases, Assumptions, | Past, Present, Future |
| Reading Type | On the line | Between the lines | Beyond the lines |
| Outcomes | Convergent Information | Divergent Interpretations | Differentiated Solutions and Actions |
| Paragraph Alignment | Topic sentence | Supporting sentence | Transition sentence |
| Essay Alignment | Introduction | Body Paragraphs | Conclusion |

**Figure 4:** 3D-Briefing as an agile system.

Figure 4 shows how the three simplel questions cover various learning objectives making them accessible and easily retrieved for diverse contexts. However, we will look at 3D-Briefing's specific application for written communication.

# 3D-Briefing the Paragraph

A paragraph is a clustering of sentences referring to one idea. In an essay, a series of paragraphs functions like rungs in a ladder helping the reader understand the larger argument. It is difficult to reach the top of a ladder without taking it one step at a time. Likewise, it can be difficult writing a persuasive argument without leading the reader through your thinking one point, or one paragraph, at a time. The challenge in writing paragraphs, then, can come in keeping the paragraph focused, coherent and relevant to one point only.

The following 3D-Briefing template encourages paragraph clarity, focus and critical depth. While I do not advocate for the use of templates, they serve as practice toward the overall aim of clear communication. Once this has been achieved, writers should enliven the sentences through concise, appropriate commentary, summarizing, paraphrasing, direct quoting. This will make the writing fluid, dynamic and reflective of the writer's authentic voice and style.

**The essay's main argument:** _____

## Paragraph's Topic Sentence
What is the one point being made in this paragraph?
1. "This paragraph claims that _____".

## Supporting sentences
So what evidence do I have to support this claim?
2. "The claim that _____ is supported by
_____ ".
So what is the significance of this claim and its evidence to the field of enquiry?
3. The claim that _____, supported by _____
is significant because _____.

## Reinforcing sentences
Now what is the specific connection between this point and the main argument?
4. "The connection between (paragraph's claim and evidence)_____
and (main claim)_____ is that _____".

## Transition sentence
Now what is the next step in building my argument?
5. "This point about _____ leads to the next paragraph's claim
which is _____".

# 3D-Briefing the Essay

An essay is a series of well-constructed, focused, coherent paragraphs building the writer's main argument one point, one paragraph at a time. The main argument is the meaningful, specific

claim the writer is making about an issue. Every written act, despite length and purpose, should be organized into three main sections: introduction, body and conclusion. 3D-Briefing aligns with this structure.

## Introduction

First, an engaging introduction grabs the reader's attention by using a variety of strategies such as facts, statistics, compelling questions, storytelling, or a creative surprise. It also states the essay's main claim clearly and confidently, and may include the pathway the argument will take throughout the paper. Depending on the scope of the assignment, and creativity of the writer, introductions may require more than one paragraph, Nevertheless, the introduction should fulfill its function of announcing the argument, and enticing the reader into the paper.

## Body

Credible and convincing body paragraphs follow the introduction. Each paragraph should focus on one point building the reader's understanding of, and interest in, the main claim. These properly paragraphed sub-points are supported by valid and reliable evidence from various sources that are summarized, paraphrased or directly cited. A complex point may require multiple paragraphs. Still, the importance in paragraphing is to maintain focus, coherence and unity. The essay's body should reflect the writer's logical and clear thinking process around developing the main claim, persuasively and accurately and not a pre-set number of paragraphs.

## Conclusion

Finally, the conclusion reminds the reader of the journey taken in the preceding paragraphs. This may include reviewing key points, summarizing evidence, restating the sub-points, evaluating gaps and omissions, as well as clarifying the essay's contribution to the field of enquiry. It also may use engagement techniques, as in the introduction, only this time to wrap up the argument and release the reader back into the world with new thinking. Thus, the conclusion makes the information presented in the essay relevant to the reader, complete with calls to action, or recommendations based on the information and evidence provided.

## 3D-Briefing in the essay structure

A modest essay might give each 3D-Briefing question its own paragraph.

| Modest Essay Structure | Structuring Questions |
|---|---|
| Introduction | • Engaging Technique<br>• What is the topic and the main argument?<br>• So what is the significance of this to society, or the field of enquiry?<br>• Now what evidence is there supporting this argument? |
| Body: Segment<br>Paragraph #1 | • What is the main argument? |
| Paragraph #2 | • So What is the significance of this? |
| Paragraph #3 | • Now what evidence supports this argument? |
| Conclusion | • What was argued?<br>• So what was the significance and the evidence?<br>• Now what should the reader do with this new insight?<br>• Engagement Technique Releasing the Reader |

A complex essay may integrate all three questions within each paragraph, or even play with the order of each 3D-Briefing section.

| Complex Essay | Structuring Questions |
|---|---|
| INTRODUCTION (may consist of more than one paragraph depending on scope) | ▪ Engaging Technique<br>▪ What is the main argument?<br>▪ So what is the significance of this to society, or the field of enquiry?<br>▪ Now what evidence is there supporting this argument? |
| Body Segment Paragraph #1 | o What is this paragraph's main point?<br>o So what is the significance of this point?<br>o So what evidence supports it?<br>o Now what does this analysis contribute to the main argument?<br>o Now what does this paragraph's point lead to next? |
| Paragraph #2 | ▪ What is the connection between the last point and this new point? What is this paragraph's main point?<br>▪ So what is the significance of this point?<br>▪ So what evidence supports this point?<br>▪ Now what does this analysis contribute to the main argument?<br>▪ Now what does this point lead to next? |
| Paragraph #3 | o What is the connection between the last point and this new point? What is this paragraph's main point?<br>o So what is the significance of this point?<br>o So what evidence supports this point?<br>o Now what does this analysis contribute to the main argument? Now what does this point lead to next? |
| Conclusion Segment | ▪ What did I argue throughout the paper?<br>▪ So what is the significance of all these points?<br>▪ Now what action steps does the essay encourage readers to do based on this information?<br>▪ Engagement technique releasing the reader. |

All activities, exercises, artifacts and experiences can be 3D-Briefed. I encourage 3D-Briefing as a culminating learning and reflection tool. Applying 3D-Briefing's three tiers of inquiry transforms everything, even seemingly simple games, into rich learning opportunities. Don't skip or rush through the levels. Allow learners to sit with the questions and ponder their potential. The rewards will surely follow.

## Conclusion

Scholars of culturally-responsive education have noted an increase in a culture of poverty within education. Lectures, rote memorization, templates, out-dated skills, irrelevant content are all depriving learners of the critical, creative and communication skills these individuals will need to combat a volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous (VUCA) future (Adams, 2012). According to Hammond (2015), learners struggle because educators "don't offer them sufficient opportunities to develop the cognitive skills and habits of mind that would prepare them to take on more advanced academic tasks" (14). Furthermore, growing concerns over inadequate reading, writing, emotional skills and complex problem solving, reflects the global labour market's identification of a gap in skills graduates have and the skills employers need (WEF, 2016). 3D-Briefing looks like a static template; it is really an agile guide for how to develop a critical habit of mind and kaleidoscopic vision.

Steven Pinker (2014) says the purpose of writing is to present the truth in a clear and simple manner so that the reader can follow the writer's journey of ideas. What, so what, now what encourages and celebrates the individual learner and their thinking processes.

Overall, 3D-Briefing provides an effective structure for creative, critical thinking and effective written and oral communication that shadows learners throughout their lives. Progressing from summary to evaluation, the literal to the reflective, the concrete to the creative,

3D-Briefing offers a sequential framework for idea planning, paragraph organization and essay structuring. The process is comprehensive and clear. It is easy to remember, to transfer and to apply to any scenario. With practice, it can become an internalized mindset where critical thinking and clear communication guides our actions. In short, it turns everything, even a simple game, into a rich learning opportunity.

- **Click the following link for an interactive 3D-Briefing tree:**
  https://www.thinglink.com/scene/1359196223151538177
- **Click this link for learner's guide on 3D-Briefing for Better Communication:**
  https://anyflip.com/ddxez/cmme/

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## About the Author

**Christine Boyko-Head**, is an artist-educator specializing in innovative curriculum development, arts-based integration, creativity and personal development through the arts. She earned her Ph.D in English Literature from McMaster University. She is a certified Foursight Thinking Preference and Design Thinking facilitator and a Values Institute intercultural compentency auditor. She founded a theatre company creating social justice plays for young audiences, helped start a national magazine for/by young people, converted her Ph.D dissertation into a historical fiction and fund raised $!.3m for her community. Her interests swirl around minimizing the familiar in order to maximize the diverse. She has published, taught and presented nationally and internationally with a focus on developing equitable, empathetic collaborative experiences. Her new venture, Kaleidoscope Learning Solutions, amplifies creativity as a way to help educators think differently, learn flexibly and live creativity. She teaches at Mohawk College and lives on the shores of Lake Erie in Southern Ontario, Canada.

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