

# Reflection



Reflection, the critical link between service and learning, is often the most challenging part of service-learning for faculty and students alike. This document provides the rationale for and strategies useful in promoting critical reflection.

## What is Reflection?

Although reflection can take many forms, it is in essence structured exercises designed to analyze connections between the service and classroom components of the course.

## Action/Reflection

In *Community Service and Higher Learning: Exploration of the Caring Self*, Robert Rhoads (1997) discusses the inseparable relationship of action and reflection. He explained: (1) We can have no true action without reflection. And reflection without action has no sustenance.; and (2) Service without a reflective component fails to be forward looking, fails to be concerned with the community beyond the present, and in essence fails as community service. *Community service, ideally speaking, is about community building for today and tomorrow* (emphasis added) (pp. 184-185).

Jane Kendall (1990, as cited in Rhoads, 1997, p.185) also speaks to the importance of reflection: “A good service-learning program helps participants see their questions in the larger context of issues of social justice and social policy—rather than in the context of charity.”

Reflection addresses students’ concerns, challenges their preconceptions, and fosters their cognitive/affective/behavioral growth. It can also be used to challenge students to connect their sense of self with that of others, ultimately reducing the likelihood of a superior/inferior service relationship (Rhoads, 1997). In other words, service is less likely to be seen as the “haves” serving the “have nots,” but rather as everyone working together toward the common good.

## Goals of Reflection

Student, instructor, and course goals should influence reflection strategies. Service-learning courses may emphasize intellectual, civic, ethical, moral, cross-cultural, career or personal learning goals- or any combination of the seven (Kendall, 1990, as cited in Rhoads, 1997).

- What are the goals and intended outcomes of the course?
- What is the motive behind integrating a service component in your course?
- How do you hope reflection will influence student learning and promote the accomplishment of your goals?
- What are the student goals for the course? Have they or will they be solicited?

## Framework for Understanding Reflection

Three frameworks are useful for the key points of reflection. The first, the 4 Cs by Eyer, Giles, and Schmiede (1996), highlights conditions that must be in place for reflection to be effective. The second framework, a result of David Kolb's work, outlines three questions that direct the flow of reflective thinking. Students are challenged to increase their depth of analysis of situations and experiences. The Bradley model is useful in evaluating levels of student learning.

### 4 Cs of Reflection

Eyer, Giles, and Schmiede (1996) concluded from their research that critical reflection in service-learning is:

➤ <b>Continuous:</b> an ongoing part of learning in the course that provides continuity through each event or experience; reflection occurs before, during and after the experience.	➤ <b>Connected:</b> the link between service and the intellectual and academic interests of students, resulting in the synthesis of action and thought.
➤ <b>Challenging:</b> an intervention to engage students in issues in a broader, more critical way; reflection pushes students to think in new ways.	➤ <b>Contextualized:</b> appropriate for the setting and context of a particular service-learning course or program; reflection corresponds in a meaningful way to the topics and experiences that form material for reflection.

### What? So What? Now What?

David Kolb's work can be best described through the following three questions:

*What? (Descriptive) So What? (Interpretive and Emotive) Now What? (Active)*

Many reflection exercises are designed to encourage movement through these three increasingly analytic phases of the reflective process toward more complex understandings of the issues involved in the service-learning experience. Through targeted questions and specially designed activities, the instructor should encourage students to think beyond the purely descriptive phase. Some suggested questions are listed below.

What service did you do?	Why was the service needed?	What else is needed now?
What happened?	What factors affected the need?	What strategies might solve the problem, eliminate the need or sustain the results
What choices were made?	Was the service useful?	
What was the result?	Was the service "successful"?	
What did you learn?	Relate this to personal values. Relate this to course concepts.	Is the community different or better? Are you?

## Criteria for Assessing Levels of Learning\*

Bradley (1995) developed three levels of reflection that are similar to the What?, So What?, Now What? framework. Reflection exercises should be designed to gradually move students toward the third level.

### Level One

1. Gives examples of observed behaviors or characteristics of the client or setting, but provides no insight into reasons behind the observation; observations tend to be one dimensional and conversational or unassimilated repetitions of what has been heard in class or from peers.
2. Tends to focus on just one aspect of the situation.
3. Uses unsupported personal beliefs frequently as “hard” evidence.
4. May acknowledge differences of perspective but does not discriminate effectively among them.

### Level Two

1. Observations are fairly thorough and nuanced although they tend not to be placed in a broader context.
2. Provides a cogent critique from one perspective, but fails to see the broader system in which the aspect is embedded and other factors which may make change difficult.
3. Uses both unsupported personal belief and evidence but is beginning to be able to differentiate between them.
4. Perceives legitimate differences of viewpoint.
5. Demonstrates a beginning ability to interpret evidence.

### Level Three

1. Views things from multiple perspectives; able to observe multiple aspects of the situation and place them in context.
2. Perceives conflicting goals within and among individuals involved in a situation and recognizes that the differences can be evaluated.
3. Recognizes that actions must be situationally dependent and understands many of the factors that affect their choice.
4. Makes appropriate assessment of the decisions facing clients and of his or her responsibility as part of the clients’ lives.

\*Extracted from Bradley, J. (1995). A model for evaluating service-learning in academically based service. In Troppe, M. (Ed.). *Connecting cognition and action: Evaluation of student performance in service-learning courses*. Providence, RI: Campus Compact, p. 21.



## Service Learning Reflection Activities

By contemplating your involvement, you can better understand your service-learning experience, appreciate what you and others are doing to make a difference, and examine how your experience relates to what you have been studying in class. We understand that you are busy, but take a few moments before the agency orientation, after each visit, and at the end of the semester to consider some of the following questions and issues.

What you think and feel about this experience can be expressed in many ways, including keeping a journal, class discussion and oral presentations. By taking some time to consider and write about some of the following questions after each visit, you will be able to keep an accurate and useful record of your Service-learning as well as fully integrate what you are learning at the site with your learning in the classroom. Make this a true service-learning experience. Students should address the following questions:

### WHAT?

- What do I expect to get out of this experience (purpose/goals/ideals)?
- What did I observe during my first visit?
- What is the agencies mission or goal?
- Are there other agencies in the community that have similar goals or could be connected? What part was most challenging? What part did you find surprising?
- How was I of service?
- What roles am I taking on?
- What about myself did I share with others?
- What did others share with me?
- What does it feel like to come into and leave my different roles (student, server, teacher)?

### SO WHAT?

- What am I learning about others and myself?
- What impact did today's visit have on me?
- What did I do that was effective? Why was it effective?
- What did I do that seemed to be ineffective? How could I have done it differently?
- What are the relationship between my community service "world" and my other "worlds"?
- What values, opinions, decisions have been made or changed through this experience?
- What has surprised; me about the agency, the people I work with, and myself?

### NOW WHAT?

- Is it important to me to stay involved in the community?
- How will my efforts working with this agency contribute to social change? my career? What changes would I make in this experience if it were repeated?
- Will I continue to be of service?

Adapted by Tidewater Community College from a publication of the Madison Leadership Center Community-Service-Learning Program, James Madison University, Harrisonburg, VA. <http://www.tcc.edu/students/specialized/civic/servicelearning/students/reflection.htm>

## Sample Reflection Exercises

Eyler, Giles, and Schmiede (1996) distinguish four learning styles that characterize students as activists, reflectors, theorists, and pragmatists. The styles inform what types of reflection activities should be chosen.

### Journaling (Reflector, Theorist, Pragmatist)

Journal writing is a common reflection activity for service-learning courses. Expectations need to be clearly communicated to students regarding journal entries. Journals can be done in groups, individually, at home or in class.

Gary Tiedeman at Oregon State University distinguishes between descriptive journals and analytical journals. Instructors should encourage students to write analytically by posing specific questions and facilitating movement through the What? So What? Now What? scheme. Descriptive journals record main events without giving too much detail. Such journals make it difficult for the instructor to evaluate learning experiences. Analytical journals on the other hand go beyond pure description and include commentary and discussion.

In writing about an incident at a social service center for example, students would tell what happened, but then go on to talk about why it happened, who it happened to and why, implications of the incident, trends, suspicions, doubts, and so on. Hopefully they would also begin to recognize the “system” in which things happen and not conclude that incidents are merely isolated events. Analytical journals are easier to evaluate because they provide indication that the student is more fully processing the service environment. (Adapted from *Strengthening Community Partnerships*, Michael Keller, Central Oregon Community College)

### Case Study (Reflector, Theorist, Pragmatist, Activist)

A case study can provide students with an opportunity to explore a problem in depth. Cases can be presented orally, written in the form of an agency report or proposal, or even role played. Additionally, analysis can be done individually or in groups. The case study is a flexible activity that can be easily altered and structured to accommodate a variety of learning styles and reflection goals simultaneously.

Questions that could be used to guide case study analysis:

- How would you describe the problem? How might others describe the problem?
- Who are key players?
- What are some things that come to mind when thinking about this problem?
- What has caused the problem?
- What are possible solutions? What are the pros and cons to each solution?
- How would you implement your determined solution? What challenges might you face in implementation? How will you address those challenges?

### Theater and Critical Incident Reports (Reflector, Theorist, Pragmatist, Activist)

Theater adds variety to standard discussion by engaging students in reflection, discussion, and planning of their “production.” If used as a follow-up to written work (i.e., a critical incident report or a journal entry), the activity reinforces thought processes and provides ample opportunities for rich discussion between classmates. Note: This activity is best for activists, but because of the writing and internal reflection involved, it could be used with a variety of students.

(From *A Practitioner’s Guide to Reflection in Service-Learning*, Eyler, Giles, & Schmiede, 1996)

## Resources

Eyler's (2001) reflection map template can be a helpful tool for thinking through the various options for incorporating reflection into a service-learning course or program. A slide presentation that describes the reflection map is available at [http://depts.washington.edu/ccph/pdf\\_files/Reflection.ppt](http://depts.washington.edu/ccph/pdf_files/Reflection.ppt)

	Before service activity	During service activity	After service activity
Alone			
With fellow students			
With community partners			

The “How Do You Define Service” exercise, along with “Defining Service with a Reflection Activity,” helps students explore what service means to them. Developed by Haas Center for Public Service at Stanford University. <http://www.nationalserviceresources.org/node/17587>

The *Reflection Toolkit* by the Northwest Service Academy provides tips on designing a high-quality reflection activity and offers reflection activity examples. <http://nationalserviceresources.org/files/legacy/filemanager/download/615/nwtoolkit.pdf>

*Connecting Thinking and Action: Ideas for Service-Learning Reflection* by RMC Corporation provides a wide variety of grade and subject-specific reflection activities. Reflective stages—preservice, during service, post-service, and ongoing—are indicated for each reflection activity. <http://www.servicelearning.org/filemanager/download/132/Reflection%20Guide%20Internet1.pdf>

*A Concise Guide to Reflection* by Youth Service California describes Howard Gardner’s “seven intelligences” along with corresponding reflection activities. Sample journal questions are also provided. <http://yscal.org/Library/Programs%20Files/MultIntellReflGuide.pdf>

The *Experiential Learning Cycle* explains the Kolb’s four learning styles (Activist, Reflector, Theorist, Pragmatist) and provides a link to the Learning Styles Inventory instrument. <http://www.learningandteaching.info/learning/experience.htm>

## References

- Eyler, J. (2001). “Creating your reflection map.” In M. Canada (Ed.), *Service-learning: Practical advice and model*. New Directions for Higher Education Series (pp. 35-43). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Eyler, J., Giles, Jr., D. E., & Schmiede, A. (1996). *A practitioner’s guide to reflection in service-learning: Student voices and reflections*. Nashville, TN: Vanderbilt University.
- Rhoads, R. (1997). *Community service and higher learning: Exploration of the caring self*. Albany: State University of New York Press.

This document was adapted from *Creating community through service-learning: A faculty guide to creating service-learning courses at The Ohio State University*. 2d ed. (pp. 31-33). Columbus, OH: Service-Learning Initiative, The Ohio State University..