

## Reflection

Reflection, the *critical* link between service and learning, is often times the most challenging part of service-learning for faculty and students alike. For that reason, this section of the manual expounds significantly on the rationale for and strategies useful in promoting critical reflection.

### What is Reflection?

While reflection can take on 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. 184-85).

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 towards 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 Jacoby, 1996).

- 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

Two frameworks are useful for the key points of reflection. The first, the 4 C's by Eyler, 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 which direct the flow of reflective thinking. Students are challenged to increase their depth of analysis of situations and experiences

### *4 C's of Reflection*

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

- *Continuous*: an on-going part of learning in the course that provides continuity through each event or experience; reflection occurs before, during and after the experience.
- *Connected*: the link between service and the intellectual and academic interests of students, resulting in the synthesis of action and thought.
- *Challenging*: an intervention to engage students in issues in a broader, more critical way; reflection pushes students to think in new ways.
- *Contextualized*: 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?    So What?    Now What?

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

## Criteria for Assessing Levels of Reflection

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 contextt
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 which 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]

## Student Learning Styles

It is important to remember that student reactions and interpretations of situations can vary tremendously- even if several students are at the same place at the same time. To that end, reflection should be designed so that students feel comfortable expressing their interpretations and perceptions regarding a particular experience. Knowledge and awareness of individual learning styles can prove invaluable in understanding students and designing the most effective reflection activities.

Learning styles can provide a frame for analyzing student reactions as well as a basis for designing reflection activities. Do the students in the class learn best by feeling, watching/listening, thinking/theorizing, or doing? In one course, it is imaginable that there will be students of all learning styles. How then do you design activities that will appropriately challenge and support each student?

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.

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Activist</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Oriented towards action.</li><li>▪ Act first- think later.</li><li>▪ “I’ll try anything once.”</li><li>▪ Engage fully and without bias.</li><li>▪ Focus on the present.</li><li>▪ Tackle problems by brainstorming.</li><li>▪ Thrive on challenges.</li><li>▪ People-oriented.</li></ul>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Reflector</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Ponder experience and observe.</li><li>▪ Seek data and consider thoroughly.</li><li>▪ Postpone decision-making.</li><li>▪ Watch and listen before offering opinion.</li><li>▪ Primarily concerned with creating personal meaning out of experience.</li></ul>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Theorist</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Approach problems step by step.</li><li>▪ Pull facts into theories.</li><li>▪ Seek perfection.</li><li>▪ Prize rationality and logic.</li><li>▪ Dislike flippancy.</li></ul>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Pragmatist</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Try and test ideas.</li><li>▪ Act quickly and confidently to implement ideas.</li><li>▪ Dislike ruminating and open ended discussions.</li><li>▪ See problems as opportunities.</li></ul>

Eyler et al. (1996) identify types of activities that are most effective according to learning style.

Activist: Doing, Oral Activities

Reflector: Writing Activities

Theorist: Reading and Writing Activities

Pragmatist: Writing Activities

There are many options/reflection activities in each of the four areas. The different exercises can be used one-time or on an on-going basis; in small or large groups; at home, in class or on site. Below are some basic ideas, followed by general guidelines. Specific examples of activities are in appendix G.

<b>Doing</b>	<b>Oral</b>	<b>Reading</b>	<b>Writing</b>
Dance	One-on-one meetings	Case studies	Journals and logs
Art	Large group discussion	Current affairs articles	Reflection or self-evaluation essays
Collages	Presentations	Community newsletters	Advocacy pieces
Photo displays	Advocacy work	Articles, books, etc. on leadership, citizenship...	Community newsletters, press releases
Video	Interviews	Bibliographies	Position papers
Role play, simulations	Reflection with the community		Letters home, to the community or self
Advocacy work	Mentoring		Group journals
Interviews	Teaching a class		Memos
Theater	Story telling		Analysis/Integrative papers
Watching movies/videos	Legislative testimony		Training manuals
Program development			

In the context of reflection goals and in consideration of student learning styles, instructors should determine the *appropriateness of an activity* in terms of time, environment, resources, etc. prior to implementation.

- How much monitoring or feedback will an activity require? Do you have time to provide the required amount of either?
- Is a permanent record of the activity needed? (Oral exercises may not produce such an outcome)
- How much time is available for the activity? Does each student need a certain amount of ‘air time’ to complete the activity?
- Is the exercise interactive or not?
- Are there opportunities for students with diverse learning styles to be challenged by the activity?
- Are there alternative ways to express an opinion/feeling?
- Is the environment supportive of diverse perspectives and conflicting points of view? If not, what can be done to create such a climate?

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Eyler, J., Giles, D.E., & Schmiede, A.. (1996). *A Practitioner’s Guide to Reflection in Service-Learning: Student Voices and Reflections*. Nashville, TN: Vanderbilt University.

## Using Reflection Effectively

- 👏 Model enthusiasm.
- 👏 Engage each member of the group.
- 👏 Permit anyone in the group to speak at any time.
- 👏 Accept the right to pass.
- 👏 Respect the privacy of students and their families.
- 👏 Model effective listening.
- 👏 Take students' responses seriously.
- 👏 Share appropriate information about your life.
- 👏 Accept multiple answers where appropriate.
- 👏 Do not accept rudeness or inappropriate responses.
- 👏 Offer different ways for students to respond.
- 👏 Allow "think time" if responding verbally.

## Questions that Prompt Reflection

### ***General***

- Can you talk more about that?
- Why do you think that happens?
- What evidence do you have about that?
- What does this remind you of?
- How else could you approach that?
- What do you want to happen?
- How could you do that?

*Reflection activities should be: meaningful; a means to explore, as well as ventilate; an opportunity for free expression; a directed chronicle of events; and structured enough to motivate learning.*

-Dr. Susan R. Jones, Ohio State University

### ***About behavior during service***

- What choice did you make?
- What other choices did you have?
- What were the consequences of your choice?
- What is your understanding of where you are supposed to be right now?
- What are you supposed to be doing?
- What are the consequences for what you are doing?

## **Appendix**

### **Sample Reflection Exercises**

## **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. 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.

Journals can be done in groups, individually, at home or in class.

(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.

(Taken from *A Practitioner's Guide to Reflection*, Eyler, Giles & Schmiede, 1996).