

Service Learning Reflection Toolkit¹

Reflection is a crucial part of community service, which allows

- o challenges current realities, perhaps creating cognitive dissonance and/or conflict; see “Managing Hot Moments in the Classroom” (Warren, <http://bokcenter.fas.harvard.edu/docs/hotmoments.html> or “Facilitating Reflection” (Reed and Koliba, http://www.uvm.edu/~dewey/reflection_manual/)
- o goes beyond the descriptive nature of the experience and asks students to interpret and evaluate the relevance of their experience in relation to classroom knowledge with real life service experience
- o asks students to apply new information to real problems and situations

Bringle and Hatcher (1999) posit that reflection activities should (a) clearly link the service experience to the course content and learning objectives; (b) be structured in terms of description, expectations, and the criteria for assessing the activity; (c) occur regularly during the semester so that students can develop the capacity to engage in deeper and broader examination of issues; (d) provide feedback from the instructor so that students learn how to improve their critical analysis and reflective practice; and (e) include the opportunity for students to explore, clarify, and alter their personal values.

Benefits of Reflection³

- o Gives meaning to the experience (was goal accomplished, how did we do, how is community served by this, how is this part of a larger effort, etc.)
- o Provides an opportunity to establish expectations (individually, team)
- o Can help volunteers understand the limitations and opportunities of the service site or community organization
- o Relieves tension and provides energizing and renewal (especially important when service is emotionally challenging)
- o Can create a sense of accomplishment that is crucial for student learning

Group problem solving creates shared understandings, open communication
better teamwork
Clarifies values as volunteers confront new situations

- *How does this project address those needs?*
- *How, specifically, has the community benefited?*
- *What is the least impact you can imagine for the project?*
- *With unlimited creativity, what is the most impact on the community that you can imagine?*

The Group(for group projects):

- *In what ways did the group work well together?*
- *What does that suggest to you about the group?*
- *How might the group have accomplished its task more effectively?*
- *In what ways did others help you today? (and vice versa)*
- *How were decisions made?*
- *Were everybody's ideas listened to?*

3. Now What?(How will they think or act in the future as a result of this experience?)

Participants consider broader implications of the service experience and apply learning. Be aware to strike a balance between realistic, reachable goals and openness to spontaneity and change.

Some questions include:

- *What seem to be the root causes of the issue/problem addressed?*
- *What kinds of activities are currently taking place in the community related to this project?*
- *What contributes to the success of projects like this? What hinders success?*
- *What learning occurred for you in this experience? How can you apply this learning?*
- *What would you like to learn more about, r*

page of the journal. Students then draw arrows indicating relationships between their personal experiences and course content. This type of journal is a compilation of personal data and a summary of

experience when putting together an academic essay reflecting their experience. (Hatcher, Indiana University-Purdue University at Indianapolis)

Three-part Journal: Students are asked to divide each page of their journal into three parts and write weekly entries throughout the course. In the top section, students describe some aspect of the service experience. In the middle of the page, they analyze how course content relates to the service experience. And finally, an application section prompts students to comment on how the experience and course content can be applied to their personal or professional life. (Robert Bringle, Indiana University-Purdue University at Indianapolis)

Good Reflection Writing/Sharing Questions:

- o What is service? What is the difference between service and volunteering?
- o Has your definition of service changed? Why? How? Should everyone do service?
- o Describe a problem the team has been having. List possible solutions.
- o Make a list of the skills used and learned on this project.
- o

- o How is the concept you are currently learning about in class reflected in a recent situation

- o Describe ideal citizens and what qualities they possess, what values they hold, and what actions they take within their communities. How has your service experience informed your image of an ideal citizen?

Other Reflection Activities

Contracts and Logs

Service learning contracts and logs formalize the learning and service objectives for the course and may be used from the beginning to the end of the coursework. In concert with the faculty and agency supervisor, the student creates a contract that outlines learning and service objectives and identifies the range of tasks to be completed during the service experience, as well as the goals to be achieved and skills to be learned and/or refined.

A service log is a continuous summary of specific activities completed and progress towards accomplishing the service learning goals. Students can use the contract and the log to assess their progress toward meeting the identified objectives and reflect on how the experience affected their ability to complete tasks and achieve their goals and objectives. Students could also submit these items as part of a service learning portfolio.

Directed Readings

Directed readings are additional readings outside of additional course textbooks that provide a broader or local context of social responsibility and literacy that can be used throughout the course. These readings are a means of enhancing a systemic understanding of societal concerns of students engaged in service. Faculty can direct readings to challenge students to apply their current knowledge within a discipline to current social needs and current events.

Directed readings take all literary forms (newspaper articles, short stories, novels, poetry, essay, etc.) and can become the basis for class discussion and directed writings. Faculty can also allow students to create their own list of directed readings through web searches for keywords, such as citizenship, service learning, civic responsibility, individual rights and responsibilities, etc.

Directed Writings

Faculty can use directed writings throughout a course to prompt students to reflect on their service experiences within the framework of course content. The instructor identifies a section from the textbook or class readings (i.e., quotes, statistics, concepts) and structures a question for students to answer (see Sample Reflection Question in Section 2). Faculty can provide a list of directed writings at the beginning of the course, or distribute it to students as the course progresses.

Faculty can also ask students to create their own lists of directed readings/questions based on the course textbooks or materials. Directed writings allow students to analyze course content critically and apply it to current problems and issues.

E-mail Discussion Groups/Blackboard Discussion Groups

Through email or blackboard students can create a dialogue with the instructor and peers involved in service projects. This dialogue can be ongoing (weekly) or directed certain times throughout the course. Students write summaries and identify significant incidents that occurred at the service site. Students can rotate as a moderator of the discussion every two weeks. Instructors can post questions for consideration and topics for directed writings. A log can be printed to provide data about group learning that occurred from the service experience.

Students are able to connect with other students about issues at their sites, help each other solve problems, identify patterns in their service learning, and have open discussions about societal issues. Faculty may not want to grade content from these discussion groups, but provide incentives for all students to participate.

Truth Is Stranger than Fiction: Best used toward the middle and end of a course, this exercise has students divided into groups of no more than three. Faculty ask students to write the most unusual story that happened to them during their service learning experience and to be prepared to share it with their small group at the next class session. At the next class session, students share their stories in small groups and then come together as a class. Ask each group members to share some of the stories and what it meant to group members. Open up the discussion to the rest of the class.

Faculty should be prepared to prompt students if needed. Students learn valuable writing skills, group communications skills, and have the chance to explore what situations/knowledge affects them. With student permission, faculty can collect stories and "publish" copies for all class members and/or share stories with campus service programs to use for community publications and other future needs. (Diane Sloan, Middle College)

Values Continuum: Faculty can use this exercise to assist students in clarifying their values and exploring the knowledge base for student opinions. This exercise can be used anytime during the course. Name each corner of the classroom as follows: Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Agree, and Strongly Agree. Name the middle of the room as Neutral. Students go to the place in the room for which they most identify after you read certain statements. Faculty can create questions based on classroom content and/or the service experience. For example, faculty may say, "I believe that individual rights are more important than those of the larger community," or "I believe that service to a community is the responsibility of citizens," or "I believe our government has the responsibility to solve world problems."

Once students have gone to their respective places, allow time for students to discuss with other group members their reasons for standing where they are. Have each group report back their reasons for why they believe what they do, and then allow others to "switch" to a different group if they have changed their minds.

Continue discussion, and then repeat the process for as long as time allows.

Personal Narrative

Students can construct a personal account of their experience by writing in a narrative form. This allows for students to be creative in telling a story and finding their voice. Faculty could experiment with allowing students to use first or third person and assign a particular audience to whom the students address their comments. Faculty assign this as an ongoing midterm, or final project for the course.

Photo Essay

This is an alternative approach to reflection, which allows students to use their figurative literal "lenses" to view their service experience and how it relates to the classroom. This is a good final project/presentation technique. Students use photos to reflect on their service experience and can weave a main theme or concept learned into actual photographs. These projects are also excellent ones to share with the community, the service sites, for year-end celebrations, or college and other local publications.

Portfolios

This type of documentation has become a vital way for students to record and learn organizational skills throughout the course, with the submission of the portfolio as a final product at the end of the course. Student portfolios could contain any of the following: service learning contract, weekly log, personal journal, directed writings, and photo essay. Also, any products completed during the service experience (i.e., agency brochures, lesson plans, advocacy letters) should be submitted for review.

Finally, students can include a written evaluation essay providing a self-assessment of how effectively they met their learning objectives. Faculty should instruct students to keep content and format professional, as the portfolios are something they can use in job applications and interviews. Students gain organizational skills, a broad list of their skills and abilities, and a final product to use in their life planning and career search.

Publications

Faculty or community partners can assign students to create publications for their service in order to market it