**Reflection in Higher Education Service-Learning**

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|  | *Source: Kara Connors and Sarena D. Seifer,*  *Community-Campus Partnerships for Health, September 2005* | |
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|  | * | **Introduction** |
|  |  | The process of reflection is a core component of service-learning. Service-learning practitioners and researchers alike have concluded that the most effective service-learning experiences are those that provide “structured opportunities” for learners to critically reflect upon their service experience. Structured opportunities for reflection can enable learners to examine and form their beliefs, values, opinions, assumptions, judgments and practices related to an action or experience, gain a deeper understanding of them and construct their own meaning and significance for future actions (Moon 1999). Reflection “facilitates the student's making connections between their service and their learning experience” and indeed the hyphen in the phrase “service-learning” has been interpreted as representing this connection (Eyler and Giles 1999). |
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|  | * | **The Theory Behind Reflection** |
|  |  | Service-learning is deeply rooted in the action-reflection theories of John Dewey and David Kolb, who both describe the importance of combining individual action and engagement with reflective thinking to develop greater understanding of the content being studied (Crews 1999). The process begins with a defining and sharing of the ***“What?”*** of the student's experience and follows a continuous cycle towards ***“So What?”*** and ***“Now What?”.*** Answers to the what, so what and now what questions are tied together to form a comprehensive and integrated discovery and learning cycle for the student throughout the duration of a service-learning experience (Eyler 1999). |
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|  | * | **Strategies for Fostering Reflection** |
|  |  | Effective strategies for fostering reflection are based on four core elements of reflection known as “the four C's” (Eyler and Giles 1999). These elements are described below: |
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|  |  | |  |  | | --- | --- | | **Core Element** | **Definition** | | Continuous | The reflective process is implemented and maintained continuously before, during and after the service-learning experience. | | Connected | The service experience is directly linked, or connected, to the learning objectives of the course or activity and allows for “synthesizing action and thought.” | | Challenging | Learners are challenged to move from surface learning to deeper, critical thinking through the use of thought provoking strategies by the instructor or community facilitator. Since learners may encounter uncomfortable feelings, it is important that the students feel they are in a safe and mutually respectful atmosphere where they can freely express their opinions, ideas and thoughts. | | Contextualized | Reflection is contextualized when it “corresponds” to the course content, topics and experience in a meaningful way. | |
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|  |  | When developing opportunities for reflection in service-learning, it is important to consider students' diverse learning styles. |
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|  |  | Eyler's reflection map template, below, can be a helpful tool for thinking through the various options for incorporating reflection into a service-learning course or program (Eyler 2001). |
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|  |  | |  |  |  |  | | --- | --- | --- | --- | |  | **Before Service Activity** | **During Service Activity** | **After Service Activity** | | **Alone** |  |  |  | | **With Fellow Students** |  |  |  | | **With Community Partners** |  |  |  | |
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|  |  | There are a wide range of meaningful reflective practices and strategies that can be incorporated into service-learning, including the frequently used approaches listed below. The list below was adapted from those developed by The Career and Community Learning Center at the University of Minnesota ([www.servicelearning.umn.edu](http://www.servicelearning.umn.edu/)). They are included here to jump-start your own brainstorming about reflection strategies for your service-learning course or program:   * Have guided discussion questions in large or small groups that challenge students to critically think about their service experiences. * Find events in the community that students can attend together and debrief about afterwards. * Find articles, poems, research, course-related readings, stories, or songs that relate to the service students are doing and create and discuss questions around relevant social issues. Or, ask students to write or bring in such items and describe how it is relevant to or reflects their service experience. * Use case studies or scenarios for students to act out and discuss something they did not know how to handle during their service in the community. Have the students role play appropriate and inappropriate responses to the situation. * Ask students to create a map that shows how their service-learning experience connects to larger issues at the state/national/global level and where community involvement and citizenship fit in. * Have students view a video or documentary to elicit discussion about critical issues that relate to their service experiences. * Write letters-to-the-editor or to government officials that address issues important to the community organizations with which they are working and that can help inform the general public. * Have students make a collage to express how they view their service site and their service. |
|  |  | Have students maintain a print or electronic reflective journal. Writing in journals is widely used by service-learning programs to promote reflection. Journaling exercises are most meaningful when instructors pose key questions for analysis and description concerning their opinions before and after the service-learning experience. |