Reflection Strategies

Reflection is a vital piece of experiential learning as indicated in Kolb's (1984) Experiential Learning Cycle. Reflection helps to guide students through service-learning and connect the service projects to the course. Reflection does not have to focus solely on how students “feel” about their service work. It can include this, but it should also focus on learning outcomes and the work students are doing. It is also an opportunity for students to discuss the service work they are doing and the impacts it has.

This is a guide to reflection and contains different ideas to lead reflection and ways to encourage students to think beyond the daily activities they complete during the course of the service learning project. These are not the only methods that exist to lead reflection but are some ideas that can be used.

Items to include in reflection:
- What are students doing? Can include accomplishments, tangible or intangible outcomes, activities, events, etc.
- What are students learning?
- Are students able to make connections between the course and the service project?

Methods:
- Journals
  - Guided Journal: Provide students with questions to think about their service work, such as: What populations are you serving? Why is there a need to service this population? What are you learning from those you serve? How is this experience different than what you expected to encounter?
  - Personal Journal: Students write freely and regularly about their experience. It is important to encourage student to delve beyond daily activities and event and think critically about overarching themes.
  - Dialogue Journal: Students submit a journal entry weekly or bi-weekly for the instructor to read and comment on. While labor intensive for the instructor, this can provide continual feedback to students and prompt new questions for students to consider during the semester.
  - Highlighted Journal: Before students submit their reflective journal, they reread personal entries and use a highlighter to make sections of the journal that directly relate to the concepts discussed in the course.
  - Key Phrase Journal: As students journal throughout the semester, they are asked to integrate terms and key phrases or concepts within their journal entries. The instructor can provide a list of terms at the beginning of the semester. Journal entries are written within the framework of the course content and become an observation of how course content is evident in the service experience.
Double-Entry Journal: Students are asked to write one-page entries each week. Students describe their personal thoughts and reactions to the service experience on the left page of the journal, and write about key issues from class discussions or readings on the right 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 course content in preparation of a more formal reflection paper at the end of the semester.

Critical Incident Journal: This type of journal entry focuses the student on analysis of a particular event that occurred during the week. By answering one of the following sets of prompts, students are asked to consider their thoughts and reactions and articulate the action they plan to take in the future: Describe a significant event that occurred as a part of the service-learning experience. Why was this significant to you? What underlying issues (societal, interpersonal) surfaced as a result of this experience? How will this incident influence your future behavior?

Three-Part Journal: Students are asked to divide each page of their journal into thirds, and write weekly entries during the semester. In the top section, students describe some aspect of the service experience. In the middle of the page, they are asked to 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.

- Guided In-Class Discussions: Can offer an opportunity for students to answer the same questions a journal entry would ask, but hear stories from other classmates that can prompt further reflection of their own experiences. It can also offer students the outlet to express accomplishments, frustrations and excitement or nerves.
- Presentations: A way for students to share their service-learning experience with peers is to make a class presentation through a video, slide show, bulletin board, panel discussion, or a persuasive speech. This is an opportunity for students to display their work in a public format. A similar presentation can be offered to the community agency as a final recognition of the students’ involvement.
- Small group discussion: Depending on your students, this could produce a deeper reflection. Students may open up more in a smaller group than they would with the whole class. This may also allow for more students to share with each other producing some meaningful discussions.
- Directed Readings: Directed readings are a way to prompt students to consider their service experience within a broader context of social responsibility and civic literacy. Since textbooks rarely challenge students to consider how knowledge within a discipline can be applied to current social needs, additional readings must be added if this is a learning objective of the course. Directed readings can become the basis for class discussion or a directed writing.
- Ethical Case Studies: Ethical case studies give students the opportunity to analyze a situation and gain practice in ethical decision making as they choose a course of action. This reflection strategy can foster the exploration and clarification of values. Students write a case study of an ethical dilemma they have confronted at the service site, including a description of the context, the individuals involved, and the controversy or event that created an ethical dilemma.
- Student Portfolios: This type of documentation has become a vital way for students to keep records and learn organizational skills. Encourage them to take photographs of themselves doing their project, short explanations (like business reports), time logs, evaluations by supervisors or any other appropriate “proof” which could be used in an interview. Require them to make this professional. Keep reminding them that submitting it at the end of the term is only one reason for doing this. “The real reason is to have documentation to present at future interviews. This could be a major factor in distinguishing them from other candidates.” Student portfolios could contain any of the following: service-learning contract, weekly log, personal journal, impact statement, directed writings, photo essay. Also, any products completed during the service experience (i.e., agency brochures, lesson plans, advocacy letters) should be submitted for review. Finally, a written evaluation essay providing a self-assessment of how effectively they met the learning objectives of the course is suggested for the portfolio.
Another way to simply conceptualize reflection is to have students answer these questions:

**What?** Report the facts and events of an experience, objectively.

**So What?** Analyze the experience.

**Now What?** Consider the future impact of the experience on you and the community.

### What?
- What happened?
- What did you observe?
- What issue is being addressed or population is being served?

### So What?
- Did you learn a new skill or clarify an interest?
- Did you hear, smell, or feel anything that surprised you?
- How is your experience different from what you expected?
- What impacts the way you view the situation/experience? (What lens are you viewing from?)
- What did you like/dislike about the experience?
- What did you learn about the people/community?
- What are some of the pressing needs/issues in the community?
- How does this project address those needs?

### Now What?
- What seem to be the root causes of the issue addressed?
- What other work is currently happening to address the issue?
- What learning occurred for you in this experience?
- How can you apply this learning?
- What would you like to learn more about, related to this project or issue?
- What follow-up is needed to address any challenges or difficulties?
- What information can you share with your peers or the community?
- If you could do the project again, what would you do differently?