Academic Service-Learning
Incorporating Reflection into Your Service-Learning Course
Background

The Importance of Reflection

Dewey (1933) explained that, for an activity or project to be educational, it must generate interest; be worthwhile intrinsically; present problems that awaken new curiosity and create a demand for information; cover a substantial time frame; and be capable of fostering development over time (pp. 217-218). Integral, too, to learning from experience is reflecting upon that experience to understand the consequences of that experience.

Since Dewey's time, theorists and researchers from Perry (1968) to Piaget (1970) to Pintrich (1994) have explored the positive role that reflecting upon possible solutions ill-structured problems has upon college students' learning and cognitive, academic, and emotional development.

Besides *reciprocity*, the linchpin to academic service-learning as a pedagogical tool is reflection. When a student is able to reflect on service in the community, he or she learns not just about his or her immediate service but how the knowledge gained from service may be applicable in other situations. The flipside, as Rhoads (1997) explains, is service without reflection, which is not concerned with the community as a whole or beyond that service incident. It follows that, without reflection, no true reciprocity—in which both the community partner and the student benefit from collaborating on sustainable long-term solutions to complex problems—can exist.

In the practice of academic service-learning, reflection may be described as the hyphen between the "service" and the "learning," or the connection that students make between service and their often theory-based academic study (Eyler, 2001, p. 35).

Frameworks for Reflection

Kolb's model for experiential learning (1984, p. 42), based on the process of learning posed by Dewey (1938) and Piaget (1970) and combined with the importance of feedback identified in the theories of action research by Lewin (1951), illustrates how reflection may effect and enhance learning by enabling individuals to think beyond their current, concrete experience toward envisioning the application of learning to new situations.

The ***"What? So What? Now What"*** framework was inspired by Kolb's model. It states that, in the process of reflection, the student should ask at least three main questions:

What?	The student describes the facts of the reflection activity.	• What did you do? • What were the results of your work? • What did you observe around you?
So What?	The student analyses aspects of the reflection activity description in light of the community partner and his/her own values.	• What are the needs of those being served? • Did your service help meet those needs? If not, why not? • How did the service meet or not meet your expectations? • What surprised you? • What did the service reveal about the way you identify yourself and about your values? • What is the relationship between the community you helped serve and the community in which you live/work/study? • What did you learn about the community? • What did you like/dislike about the experience? • How did this service relate to your course curriculum?
Now What?	The student begins to analyze what might be the ongoing impact of the service activity on the community and relates this back to classroom learning.	• What are the larger issues associated with your service? • What sustainable solutions may address these issues? • What did you learn about the community issue in general? • What could you teach others about this issue? • How have you been affected personally by the service?

Eyler, Giles, and Schmiede's framework (1996) offer the four Cs (p. 16) as elements of successful reflection.

> **Continuous**. Reflection is an ongoing part of the course and is continuous through the student's years of service. Reflection occurs before, during, and after service.

> **Connected**. Reflection provides a link between the intellectual and theoretical aspects of academic learning with practical service and connects coursework to the "real world."

> **Challenging**. Reflection pushes students to think in a more critical way about issues, to question their original perceptions of issues, and to develop new frameworks for problem-solving.

> **Contextualized**. Reflection is appropriate for the setting and the context of the service-learning course and to the topics and experience that comprise the content of the course.

Designing Reflection Activities

To be truly effective, reflection, like the community service activity itself, must serve as a vehicle to encourage student learning outcomes in the course.

In addition, the reflection activities chosen for the service-learning course may be as diverse as the types of learners taking a course. Drawing on the work of Homey and Mumford (Organizational Design and Development, Inc., 1989) and Kolb (1984), Eyler, Giles, and Schmiede (1996) offer four learning styles: Activitist, Reflectors, Theorists, and Pragmatists (pp. 50-53). Understanding the learning styles of the students in the class may allow for the development of the most appropriate reflection materials.

> *Activists*: Immerse themselves in new experiences. Like to act first, think later.
> *Reflectors*: Observe and collect data. Weighs pros and cons before acting.
> *Theorists*: Fit problems and solutions into theories. Like to be informed.
> *Pragmatists*: Put theories to practical use. Demonstrate problem-solving.

The choice and form of reflection activities may also be determined by the size of the class, the experience of students in the class with prior service, the faculty member's relationship with the community partner, and the degree of structure, among other factors (Campus Compact, n.d.).

Sample Reflection Activities

Depending on the types, number, and experience of students in the class, reflection activities may focus on reading, doing, writing, or telling. This chart reflects the work of Eyler, Giles, and Schmiede (1996, p. 56-59), although we have included some additional ideas.

READING	DOING
• Case studies • Books about social issues • Government documents • Professional journals • Classic literature	• Simulations and role playing • Ethnographies • Art journals and installations • Multimedia presentations • Watching movies/videos • Making videos and movies • Presentations of dance or music • Event planning • Analyzing or creating agency budgets
WRITING	**TELLING**
• Journals • Blogs and other social media • Reflection essays • Self-evaluation essays • Portfolios • Analysis papers • Case studies • Grant proposals • Press releases • Legislation • Published articles (newspapers, newsletters, journals) • Volunteer/agency training manuals	• Focus groups • Informal group discussions • Formal class discussions • Panel discussions • Presentations to community organizations • Talking to other students • Recruiting other volunteers • Teaching a class • Storytelling • Individual conferences with faculty or project sponsor • Legislative testimony

Frequency of Reflection

To ensure that reflection is truly continuous, Eyler (2001) recommends creating a reflection map to track reflection before, during, and after service. While reflection alone allows for students to assess their expectations and to prepare for class activities, reflection with classmates enables students to make connections with their academic curriculum, as well as to express any hopes or fears they may have before, during, or after service. Reflection with community partners can begin to ensure that the service-learning process is truly marked by reciprocity.

Eyler's (2011) template can be modified for each course.

	Activities *Before* Service	Activities *During* Service	Activities *After* Service
Reflection Alone			
Reflection with Classmates			
Reflection with Community Partners			

With ongoing reflection, student service can take on meaning, inspire learning, and create a culture of civic engagement among students and at the University.

Resources on Reflection

Dewey, J. (1938). *Experience and Education.* New York: Macmillan.

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

Eyler, J. (2001). Creating your reflection map. *New Directions for Higher Education,* 114, pp. 35‐43.

Kolb, D.A. (1984). *Experiential Learning.* Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.

Rhoads, R.A. (1997). *Community Service and Higher Learning: Explorations of the Caring Self.* Albany: State University of New York Press.

Piaget, J. (1970). *Genetic Epistemology.* New York: Columbia University Press.

Structuring the reflection process (n.d.). Retrieved from Campus Compact website

http://www.compact.org/disciplines/reflection/structuring/decisions.html