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Reflection exercises conducted before, during, and after service-learning projects can dramatically improve student learning.

Creating Your Reflection Map

Janet Eyler

Reflection is the hyphen in service-learning; it is the process that helps students connect what they observe and experience in the community with their academic study. In a reflective service-learning class, students are engaged in worthwhile activity in the community, observe, make sense of their observations, ask new questions, relate what they are observing to what they are studying in class, form theories and plans of action, and try out their ideas. The importance of this cycle of action and reflection, of intentional examination of experience, has long been central to practitioner wisdom in the field (Honnet and Poulsen, 1989; Mintz and Hesser, 1997). Growing empirical evidence supports the usefulness of students' analyzing their field experience. Conrad and Hedin's (1980) pioneering study with high school students noted the importance of program quality, including systematic discussion for positive student outcomes. Recent research in higher education has provided considerable additional evidence that quality makes a difference. The most important component of a high-quality program is frequent attention to the reflective process (Eyler, Giles, and Gray, 1999). And while service itself has a positive effect on personal development, if the objectives of service-learning include such cognitive goals as deeper understanding of subject matter, critical thinking, and perspective transformation, intensive and continuous reflection is necessary; little change is produced by classes that have community service as an add-on poorly integrated into the course (Eyler and Giles, 1999). Unfortunately, minimal or sporadic attempts to integrate service into the course are fairly typical of service-learning classes.

Students also stress the importance of reflection in adding value to their service-learning courses. In an exploratory study of reflective techniques in service-learning, sixty-six college students were interviewed about their

experiences with volunteer service and service-learning (Eyler, Giles, and Schmiede, 1996). Students who had been involved with service-learning, in which service and learning were linked through reflective activities, were more likely than their volunteer peers to identify learning as an important outcome of their experience. They identified several important principles that made reflection effective for them. First, reflection should be continuous and not just an assignment or two at the end of a course. Second, reflection needs to connect course content and the community experience explicitly. Third, reflection should be challenging, forcing students to confront their own assumptions and pursue hard questions. Finally, they believed that different contexts called for different types of reflective activities. When possible, reflection should be integrated naturally into the projects and the course and not be viewed as an add-on activity.

Creating or borrowing reflection activities for service-learning classes is not difficult to do, but taking the time to plan systematically for reflection appears to be rare. The reflection map, which contains some sample activities, is a tool to help practitioners organize their thinking about integrating continuous reflective processes into their service-learning practice (Table 4.1). One dimension is the context for reflection—alone, with the class or group, and with the community partner. The second dimension is chronology—before, during, and after service. By focusing on filling each cell of the map during their course planning, instructors can be prepared to challenge their students with continuous reflection.

This chapter describes a number of activities designed to help students reflect in these various ways. (Most of these activities are from Eyler, Giles, and Schmiede, 1996.)

Reflection Before Service

One of the goals of reflective practice in service-learning is to help students become aware of their own assumptions and develop the habit of questioning themselves and others. Before students can challenge their own beliefs about the world, they need to know what they believe about the community, the issues, the people they will work with, and themselves. Asking students to bring to the surface some of these thoughts in an explicit way before they perform their initial service may serve as both a benchmark for later reflection and an exercise that heightens their awareness of the frames of reference that they bring to the new experience. From the beginning, they may experience their service in a more reflective way.

Creating Activities for Reflection Alone. Asking students to explore their expectations and assumptions individually helps prepare them for later class activities designed to stimulate inquiry. One idea for accomplishing this is an activity called *letter to myself*. Students are asked to create a document that they will send to themselves and not open until the end of the service placement or project. A set of questions appropriate to the experi-

Table 4.1. Mapping Service-Learning Reflection

	Activities Before Service	*Activities During Service*	*Activities After Service*
Reflection alone	Letter to myself	Structured journals	Reflective essay
Reflection with classmates	Hopes and fears Giant Likert scale	Service-learning theater Mixed team discussion	Team presentation Collage or mural Video
Reflection with community partners	Planning with community Asset mapping	Lessons learned, debriefing	Presentation to community group

ence and the academic goals of the course should be provided to help structure the letter. For example, students may be asked to describe what they expect the people they will be working with to be like, what their own contributions will be, and what they will see in the community. If the focus of the class includes exploration of social problems, they may be asked to discuss the sources of these problems and possible solutions.

When opened and read weeks later, this letter can be an interesting focus for a personal essay on the journey the student has undertaken in understanding the community, or it may serve as the basis for class discussion of what students have learned during the semester. It is common for students to be unaware of the changes in their thinking over the course of a semester of service-learning because the process may be gradual; seeing their preconceptions can trigger some interesting insights about the experience.

Creating Activities for Reflection with Classmates. Classroom preparation for community service is often focused on logistics and sometimes on training in the skills that will be needed at the service site. However, it is important to prepare students substantively for their service experience as well. Just as encouraging individual exploration of preconceptions prepares the student to be a more thoughtful participant, group activities to "preflect" on the planned service and its possible relationship to the academic study can generate curiosity that the academic portions of the course can help satisfy. The process can also be used to facilitate team planning for service-related activity and inquiry.

One activity to encourage students to begin to think about what they want to know is a brainstorming session on hopes and fears they have for the service experience. Students list these on flip charts and then explore what they need to do to address their fears or realize their hopes. One class studying public policy and soon to embark on an alternative spring break project with an outreach organization working in the area of acquired

immunodeficiency syndrome identified one fear as their own parents' concern about their service with people living with human immunodeficiency virus (HIV). The group identified the specific concerns their parents had expressed and the group's inability to respond to these concerns; this discussion helped the group members to recognize some of their own fears and gaps in their knowledge. They then organized themselves to research some of the issues and drafted a letter to send to their parents detailing their training, safety precautions, and facts they had learned about transmissibility of HIV. This exploration of their own hopes and fears and their parents' concerns was a springboard for substantive preparation for their experience.

Another reflective activity that can challenge assumptions and provoke curiosity about the issues related to the community placement is a giant Likert scale. Preparation of the scale is accomplished by creating a series of statements related to the service or the academic subject matter of the course. Likert anchors ranging from Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree are posted on classroom walls, and students physically place themselves where they belong in response to each of the statements. Following are some of the items used with students about to embark on service projects for their education policy class:

"Teachers in inner-city schools are less competent and caring than teachers in suburban schools."
"Voucher plans would allow any child to attend the private school of his or her choice."
"Students who fail in school usually have parents who don't care much about their progress."
"The most common time for juveniles to commit burglaries and other property crimes is after 11 P.M."

Often groups of students cluster at both the Agree and Disagree polls, and dialogue can be fostered on the spot. Students can then do some preliminary research on these issues and share their findings with the class. This exercise is fun for participants, illuminates assumptions that students bring to the study of the issue, and ignites curiosity, thus preparing students to observe more closely in the community and pursue answers in the library.

Creating Activities for Reflection with Community Partners. Reciprocity is central to effective service-learning, (Honnet and Poulsen, 1989; Sigmon, 1996), yet genuine joint planning of service projects to meet community needs is rare in service-learning classes. We know that interaction with community members contributes to positive student outcomes, but planning for reflection between students and community participants is a challenge. When this sort of reflection is possible, the instructor should create opportunities for students to engage in exploring needs with community members and engage in some mutual planning of the service activity. If this is not feasible for the entire class, sometimes it can be managed by designating student representatives. Sometimes a community project can stretch

over several semesters, with the first team of students planning with the community and then handing off implementation to the next team.

A specific activity that can be conducted with community members and students is community asset mapping (McKnight and Kretzman, 1997). Those engaged in service often concentrate on the negatives about the community, that is, its problems and needs. McKnight and Kretzman argue that it is sometimes more fruitful to think about the strengths or assets of communities. They suggest a process of identifying institutions, associations, individuals, and other positive resources that the community can contribute toward development. This exercise can be the basis for planning a collaboration between student and community groups. It is also a tool that helps students understand that the way a question is framed influences what they observe.

Reflection During Service

Ideally students engage in ongoing reflection throughout their service. Most service-learning classes, particularly those in which only some students are participating in a service option, do not devote a lot of time to discussion of the experiences in the field. It is important to build this process into the class in ways that support course objectives.

Creating Activities for Reflection Alone. Given the demands on classroom time, it is important to create activities to ensure that students do a good deal of thinking about the connections between service and course work on their own. Self-monitoring of the learning process is important for cognitive development. A common choice for individual reflection is the student journal. Some students spontaneously create highly reflective journals, but many others view it as a burden and write either simple descriptive material about where they went and what they did or express their feelings about the events. (Undoubtedly some gather up a handful of different pens and try to create something the night before they turn in their journals.) To push students to observe clearly, raise questions, and make connections continually, instructors should provide some structure for this process and also provide frequent feedback. The journal can be structured many ways around issues emerging in the classroom, but it is useful to provide a few questions that will form a basic template for each entry. For example, early in their service experience, students might be asked: "What were your first impressions? What did you see and hear? Were you surprised by anything you saw? What questions do you have as a result of your experience today?" Later in the service, students can be asked to identify critical incidents and discuss how conflicts were resolved or problems overcome. And as the semester unfolds, they will be able to connect theories from the classroom with their field experiences.

At minimum, students need to describe their experiences in the community, react to those experiences, try to make sense of the experience in the context of what they are learning or have previously learned, and discuss

implications for action. This is the well-known "What? So What? Now What?" process based on Kolb's (1984) cycle of action and reflection. For example, the "Now What?" component may well be questions that need to be answered or perhaps a strategy for doing something different the next time at the community site. These three questions can serve as the basic template for journal writing when other tasks are not assigned.

Instructors who set reflective tasks for the journal and read and respond to them should encourage students to take this process seriously. A structured journal is valuable in two distinct ways. By explicitly linking experience to the course of study, it challenges the student to be thoughtful. Furthermore, it provides a database the student can use to reflect on the entire experience at the end of the service-learning class. Students are often surprised as they read over their journals at how much their thinking about the community and issues changed over the semester. Journals both propel and record this growth. They also provide instructors with a way to monitor experiences and intervene when necessary and, of course, to provide feedback and challenge to students.

Creating Activities for Reflection with Classmates. It is important to create a series of activities over the course of a semester to help students integrate their experiences with their academic course of study. The most obvious reflective technique is the class discussion. The "What? So What? Now What?" structure can be used to help push discussion beyond sharing reactions and observations to linking those observations to course content and future action. Students can also take turns facilitating these discussions.

Service-learning theater is another activity that can engage students. The instructor invites students to construct and enact role-play scenarios around critical incidents from their community service. Classmates then explore the issue, apply insights from their study, and suggest a resolution to the critical incident or draw lessons from it. The critical incidents can be based on specific problems that students experience, such as difficulties in a mentor relationship with a teenager or in planning a community event. They can also be based on situations that the student observes in the field placement, such as the strategies that some recipients of service use to obtain service more effectively or how agencies bend regulations to provide needed service. Students may be invited to construct these incident descriptions in their journals or as written assignments. The instructor can select several journal entries that showcase different issues and concepts relevant to the subject matter of the course. Or students may work in teams to choose an illuminating incident to present.

Some classes make community service an optional assignment. This presents challenges for the instructor, and typically the service component is managed much as a term paper with little integration into the class. One way to integrate the experience of students doing community service with those engaged in more traditional library research is to create classroom teams with representatives from each group. These mixed teams can be assigned discussion topics that require them to share their expertise. For

example, one team of researchers contributed their facts and figures about welfare reform, while those working in a community program for single mothers who were returning to work shared their experiences with families trying to cope with the implementation of those reforms.

Creating Activities for Reflection with Community Partners. Moore (1999) and others have observed that reflection does not necessarily happen spontaneously for students in field settings, and this may restrict the learning that takes place. Part of establishing an effective service-learning site should be attention to the kind of feedback and opportunities for interaction that students will have. When students are engaged in carrying out focused projects, periodic feedback sessions can be built into the schedule. But it is also sometimes possible to arrange for students to be included in the regular debriefings held by community service organizations to critique events or evaluate programs. Just as real-world service adds an important dimension to the students' learning, engaging in debriefing about authentic lessons learned reinforces the importance of reflection as part of effective practice. For example, college students who were tutoring students in an elementary school occasionally were able to join grade-level teacher teams when they met to discuss plans for students. Students working in an emergency management agency met with staff for incident debriefings.

Reflection After Service

Most service-learning classes require a paper or presentation as an end-of-semester assessment of the service activity. If instructors have attended to the first six cells of the map and students have been engaged in reflection and action throughout the course, then students are in a position to create a more thoughtful final project than if it is their first sustained exploration of the experience.

Creating Activities for Reflection Alone. Final reflective essays in which students are challenged to use their journals as a database and to link their experiences in the field with what they have read and discussed in class are powerful learning tools. Essay projects can take a variety of forms. Students might develop position papers on policies affecting the community. They might discuss a theory introduced in the course, drawing from their experience to illustrate the power of that theory to help explain social phenomena. For example, students in a communication class applied different communication theories to their experiences, making contact with and establishing a project with a community group. One advantage of this exercise was that students were able to make sense of their failures in communication as well as document their triumphs. They might also develop videos, short stories, or other artistic expressions of their experience.

Creating Activities for Reflection with Classmates. When students have been engaged in reflection on their community service throughout the semester, one purpose of postservice activities is to bring a sense of closure to the experience. One approach is to have students or student teams pre-

sent projects to the class. The projects already identified as suitable for students to undertake alone may also be part of team efforts. For example, students might present policy options in a mock legislative hearing, with their peers questioning and challenging their positions. Some of the roles of those testifying before the hearing might be drawn directly from the community people whom students have worked with during their service. Consider how powerful the testimony of students on welfare reform might be if they could draw on their experiences working with women struggling to cope with the demands of employment and their family situation with limited resources.

Teams might take theories taught during the course and illustrate how they can be applied in understanding community issues or their community project. Service-learning students may also be teamed with students doing more conventional research and create presentations that draw from both forms of inquiry. For example, a powerful presentation on homelessness might include from the work of the service-learners statistical data, historical analysis of the impact of changes in policy from library research, information about how the community currently provides or does not provide needed service, and examples of individuals who are coping with these systems. Community members might be included in the team presentation.

Another approach is to use artistic expression to pull together the threads of the course and the service experience. Students can create a mural during a final class session, explaining the importance of the symbols they add to it, or construct a collage or sculpture that represents the meaning of their experience. One team of students made a video from snapshots they had taken of their project, creating a narrative about their experiences and what they had learned from them.

Creating Activities for Reflection with Community Partners. Part of the value of service-learning is that students are performing a genuine service for the community. There are few more powerful experiences for students than presenting a project they have developed for a community group to representatives of that group and then fielding questions about it. This is particularly meaningful for students when the original project was planned with those in the community to meet needs they identified. An evaluation plan, a grant proposal, a newsletter, and a community needs assessment are examples of projects that students may share with the community.

Conclusion

Reflection is central to effective service-learning. Helping students question their assumptions, identify questions that arise from their experience, or link what they are learning in the classroom with the lives of communities is a continuing challenge. Using the reflection map to guide course planning will ensure that the reflective process in the classroom is effective.

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JANET EYLER, associate professor of the practice of education at Vanderbilt University, teaches service-learning courses. She received the National Society for Experiential Education's Outstanding Research Award in 1998.

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