



Reflection in Higher Education Service-Learning

Source: K. Connors and S. D. Seifer, *Community-Campus Partnerships for Health*, September 2005

For additional resources on this and other service-learning topics visit Learn and Serve America's National Service-Learning Clearinghouse at <http://www.servicelearning.org>.

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” can have been interpreted as representing this connection (Eyler and Giles 1999). This fact sheet provides an overview of reflection in higher education service-learning and links to helpful resources.

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). Kolb is widely cited for providing a scientific interpretation of reflection (Olson 2000). Kolb illustrates the process of reflection in the Experiential Learning Cycle (Figure 1). 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).

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:

The Experiential Learning Cycle

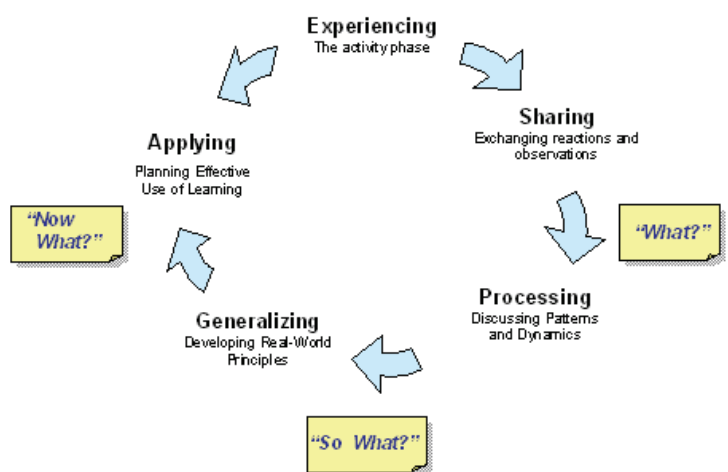


Figure 1.



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.
Contextualized	Reflection is contextualized when it “corresponds” to the course content, topics and experience in a meaningful way.

When developing opportunities for reflection in service-learning, it is important to consider students' diverse learning styles. The most effective reflective practices will appeal to and meet the needs of different student's learning styles.

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). They are included here to jump-start your own brainstorming about reflection strategies:

- Have a speaker on a certain issue that relates to the students' service experiences.
- Have guided discussion questions in groups that challenge students to think critically.
- Find community events that students can attend together and discuss afterwards.
- Find articles, poems, stories or songs, or ask students to create their own, that relate to the service students are doing and create and discuss questions around relevant issues.
- 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.
- Ask students to create a map that shows how their service-learning experience connects to issues at the state/national/global level and where community involvement and citizenship fit in.
- 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.

For a more detailed discussion, including references and documentation, see the complete online fact sheet at http://www.servicelearning.org/instant_info/fact_sheets/he_facts/he_reflection/expanded.php

Suggested Citation: Connors, Kara, and Sarena D. Seifer. *Reflection in Higher Education Service-Learning*. Scotts Valley, CA: Learn and Serve America's National Service-Learning Clearinghouse, 2005/2008.
http://www.servicelearning.org/instant_info/fact_sheets/he_facts/he_reflection/index.php