Reading for Service Learning


The Student Training Manual at the Career and Community Learning Center has a compilation of over 35 different reflection activities and icebreakers.
Reflection

Reflection leads to understanding, which in turn leads to more informed action. Effective reflection leads to a better understanding of social problems and to the quest of better solutions.

Reflection is one of the most important tools necessary to ensuring a successful service-learning experience. It is the means through which someone can make sense of what they are seeing and doing and learn from it. Reflection activities can include writing a journal, newsletter, poem, or report; using art such as painting a mural, making a sculpture, or putting together a scrapbook of photos; being involved with activities that stimulate conversation and reflection such as camping, hiking, playing a sport, quilting, or just having tea. In the classroom more structured reflection activities such as directed reading, student narratives, ethical case studies, and experiential research papers are often used.

“Tell me, and I forget, show me and I remember, involve me, and I understand.” – Confucius

“We come to terms as well as we can with our lifelong exposure to the world, and we use whatever devices we may need to survive. But eventually, of course, our knowledge depends upon the living relationship between what we see going on and ourselves. If exposure is essential, still more so is the reflection. Insight doesn’t happen often on the click of the moment like a lucky snapshot, but comes in its own time and more slowly and from nowhere but within.” – Eudora Welty

The complete reflection process is essentially never-ending and consists of pre, during, and post community involvement reflection. It stays with students during every step of their journey and assists them in searching through the basic questions of: what, so what, and now what? According to the “Practitioners Guide to Reflection in Service-Learning,” there are four important principles to keep in mind for effective critical reflection which they call the four C’s of reflection: Continuous, Connected, Challenging, and Contextualized.

Continuous reflection ensures that reflection, as well as community involvement, are ongoing components in the learners education. Often early short-term experiences can lead to more complex long-term involvement which gives the student extensive material for observation, reflection, and experimentation. (see Kolb’s Experiential Learning Cycle later in this section). Continuous Reflection also means that reflection should be utilized before, during, and after an experience.

“Service experiences illustrate theories and concepts, bringing statistics to life and making academics real and vivid. Through classroom work, in turn, students begin to develop conceptual frameworks that explain service experiences. And intensive service-learning experiences can also serve as capstone courses to integrate concepts across the curriculum. Academic pursuits add a “big picture” context to the personal encounters of each isolated service experience and help students to search for causes and solutions to social problems.”
Get Up, Get Into It, Get Involved!!!

Again this spring, the Career and Community Learning Center is offering a fun and interactive 3-hour pre-entry training for service learning students who will be working out in the community. The training addresses critical issues such as systematic oppression, diversity, active listening, how to respectfully enter a community, and the notion of “service.” The pre-entry training is the first of a community involvement/critical thinking series that continues throughout each semester. The second portion of the training consists of informal Coffee Hours with guest speakers, guided discussion, and other activities relevant to community work. Such interaction with other service learning students doing community work provides a supportive, problem-solving forum through which students can learn more about social issues as well as find out other ways to participate in improving communities. The entire series provides a space for students to continue to connect with, share, and learn from each other and their experiences.

Dates for Fall 2003 Pre-Entry Training:

Monday, September 15, 2003  Basic Sciences 2-101  5:30-8:30pm
Wednesday, September 17, 2003  Basic Sciences 2-101  5:30-8:30pm
Tuesday, September 23, 2003  Basic Sciences 2-101  5:30-8:30pm
Thursday, September 25, 2003  Basic Sciences 2-101  5:30-8:30pm
Monday, September 29, 2003  Basic Sciences 2-101  5:30-8:30pm
Wednesday, October 1, 2003  Basic Sciences 2-101  5:30-8:30pm
Saturday, October 4, 2003  U-YMCA Great Hall  10:00am-1:00pm
Tuesday, October 7, 2003  Basic Sciences 2-101  5:30-8:30pm

For further info, or to RSVP contact Heidi Rivers at hrivers@class.clu.umn.edu or call 612-626-2044.

Funding provided by the University of Minnesota Community Initiative in partnership with Coca-Cola.
Doing Reflection On-Site at Your Organization

Your Role as Co-Educator

The training and classroom reflection activities are not enough to ensure effective reflection. One of the best places for reflection to take place is at the community organization site. This is highly effective because it brings together students who are engaged in very similar work and allows them as a group to reflect on how that work relates to their lives and the world around them. As experts in their field, reflection activities also give site coordinators a chance to really stand in their role as a co-educator in service-learning and provide deep insight and guidance to students about the work they are doing and the bigger picture issues that surround it. In addition, students the chance connect-with and give feedback to their site coordinators as they share their experiences.

Reflection activities can be structured in a variety of ways from scheduled group meetings to one-on-one informal discussions. There could be organized speakers, activities that allow an individual to express themselves creatively, role playing, group activities, or just open discussion forums. It is important to get feedback from the students to find out what kinds of things they would most like to see at a reflection session. It is also important to keep in mind that everyone has a different learning styles and different ways of expressing themselves. Some ideas would be:

- Discuss and/or have a speaker on a certain issue that relates to the work being done, whether it is something related to the worksite or a larger social issue.
- Have guided discussion questions to be discussed in large and/or small groups that challenge the students to critically think about their experience.
- Give students a deeper connection to the community they are working in by having reflection meetings at different places in the community.
- Find events in the community that students can attend together and organize a reflection session around that.
- Find articles, poems, stories, songs that relate to the work the students are doing and discuss and create questions around which to discuss the article.
- Use Case Studies or Role Plays to allow students both act out and discuss something they did not know how to handle. 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-where does community involvement and citizenship fit in?
- Use a video or documentary to elicit discussion.
- Write letters-editor, paper, government officials that speak out on issues that are important to the students and the community organization or that help inform the general public.
- Make a collage that has the student express how they view their work site and their work.
- Ask students to bring in a song that reflects their community involvement experience. Have them play it for the class and tell why they chose it.
- Have students write a poem that reflects their community involvement experience.
- Use other structured reflection activities that will help stimulate thought and discussion about their work, their life, how these things are deeply connected to larger social issues, and how to continue to take action for social change.