Service-Learning Reflection Resources

Reflection is an essential part of service-learning as it encourages students to make meaningful connections between their service-learning experiences and their classroom content, thereby enhancing learning. By doing reflection before, during, and/or after service-learning students can develop their critical thinking skills, articulate their intellectual and emotional development, enhance their personal relevance in their service, and develop a greater civic capacity.

Reflection activities should be designed based on your service-learning outcomes. Consider which of these activities will best support your outcomes. Reflection activities and assignments are a way to formally and informally assess if students are achieving your desired outcomes. Reflection can be done in or out of class.

Below are some informal and formal reflection ideas to get you started. The resources are divided in four parts: Reflection Questions, Briefer Reflection Activities, Rigorous Academic Links, and Presenting Culmination of Experience.1

1 Compiled by Katie Halcrow, Director of Service Learning, Inver Hills Community College. Reflection activities marked with an asterisk (*) are taken from “Reflection Activities: Tried and True Teaching Methods to Enhance Students’ Service-Learning Experience,” a packet compiled by Professor Diane Sloan, Miami Dade College, and based on the work of Julie Hatcher and Robert Bringle’s “Reflection Activities for the College Classroom” (Indiana University – Purdue University Indianapolis) packet.

**Reflection Questions**

1. **Sample Reflection Questions:** Reflection questions can be used in a variety of formats to prompt students to connect their service experience to the course, articulate their feelings, and consider the social considerations raised by their service. You can use the questions in structured class discussions, in online discussions, as prompts for writing assignments, etc.

   **Academic:**
   1) How is your service relevant to what you are learning in this course?
   2) Connect three course concepts to your service hours.
   3) How does the information you have learned during your service hours support the literature you have been reading? How does it contradict it?
   4) What skills have you enhanced as a result of this experience? How will they support you in your career?

   **Community:**
   1) What is “community”? How will you help build or sustain community at your organization?
   2) How is the community a teacher in your learning? What have you learned from staff, volunteers, and from those accessing services?
   3) Has your understanding of community changed from your participation? Why or why not?

   **Perceptions:**
   1) What did you expect to happen that happened? What didn’t you expect to happen that happened? Why did you think you had these expectations?
2) Do you have any thoughts/feelings about the social issue(s) your organization is addressing? If so, do they stem from facts/experience or from something someone told you – such as a teacher, parent, media?

3) What does it mean to be underprivileged? What does it mean to be privileged? How has your socio-economic status impacted your own life? How can understanding privilege/underprivilege assist you and the community?

Impact:
1) Did anything surprise you? If so, what?
2) What did you do that made you feel that you made a difference? Why?
3) Did anything happen that made you feel comfortable/uncomfortable? If so what, and why do you think it made you feel this way?
4) What are the most difficult and most satisfying parts of the service you are performing? Why?
5) Describe what you have learned about yourself as a result of your service.

(Robin Bendig, University of Nevada—Reno)

2. **Think, Pair, Share:** Ask students one of the questions from the sets below. Give students time to think about the question on their own; then ask them to pair with a partner to discuss the idea. Finally, have each partner group share their findings/thoughts with the class. Discuss. These same questions can also be used in a variety of in and out of class formats.

**Beginning of Semester Questions:**
1) How do you predict your service will relate to the class content?
2) What is the identified problem/community need?
3) How is your community partner site addressing that need?
4) What are some of your perceptions or beliefs about the population you will be serving?
5) What fear, if any, do you have about working in the community?
6) What do you hope to gain from this experience?

**During the Semester Questions:**
1) How does your service learning experience relate to the learning objectives of the course?
2) What did you do at your site since the last reflection discussion?
3) What did you observe?
4) What did you learn?
5) What has worked? What hasn't?
6) What do you think is (will be) the most valuable service you can offer at your site?

**End of Semester Questions:**
1) How does your service learning experience relate to the learning objectives of the course?
2) What have you learned about yourself?
3) What have you learned about your community?
4) What have you contributed to the community site?
5) What values, opinions, beliefs have changed?
6) What was the most important lesson learned?
7) How have you been challenged?
8) What should others do about this issue?
9) What impact did you have on the community?

(Questions from Channel Islands, California State University)
Briefer Reflection Activities:

2. **Critical Incident Journal**: This type of journal entry focuses the student on analysis of a particular event that occurred during the week. By answering the following prompts students are asked to consider their thoughts and reactions.
   1) Describe a significant event that occurred as a part of the service-learning experience. Why was it significant to you? What underlying issues (societal, interpersonal) surfaced as a result of the experience? How will this incident influence your future behavior? (Hatcher 1996)

3. **Four-Part Table**: Students divide a piece of paper with the sections to the right. This helps students to:
   1) Differentiate between thought and feeling
   2) Construct new knowledge
   3) Ask questions about their experience
   4) Think critically for the development of analytical essays.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What happened?</th>
<th>How do I feel?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ideas</td>
<td>Questions</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

   This table can also be adapted using different figures/concepts within each box. (Cathy Kaye, 2012 National Service Learning Conference)

4. **Free Association Brainstorming**: (This reflection session should take place no earlier than the end of the first 1/3 of the project experience.) Give each student 10 – 20 post-its and ask them to write down all the feelings (one per post-it) they had when they first heard about their service-learning requirement. Then, have them write down all of the feelings they had when they experienced their first “field encounter.” Next, have them write down all of the feelings they are having right now regarding their service-learning experience. Have three newsprint papers taped to the walls around the classroom. Have one with a happy large face, one with a sad face, and one with a bewildered face. Ask the students to place their words on the newsprint paper that closest fits their feelings. Then, have them stand next to the newsprint that has most of their feeling and talk about why. (Sloan 1996)

5. **Quotes**: Quotes may be used in a variety of ways. You might give each student a page of quotes and ask them to pick one that fits his/her feeling about the service-learning project. Then you could ask them to explain why this quote represents his/her feelings. The students could also do it as a one-minute paper that might then be read and explained to the rest of the class. Here are some quotes as examples you might want to use:
   1) “If we do not act, we shall surely be dragged down the long, dark and shameful corridors of time reserved for those who possess power without compassion, might without morality, and strength without insight.” - Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.
   2) “A different world cannot be built by indifferent people.” - Horace Mann
   3) “I believe that serving and being served are reciprocal and that one cannot really be one without the other.” - Robert Greenleaf, Educator and Writer

(Diane Sloan, Miami Dade College)
6. **Quotes in Songs**: Ask the student to find a song where the singer uses lyrics that describe what s/he feels about service-learning project. Students can post the song lyrics online or provide a link to the song and describe how this describes their feelings. (Adapted from Prof. Gwen Stewart’s song speech, Miami Dade College)

7. **Select a Superhero**: Give students this prompt: Based on your service-learning experience, choose the one community concern you think is most important. Which superhero is most up to the job of fixing this issue? (Afterward: Who are real-world people that can help?) (Katie Halcrow, Inver Hills Community College)

8. **Bumper Sticker**: Create a bumper sticker that captures what you learned and/or speaks to the community need you saw in your experience. (Create an ad campaign that addresses this community need.) (Katie Halcrow, Inver Hills Community College)

9. **Professional Goals**: Give students one of these prompts:
   1) Think about the work you are doing for your Service-Learning experience. What are your future professional goals? What are you doing in this experience right now that you think will be important for your profession?
   2) Pretend that you’re in an interview and your potential employer asks you what you learned during your Service-Learning experience. How would you respond? (Katie Halcrow, Inver Hills Community College)

10. **Resume Updates**: Have students update their resume or create a resume section that includes three bullet points about the activities they did and skills they developed while serving. Encourage students to think about the hard and soft skills they developed. (Cindy Carow Schiebe, Normandale Community College)

11. **D2L Discussion Groups**: With D2L students can create a dialogue with the instructor and peers involved in the service project. Students write weekly summaries and identify critical incidents that occurred at the service site. Students can rotate as a moderator of the discussion every two weeks. Instructors can post questions for consideration and topics for directed writings. (Diane Sloan, Miami Dade College)

12. **Service-Learning Panel**: If some members of your class did service-learning but some did not have the whole class engage in a service-learning panel. Have the students who did not do service ask questions of their peers who did service. This enables those students who did not do service to still learn about the experiences and connections their peers experienced though service-learning. (Dave Lake, Normandale Community College)
Rigorous Academic Links: Journaling, Reading, and Writing as Reflection

1. **Personal Journal**: Students write freely about their experience at set intervals. Personal journals may be submitted periodically to the instructor, or kept as a reference to use at the end of the experience when putting together an academic essay reflecting their experience. *Note:* Oftentimes journal writing can become a log of events rather than a reflection activity in which students consider the service experience in the context of learning objectives. Guidance is needed to help student’s link personal learning with course content. (Hatcher 1996)

2. **Dialogue Journal**: Students routinely submit loose-leaf pages from a dialogue 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. (Goldsmith 1995)

3. **Highlighted Journal**: Before students submit the reflection journal, they reread personal entries and, using a highlighter, mark sections of the journal that directly relate to concepts discussed in the text or in class. This makes it easier for the instructors to identify students’ learning and, more importantly, necessitates that students reflect on their experience in light of course content. (Gary Hesser, Augsburg College)

4. **Key Phrase Journal**: In this type of journal, students are asked to integrate terms and key phrases within their journal entries. The Instructor can provide a list of terms at the beginning of the semester or for a certain portion of the text. Journal entries are written within the framework of the course content and become an observation of how the course content is evident in the service experience. (Hatcher 1996)

5. **Double-entry Journal**: When using a 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 the 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 the course content. This type of journal can be 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. (Angelo and Cross 1993)

6. **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. (Bringle 1996)

7. **Reflection Essays**: Reflective essays are a more formal example of journal entries. Essay questions are provided at the beginning of the semester and students are expected to submit two or three essays during the term. Reflective essays can focus on academic connections to the course content, personal development, and/or ideas and recommendations for future action. (Chris Koliba, Georgetown University)
8. **Directed Writings***: Directed writings ask students to consider the service experience within the framework of course content. The Instructor identifies a section from the textbook or class readings (i.e., quotes, statistics, and concepts) and structures a question for students to answer. A list of directed writings can be provided at the beginning of the semester, or given to students as the semester progresses. Directed writings provide opportunity for application and critical analysis of the course content. (Diane Sloan, Miami Dade College)

9. **Experiential Research Paper***: An experiential research paper is a formal paper that asks students to identify a particular experience at the service site and analyzes that experience within the broader context in order to make recommendations for change. Mid-semester, students are asked to identify an underlying issue they have encountered at the service site. Students then research the issue and read three to five articles on the topic. Based on their experience and library research, students make recommendations for future action. (Julie Hatcher, Indiana University—Purdue University Indianapolis)

10. **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 context, the individuals involved, and the controversy or event that created an ethical dilemma. Case studies are read in class or posted on D2L and students discuss the situation and identify how they would respond. (David Lisman, Colorado College)

**Presenting Culmination of Experience**

1. **Student Portfolios***: This allows students to keep records, learn organizational skills, and document experience they can talk about in future applications and job interviews. 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 meet the learning objectives of the course is suggested for the portfolio. (Diane Sloan, Miami Dade College)

2. **Class Presentations***: Students can share their service-learning experience with peers through class presentations which may include a video, slide show, or a persuasive speech. (Diane Sloan, Miami Dade College)