

Reflection Toolbox

Structured Reflection: Snapshots Along the Way



Reflection is the process of encouraging the participants to engage in critical thinking skills in order to prepare for and learn from the service activity. Reflection is an essential component of effective service-learning, yet it is often neglected. Many feel that it is the most important step in the process. It provides a time to capture valuable knowledge and integrate it into the mindset of the participant.

One reason reflection is important is because service-learning often introduces the participant to new relationships, experiences, questions, and feelings. Without reflection, there is no way of knowing how the participants are reacting to these new experiences or what they are learning from them. Unless there is an opportunity to share in a reflection, that which is not addressed may not be understood.

Reflection provides the coordinator with an opportunity to check on how the group is doing on the established learning objectives and to evaluate the project. Those students who are giving time and energy, gain in knowledge and skills as they actively engage in preparing for and looking back at what has been accomplished. This process extends the experience of giving from a one-sided venture to true sharing in which the person who gives will also get back.

By adding reflection, we can create deeper, longer-lasting, positive outcomes for participants. If learning objectives are the road map, and meaningful service the vehicle, then reflection is the snapshots we take along the way. Like photography, reflection allows us to frame or focus on an experience as it takes place, and also to remember it and talk about it afterward. Reflection allows us to see things in a different way. It can help us to better appreciate all that we've experienced.

Toolbox for Reflection:

There are a wide variety of reflection techniques. Reflection activities can be as simple as a facilitated discussion or, by contrast, can incorporate varied forms of expression including writing, arts activities, dance, music, theater, photography, and other oral presentations. The use of many different types of reflection activities will sustain the interest of participants and draw on their varied learning styles.

In every case, effective service-learning experiences provide opportunities for participants to reflect before, during and after the service project. While topics for reflection are tied to the learning objectives, they also can expand to include the unexpected "teachable moments" which have occurred during the experience.

Some starter reflection questions:

One thing that is important to remember is that reflection should happen throughout the

service-learning experience. Here are some starter reflection questions to guide a basic discussion:

Pre-project reflection: What are we going to do? Why? Are we prepared? Does everyone know what is expected of them? Are we all on the same page? What ideas do I have about the community or group with which I will be working?

Mid-project reflection: Are we still learning and growing? Are we doing what we originally set out to do? If not, is that okay? What are some of the frustrations of this project? Can we do anything about them?

Post-project reflection: What did I learn? Who did I help? When in their lives and in mine did it occur? Did it meet their needs? Could I do it better next time? Are there other things that I can do now to address the need? Do I view my community differently because of my involvement in this experience? If so, how? Are my ideas different from the ones I had before the experience?

Journal Writing

Sample instructions: *This is an opportunity for you to capture the present, to hold on to what you have experienced, and to think about what you want to take home with you. Please respond to each of the questions, and then feel free to write down or draw other thoughts that occur to you.*

OR: *Take a few minutes to think about the experiences you have had today. Think about the feelings, ideas, concerns, and dreams that you will take away with you as a result of your actions today. Please write down some of the key things that you want to remember about today.*

OR: *Think about and describe the most significant idea, concept, or insight you have discovered today. Why is it important to you?*

OR : *What is one thing you are going to do that is new or different as a result of this experience?*

Graffiti Wall

Sample instructions: Please go over to the graffiti wall, where there are some questions to ponder and answer. Grab a marker and write down your own thoughts, ideas, feelings, and insights. Feel free to be anonymous or to identify your ideas by writing your name beside your comments. (Note: Coordinators should post newsprint with one question per page.)

What is one word you would use to describe your experience today?

What did you enjoy most about the day? Why?

What are some of the concerns that you have about what you experienced today?

What was the funniest part of this experience for you?

What is the most valuable thing you experienced or learned today and why was it valuable to you?

What is one thing that you intend to do differently as a result of what you have learned today?

What is one recommendation you would make to improve the process?

How did you contribute to the learning of others today?

What are some of the skills, talents, or abilities that you can contribute to help your project succeed?

Bumper stickers

Sample instructions: Find a partner. Take a few minutes to talk to one another about the experiences you have had today. Share your ideas about the most important things that you have learned. Then create a bumper sticker that tells the essence of your joint experience.

Skit

Sample instructions: With the other people in the group, develop a skit that includes some of the do's and don'ts you discovered in relation to your service project (for example, how to do certain tasks; how not to relate to other people). Please include the props found in this bag. (Note: include some props related to the project, and some odd ones, e.g., a banana, a bandanna, a CD.)

Mind Mapping

Sample instructions: On an outline of a sun burst (a sun with rays) or a wagon wheel drawn on newsprint, generate words that describe the experience that you have had today and the significant things you have felt, seen, or learned. Once you have generated 15-25 words, begin to develop sentences that include these words. Put all the words into sentences. Place the sentences in a sequential order, feeling free to add more ideas as you go. Once all of your words and sentences have been put into a paragraph form, invite someone in the group to read the paragraph out loud to the entire group when it reconvenes.

Commercial

Sample instructions: As a small group, create a service-learning commercial to act out for the entire group. It should reflect some of the insights you have gained today. The purpose of this commercial is up to you. You may want to convince your community to support service-learning. You may want to sell your project to the next group of people to participate, etc. Your commercial may be of a serious or humorous nature. As with real TV, you can have up to one minute of air time for your commercial.

Emotional Whip

In this exercise, the coordinator asks participants to show-with a word, body movement, or facial expression-how they feel right at that moment. Ask each person to show a reaction, one at a time and then ask each person to explain the feeling. This activity can give the facilitator a sense of the group mood and gives participants a chance to express how they feel.

Visualization

Coordinators should take your participants on an imaginary tour of their service experience.

Ask participants to find a comfortable position (laying down on the floor, head on table, lounging in a chair), and close their eyes. Play relaxing instrumental music at a low volume. Ask participants to become aware of their breathing. Ask them to leave behind

their present thoughts and clear their minds. Once the participants appear to have achieved a relaxed state, ask them to begin remembering their service experience. To assist them in remembering their experience, mention common events. Allow participants to remember how they felt before they performed the meaningful service, what their expectations were, what happened in their preparation, and how they felt during their service experience. To stimulate their thinking, you might mention some of what you remembered. Slowly bring them back to the present. Ask them to become aware of their surroundings, to again concentrate on their breathing, and to open their eyes when they are ready. Ensure that a quiet tone is maintained. Continue to play music. Ask each participant to share his or her reflections with another and end with people volunteering to make comments to the whole group.

Group Banners

If you are coordinating a project where there are already small groups, keep participants in those groups. If not, then break the big group into smaller groups of five or six. Supply each group with a piece of banner paper and markers and ask group members to depict its experience using a combination of words and pictures. Give them about 10-15 minutes. When they have finished, ask each team to share its banner with the whole group. Use the banners as a starting point for discussing and reflecting upon the experience.

Ball of String

Have the group stand in a circle. Give someone the ball of string and ask them a question, or ask them to reflect on a particular question (e.g., what was one thing you learned today?). Once they have answered the question ask them to hold onto one end of the string and to throw the ball to someone else. Have the second person answer the same question, holding onto one end of the string and passing it on to the next person. Continue the process until everyone has reflected on the question. When everyone has spoken, you should have something that looks like a web. At this point, the coordinator should make points about the interconnectedness of people, how they were all part of the solutions, how the outcome would be different if everyone had not participated, etc.

Discussion Groups

In small or large groups, ask participants, questions that will help them process their service experience. Some sample questions might include:

What difference have you really made in your community?

Where might you apply this new knowledge to other parts of your life?

What things do you see differently as a result of your service?

What have you learned about yourself?

What new views do you have of groups and individuals?

Time Capsule

As participants are preparing for a project, have them put memorabilia related to the process together in the form of a time capsule. This could include information about the topic they had researched, a training agenda, dirt from a gardening project, etc. In addition to the objects, ask participants to write down how they are feeling at different points of the project (what they expected before they began, how they felt about the preparation, how they felt the first time they did service as part of the project). Put everything into a "capsule" that will be opened, read aloud and discussed (perhaps

anonymously) at the end of the experience. This is particularly good for a long-term project or for a long-term service-learning program.

Before and After Pictures

Pictures are especially effective for cleanup or renovation projects. Ask participants to draw, color, paint, etc., pictures of the park before they begin to clean it up. Chances are the pictures will include trash, broken bottles, rusty playground equipment, etc. After the project is complete, have the participants create another picture. Lay the pictures side by side and let them discuss the changes and positive impact they made.