

# Reflection Activities: Service-Learning's Not-So-Secret Weapon

So you've decided you want to use Service-Learning in your classroom to give your students a way to use the skills they're learning in their course to meet an authentic community need. *Awesome*. You've taken the first step to making the most of this fabulous high-impact practice.

Reflection is your second.

Although much of the power of learning is in the action of *doing* the activity, reflection is the necessary link between students' Service-Learning experiences and their classroom learning, and it also provides a medium through which they can articulate their own intellectual and emotional development throughout the semester.

This packet provides a variety of traditional as well as creative reflection techniques that you can incorporate into your course as classroom activity or as an outside assignment. Feel free to take and tweak to your classroom as you see fit – as you'll see, there are a WIDE variety of possibilities!

*Compiled by Katie Halcrow, Director of Service Learning, Inver Hills Community College, and incorporating the work of Professor Diane Sloan's "Reflection Activities: Tried and True Teaching Methods to Enhance Students' Service-Learning Experience"<sup>1</sup> (Miami Dade College).*

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<sup>1</sup> Reflection activities marked with an asterisks (\*) are taken verbatim 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); reflection activities marked with a double asterisks (\*\*) have been adapted from the aforementioned packet.

## Reflection Activities: In and Out of Class

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

What happened?	How do I feel?
Ideas	Questions

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

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 one of the following sets of prompts, students are asked to consider their thoughts and reactions and articulate the action they plan to take in the future. Sharing these in class after students complete the assignment can be a powerful learning experience for all students.
  - a. Prompt 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?
  - b. Prompt 2: Describe an incident or situation that created a dilemma for you in terms of what to say or do. What is the first thing you thought of to say or do? List three other actions you might have taken. Which of the above seems best to you now and why do you think this is the best response?  
(Hatcher 1996 )
3. **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 they had when they first heard about their service-learning requirement. After they finish the first question, have them write down all of the feelings they had when they experienced their first “field encounter.” After finishing questions two completely, have them write down all of the feelings they are having “right now” regarding their service-learning experience. Encourage them to write down as many different brainstormed thoughts as possible (one for each card). Have three newsprint papers strategically located and 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 now place their words on the newsprint paper that closest fits their brainstormed feelings. Then, have them stand next to the newsprint that has most of their feeling. This exercise involves both writing and speaking and is seen as non-threatening in an oral presentation sense. (Sloan 1996)

4. **Quotes\***: Using quotes can be a useful way to initiate reflection because there is an ample supply of them, and they are often brief and inspiring. Here are some quotes as examples you might want to use:
  - a. "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.*
  - b. "A different world cannot be built by indifferent people." -Horace Mann
  - c. "I believe that serving and being served are reciprocal and that one cannot really be one without the other." - *Robert Greenleaf, Educator and Writer*
  - d. "Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world: indeed, it's the only thing that ever has." - *Margaret Mead*
  - e. "Unless you choose to do great things with it, it makes no difference how much you are rewarded, or how much power you have." - *Oprah Winfrey*

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 best results seem to be when the students are given the sheet one session before the reflection class. This gives them time to put their thoughts together. The students could also do it as a one-minute paper that might then be read and explained to the rest of the class. (Diane Sloan, Miami Dade College)

5. **Quotes in Songs\***: Ask the student to find a song where the singer uses lyrics that describe what he/she feels about service-learning project. Emphasize that it does not need to be a whole song but lyric in a song. If they have access to the song, tell them to bring it to play at the end of the reflection session. Even if they do not have the song, ask them to "say" the lyric that describes their feelings. This usually proves to be "fun" in a sense that it creates a casual atmosphere and bonds the group together. Many times others will help by trying to sing it with them. Playing the song usually creates a celebratory atmosphere. You might also bring a bag of Hershey's kisses, or something similar to keep the festive spirit going.

(Adapted from Prof. Gwen Stewart's song speech, Miami Dade College)

6. **Creative Questions:** These kinds of questions can get students to think abstractly, critically, and/or creatively about their service experience – especially about the emotions they may be experiencing.
- What is the weather of your experience? Sunny skies? Cloudy? Thunderstorms? Explain.
  - What is the color of your Service-Learning experience? Explain.
  - Look at this chart of faces below. What is the face of YOUR Service-Learning experience? Why?  
[http://2.bp.blogspot.com/\\_TT9hGUvIsCA/TNsmPtdQFAI/AAAAAAAAAB8/Asi5sBylouk/s1600/howfeel.GIF](http://2.bp.blogspot.com/_TT9hGUvIsCA/TNsmPtdQFAI/AAAAAAAAAB8/Asi5sBylouk/s1600/howfeel.GIF)
  - What kind of animal are you most like during your Service-Learning experience? Why?
  - Put yourself anywhere in nature that you like to go. What in that visual connects with \_\_\_\_\_? (Insert part of the Service-Learning experience.)
  - Based on your Service-Learning experience, choose the one community concern you think is most important. Which superhero and/or cartoon character 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)

7. **Short-Takes (Or Longer).**

a. ***Sports Analogies:***

- Baseball, Volleyball, and Soccer each have their own set of rules of the game. What's one rule of your Service-Learning experience? What would happen if someone broke this rule? (Write a rulebook of your Service-Learning experience. Include penalties/consequences.)
  - Each of those sports also has a playbook. What's the best play you've seen while participating in this Service-Learning experience? Why? (Write a playbook of at least five "plays" that are (1) sure to help you/your group perform well in your Service-Learning experience OR (2) important to know for the profession.)
- b. ***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.)
- c. ***Dinner Guest:*** If you could have one person from your Service-Learning experience over for dinner, who would you invite and what would you serve? Why? (Depending on assignment, this could be a short or long response.)

(Katie Halcrow, Inver Hills Community College)

8. **It's Your Thing/Express Yourself\*\***: Tell students that they will have the opportunity to create their own version of their feelings toward the service-learning project. The content of the creation must be linked to course content, but the *forms* do not; rather, they can simply be a way for students to approach reflection that allows them to express themselves as individuals. However, the creative form *can* be linked to skills in the class (when appropriate) to provide a medium for reflection as well as skills assessment. ANYTHING goes – just be sure to require that it must be some kind of individual work that he/ she have created. Here are some ideas:
- a. Draw/paint/sculpt the most important person/place/object of your experience. Include an artist's statement.
  - b. Create a photo album (with captions) of your experience.
  - c. Create a collage that captures the various emotions you felt and work you did during your Service-Learning experience.
  - d. Write a haiku poem (or series of poems) that captures your experience and/or describes the community need and/or describes someone with whom you had meaningful contact during your experience.
  - e. Make a music video or write a song/rap that captures your experience.
  - f. Write a short script and/or create a play that captures your experience.
  - g. Write about your experience in the form of a business memo/email correspondence.
  - h. Create a blog that shows your experience and what you learned.

(Adapted from Multiple Intelligence exercise created by Prof. Michael and Donna Lenaghan, Miami Dade College)

9. **It's My Bag\***: Tell the students to find a bag at home (any bag). Then tell them to fill it with one (or two-depending on time) item(s) that remind them of how they feel about their service-learning project. Tell them to bring this bag with item(s) to the reflection session, and have them explain their items to the rest of the class. The items that they bring usually turn out to be inspiring visual aids that bring out some great comments.

\*\*Note: this can be done online with pictures of the objects.\*\*

(Adapted through a speech exercise provided by Prof. James Wolf 1998)

10. **Think, Pair, Share:** Ask students one of the questions from the sets below OR ask a question created from the Depth of Knowledge (DOK) Levels wheel. 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. (Depending on the level of the question, this can take anywhere from 10 minutes to the entire class period.)

a. Beginning of Semester Questions:

- What is the identified problem/community need?
- How is your community partner site addressing that need?
- Why are you needed?
- What are some of your perceptions or beliefs about the population you will be serving?
- What fear, if any, do you have about working in the community?
- What do you hope to gain from this experience?

b. During the Semester Questions:

- How does your service learning experience relate to the learning objectives of the course?
- What did you do at your site since the last reflection discussion?
- What did you observe?
- What did you learn?
- What has worked? What hasn't?
- What do you think is (will be) the most valuable service you can offer at your site?
- Is there something more you could do to contribute to the solution?

c. End of Semester Questions:

- What have you learned about yourself?
- What have you learned about your community?
- What have you contributed to the community site?
- What values, opinions, beliefs have changed?
- What was the most important lesson learned
- How have you been challenged?
- What should others do about this issue?
- What impact did you have on the community?

(Questions from Channel Islands, California State University)

11. **Thought Progression:**

- a. ***New Eyes:*** Choose a picture that connects to students' service experience. Instruct them to look at the picture and write down what they see. Then, have them look at the picture again and find something they hadn't seen before. Finally, have them look again and find something they didn't see the first two times. What had they missed at first? Why? How does this relate to what they're learning in their experience?
- b. ***Times Change:*** Give students this prompt:  
Think about the first day of your Service-Learning experience: what was your biggest challenge? What was your biggest challenge mid-way through the semester? Now, at this point in your experience/at the end of your experience, what is your biggest challenge? Explain.  
(Katie Halcrow, Inver Hills Community College)

12. **Professional Goals:** Give students one of these prompts:

- a. 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?
- b. 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?  
**\*\*Note:** For this prompt, instructors may want to remind students that the experience is providing an opportunity to practice soft-skills as well as reinforcing the course content.\*\*  
(Katie Halcrow, Inver Hills Community College)

13. **Structured Class Discussions\*:** Structured reflection sessions can be facilitated during regular class time if all students are involved in service. It is helpful for students to hear stories of success from one another. They can also offer advice and collaborate to identify solutions to problems encountered at the service site. The following exercise is an example of structured reflection discussion:

- a. List phrases that describe your actions at the service site.
- b. List phrases that describe your thoughts at the service site.
- c. What contradictions did you sense at the service site?
- d. What connections can you make between your service and the course content?  
(Nadinne Cruz, Stanford University)

14. **Empathy Work:**

- a. **Journal:** Write a journal entry from the point of view of the person (or one of the people) you are serving. The journal entry can be about a specific topic that concerns them, about working with you (in your service-learning capacity), or just about a day in the life of that person.
- b. **Story the Experience:** This is a guided writing assignment for students that helps them to silence their inner censors. Instructor needs to lead this experience. Instructions to students:

Choose someone you remember observing at some point today. Begin writing a story about this morning's activities from his/her perspective.

As students write, instruct them to – about a minute apart – add a color, a sound, weather, an emotion, dialogue, the word “strange”, a question, a short sentence. (These items of addition are just suggestions; you could easily sub in material from your class in place of the other “add-ins.”) Afterward, ask students what they learned about their own perceptions by writing this. What thoughts/feelings about the Service-Learning experience came out in their writing?

(Katie Halcrow, Inver Hills Community College)

15. **Truth is Stranger than Fiction\***: (This is an exercise that is best used toward the middle or end of the student's experience). Have the students break into groups of three (no more). Ask them to share the most unusual story that happened to them during their service-learning experience. Some students will be hesitant at first. If they really can't think of one, don't let them off the hook. Tell them to take the assignment home, write it and submit it at the next session. This usually motivates them to think of one rather quickly. In fact, most classes come up with some really interesting stories. Then have the class come together as a whole and share them. It is surprising how animated all of the students get. Even if it's not their own story, they feel some ownership if the person was in their group. Usually everyone ends up sharing a story. As you move through the exercise, even the reticent ones usually find themselves sharing something. Be prepared to prod these students a little. If you happen to have a class that's filled with interesting stories, you might want to save these stories and submit them to the service-learning program for future use. (Diane Sloan, Miami Dade College)

16. **Graffiti**: For this in-class exercise, you'll need poster paper to hang in different places around the room and different colored markers that thick enough to be visible on the poster board from a distance. On the top of each piece of poster board, write a topic that relates to the Service-Learning experience (this can be a course topic, a feeling, a thought, a quotation – whatever). Then, take 10 minutes to have students walk around and write down their own thoughts/feelings/experiences as a response. This is an ANONYMOUS exercise, which allows students to be more honest/vulnerable than if they attached their names to the comments. Discuss. (Anonymous)
17. **Snowball Fight**: Similar to the exercise above, this provides students an anonymous way to answer a question, ask a question, or bring up some concern they have about the experience. Ask each student to pull out a piece of paper and then write down a question, an answer to a question, a feeling – whatever their response is to a prompt you give them. Then, have the students crumple up their paper and begin having an in-classroom “snowball fight” with their peers. At the end of the snowball fight, have students each gather one of the papers and read what is written. Use this to start discussion. (Stan Rothrock, Inver Hills Community College)
18. **Prelection & Postlection**: Before students begin their Service-Learning experience, pass out one notecard to each student. On it, the student should write their fears, anticipations, and any questions they have. They should NOT put their names. Throughout the Service-Learning experience, you (the instructor) may use notecards to help guide discussion. At the semester's conclusion (or after the Service-Learning experience is complete), bring out the notecards and pass around, at random, to students. Discuss the growth students experienced over the semester. (Anonymous)
19. **Small Group Week\***: This is a simple alternative to full-class reflection sessions when you really want students to have a maximum amount of time to talk individually. Schedule the reflection sessions so that only a small number of students need to attend. The group should consist of no more than 10-12, if possible. The rest of the class will be scheduled to attend other class periods, using this period for whatever you want them to be doing outside of class. The students will feel more like sharing when you form the group in a small intimate circle and spend the period asking them questions related to their service-learning experience that encourage self-expression. (Prof. Dave Johnson, Miami Dade College)
20. **E-Mail Discussion Groups\***: Through e-mail, students can create a dialogue with the instructor and peers involved in service projects. 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. A log can be printed to provide data about group learnings that occurred from the service experience.

(Diane Sloan, Miami Dade College)

### **Rigorous Academic Links: Journaling, Reading, and Writing as Reflection**

1. **Personal Journal\***: Students will write freely about their experience. This is usually done weekly. These 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 submit loose-leaf pages from a dialogue journal bi-weekly (or otherwise at appropriate intervals) 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. Students could also create their own list of key phrases to include. 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 is 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 personal development, academic connections to the course content, or ideas and recommendations for future action. As with any essay, criteria can be clearly stated to guide the work of the students. (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. For example, “William Gray has identified five stages of a mentor - protégé relationship. At what stage is your mentoring relationship with your protégé at this point in the semester? What evidence do you have to support this statement? In the following weeks, what specific action can you take to facilitate the development of your mentoring relationship to the next stage on Gray’s continuum?” A list of directed writings can be provided at the beginning of the semester, or given to students as the semester progresses. Students may also create their own directed writing questions from the text. 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, based on Kolb’s experiential learning cycle, 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 social issue they have encountered at the service site. Students then research the social issue and read three to five articles on the topic. Based on their experience and library research, students make recommendations for future action. This reflection activity is useful in interdisciplinary courses and provides students with flexibility within their disciplinary interests and expertise to pursue issues experienced at the service site. Class presentations of the experiential research paper can culminate semester work. (Julie Hatcher, IUPUI).

10. **Directed Readings\***: Directed readings are a way to prompt students to consider their service experience within a broader context of social responsibility and civic literacy. Since textbooks rarely challenge students to consider how knowledge within a discipline can be applied to current social needs, additional readings must be added if this is a learning objective of the course. Directed readings can become the basis for class discussion or a directed writing. (Diane Sloan, Miami Dade College)
  
11. **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 and students discuss the situation and identify how they would respond. (David Lisman, Colorado College)

### **Presenting Culmination of Experience**

1. **Student Portfolios\***: This type of documentation has become a vital way for students to keep records and learn organizational skills. Encourage them to take photographs of themselves doing their project, short explanations (like business reports), time logs, evaluations by supervisors or any other appropriate “proof” which could be used in an interview. Require them to make this professional. Keep reminding them that submitting it at the end of the term is only one reason for doing this. “The real reason is to have documentation to present at future interviews. This could be a major factor in distinguishing them from other candidates.” 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\***: A way for students to share their service-learning experience with peers is to make a class presentation through a video, slide show, bulletin board, panel discussion, or a persuasive speech. This is an opportunity for students to display their work in a public format. A similar presentation can be offered to the community agency as a final recognition of the students' involvement. (Diane Sloan, Miami Dade College)