Reflection: The Hyphen Between Service & Learning

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Reflection: The Hyphen Between Service & Learning

“A mind that is stretched by a new experience can never go back to its old dimensions.” —Oliver Wendall Holmes

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Why Reflect?

Reflection in the service-learning field can be defined as the “use of creative and critical thinking skills to help prepare students to succeed in and to learn from the service experience, and to examine the larger picture and context in which the service occurs” (Toole & Toole, 1985, p. 100)

Why?

Why is reflection important?

1. Research studies link high-quality reflection with improved academic and interpersonal outcomes. For example... Billig, Root, and Jesse (2005) found that service-learning approaches that featured cognitively challenging activities and reflection were associated with students being more likely to value school, feel more efficacious, engage in school and enjoy subject matters, and acquire more civic knowledge and more positive civic dispositions.

Eyler and Giles (1999) showed that reflection helped students gain a deeper understanding of what they learned and helped them to apply learning to real-life situations and develop increased problem-solving skills. They also demonstrated that reflection was a good predictor of openness to new ideas, the ability to see issues in a new way, and the ability to analyze issues systematically.

Eyler, Giles, and Schmiede (1996) demonstrated that students engaged in critical reflection were more likely than their peers to apply what they learned to understanding and solving social problems.

2. There is a long theoretical history that connects reflection and learning
Experience, Reflection and Learning

John Dewey was a prominent philosopher who emphasized the important links between experience, reflection and learning.

- Learning is a continuous and cumulative process. Prior learning "becomes the instrument of understanding and dealing effectively with the situations that follow" (1938, p.44).
- Reflection is an active and intentional action in which we examine prior beliefs and assumptions and their implications. "The function of reflective thought is, therefore, to transform a situation in which there is experienced obscurity, doubt, conflict, disturbance of some sort into a situation that is clear, coherent, settled, harmonious" (1933, p.105).
- Reflective thinking takes time and requires us to engage in several distinct phases. Dewey (1933, pp.106-115) outlines these phases as—
  1. Perplexity (responding to ideas that appear when there is a problem)
  2. Elaboration (referring to past experiences that are similar)
  3. Hypotheses (developing several potential hypotheses)
  4. Comparing hypotheses (finding some coherence within these hypotheses)
  5. Taking action (experiencing mastery, satisfaction, enjoyment in acting on these hypotheses)

"We do not learn from experience......we learn from reflecting on experience”

Three principles at the core of Dewey’s educational philosophy:

1. Education must lead to personal growth
2. Education must contribute to humane conditions, and
3. Education must engage citizens in associating with one another

Donald A Schon (1930-1997)
Massachusetts Institute of Technology

Reflective Practice
Kolb’s Experiential Learning Cycle

According to Kolb:
"Learning is the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience"

• Learning should be viewed in terms of process, not in terms of outcomes;
• Learning is a continuous process grounded in experience;
• Learning results from finding ways to resolve opposing ways of dealing with the world;
• Learning involves transactions between the person and the environment - it is an active, self-directed process, and
• Learning is the process of creating knowledge
**DEAL Model for Critical Reflection**

- **Engage in experience**
- **Describe Experience Objectively (i.e., What?)**
- **Examine per learning goal/objectives in each category (i.e., So What?)**
- **Articulate learning including setting goals in each category (i.e., Now What?)**

**Category #1: Goals & Objectives (e.g., Academic)**

**Category #2: Goals & Objectives (e.g., Personal)**

**Category #3: Goals & Objectives (e.g., Civic)**

**From Ash & Clayton, 2009**

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**Transformative Learning through Reflection**

- Encounter a relative experience
- Experience emotions
- Reflect on disorienting experience, dilemma
- Making meaning out of the experience
- Engage in action to promote change

**Writing**

- Students create an Internet blog focusing on the links between the academic concepts they are learning in the classroom and how these ideas are being applied in the service project.

**Doing**

- Students write and perform plays for the school or the community (e.g., high school students, community residents) about an issue they have learned about in their service-learning class.

**Telling**

- Students participate in three discussions with each other about their transformative ideas and principles to help build their vision and social justice with their experiences.

**Academic Enhancement**

- Students write and submit Op-Ed pieces to local newspapers about the social issues they are addressing through their service project.

**Civic Learning**

- Students create a website or wiki that provides information for the general public about an issue they are addressing in the service project.

**Personal Growth**

- Students participate in a one-minute video describing what they learned about themselves as a result of participating in the service project.

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**Remember that reflection can take many forms and address different learning objectives**

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<td>Personal Growth</td>
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<td>Each student creates a one-minute video describing what they learned about themselves as a result of participating in the service project.</td>
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Be sure to bookmark these great online resources!

- Using Structured Reflection to Enhance Learning from Service (Campus Compact)
  http://www.compact.org/disciplines/reflection/
- Facilitating Reflection: A Manual for Leaders and Educators
  http://www.uvm.edu/~dewey/reflection_manual/
- Reflection in Service-Learning Fact Sheet (Service-Learning Clearinghouse)
  http://www.servicelearning.org/instant_info/fact_sheets/he_facts/he_reflection

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