

Reflection in Action

The Learning–Doing Relationship

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I have realized that it is often difficult for people to explain why they believe a certain way. What I have been forced to do in the writing assignments is just that. This process of writing down my views and patterns of thinking took nearly every drop of energy I had.

In the preceding chapters, we have encouraged you to complete a variety of **reflection** exercises on a range of topics from “What Is Citizenship?” to “How Am I in Groups? What, exactly, is the process of reflection? How can you as a student train yourself to reflect at deeper and deeper levels in order to maximize your learning and the ways that your learning can inform and impact your life?

Several service-learning researchers (www.compact.org/disciplines/reflection/index.html; Eyler, Giles & Schmiede, 1996) have identified the characteristics of successful reflection:

- **Continuous:** Reflection must take place before, during, and after the completion of the service project to be fully useful.
- **Challenging:** Effective reflection involves pushing ourselves out of our comfort zones to make new connections between concepts and to think in new ways.

- **Connected:** Successful reflection can serve as a bridge between the service experience and our discipline-based academic knowledge.
- **Contextualized:** Effective reflection is framed in a manner that is appropriate for the context in which the service experience takes place.

We've designed the activities in this book to engage you in reflection that is *continuous, challenging, connected*, and *contextualized*. In this chapter, we'll take a closer look at the process of reflection and the necessary components of *deep reflection*.

Why Reflect?

Why is there so much emphasis on reflection in service-learning classes? Reflection serves as a bridge for the back-and-forth connecting between what you as a student learn in class and what you are experiencing in the community. Reflection, within the context of a service-learning class, helps you integrate what you have been absorbing through the course content with the community external to the college campus.

Engaging in reflective practices has been linked to other benefits for students. Mabry (1998) found that, for students in twenty-three different service-learning courses, those who participated in reflection exercises attributed more learning to the service experience than

students who participated in the service project but not in reflection exercises. Eyler and Giles (1999) also noted the positive impact that reflection had on academic outcomes for college students. Furthermore, researchers have found that written reflection about emotional events can serve to reduce anxiety and depression (Pennebaker, 1990; Bringle & Hatcher, 1999). In an experimental study in which students wrote for four consecutive days on either traumatic events or superficial topics, Pennebaker, Kiecolt-Glaser, and Glaser (1988) found that students who engaged in reflection on traumatic life events had more favorable immune system responses, less frequent health center visits, and higher reports of subjective well-being. These researchers found that the most important factor that distinguished persons showing health improvement from those who did not was a greater ability to include causal thinking, insights, and self-reflection in their stories. Taken together, research studies suggest that activities that promote personally and academically meaningful reflection on service-learning experiences may result in both intellectual and health-related benefits.

Connecting Reflection to Service-Learning

Psychologist Irwin Altman (1996) identified three distinct kinds of knowledge: **content knowledge**, which involves the rote learning of facts (for example, that the capital of the state of Oregon is Salem); **process knowledge**, or skills that involve learning how to do something (like how to search a library database); and **socially relevant knowledge**, which connects one's personal perspective with content within particular social contexts (for example, how to effect social change through activism). Traditional teaching methods typically produce content and, sometimes, process knowledge. Service-learning, however, involves a kind of teaching and learning that promote both content and process knowledge, as well as developing socially relevant knowledge in students. The key to making this happen is reflection.

I was extremely myopic prior to this class. I had no concept of any of the issues facing today's educator. Now I feel informed and knowledgeable and I believe that there ARE some contributions I can make

to society. I know that my work as a teacher is not only to educate the particular class that I am working with at any given time, but to model excitement about learning and a real passion to be of use in the world.

Building upon ideas originally developed by the pragmatist philosopher John Dewey (1933), within the context of service-learning classes we define “reflection” as “a person’s intentional and systematic consideration of an experience, along with how that person and others are connected to that experience, framed in terms of particular course content and learning objectives.” Successful service-learning involves reflection—again, an “intentional and systematic consideration of an experience”—before, during, and after the actual service experience. Toole and Toole (2001) posited reflection as being a central feature of the **Service-Learning Cycle**. As you read about the stages of this cycle, think about how your service-learning experience and the reflection you have done throughout the experience fits into these stages. You might thumb through the previous chapters of this book to match the exercises you’ve already completed to the stages. Figure 6.1 illustrates the stages.

Pre-Service Reflection: Reflection plays a critical role in the initial steps of a service-learning project. Already, you have engaged in reflection on your own (and possibly as part of a group) as you identified your service-learning experience and planned for its accomplishment.

- 1. Identifying a project:** You completed reflection exercises to increase awareness of important community issues in order to provide a useful frame for determining which community concern you would focus on and which specific project you would undertake.
- 2. Planning and preparation:** You completed reflection exercises to try to imagine all the potential problems that could arise with the project as well as possible solutions to each problem that could serve as contingency plans for dealing with unexpected issues related to the project, thus aiding you in the planning and preparation processes.

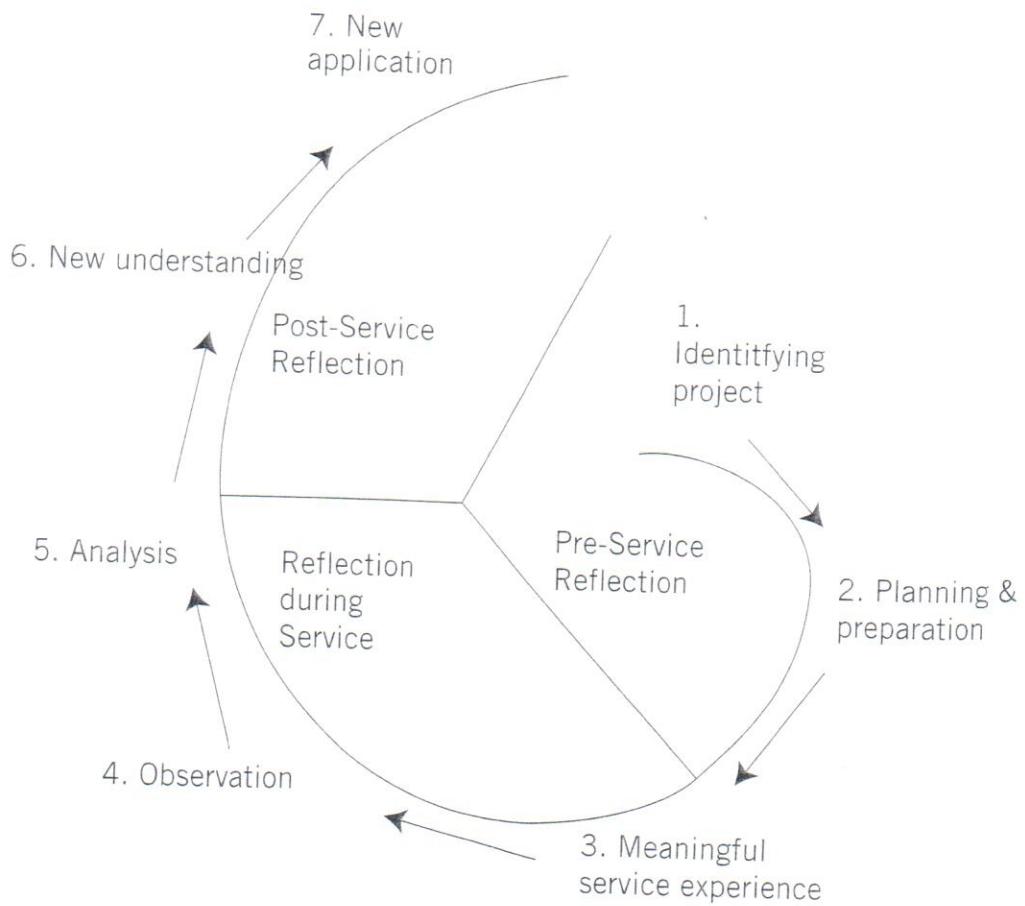


Figure 6.1. Reflection and the Service-Learning Cycle

From Toole & Toole (2001)

Reflection during Service: Reflection will continue to be crucial for the success of your service-learning experience.

3. Meaningful Service Experiences: You will have opportunities for reflecting on how to connect course concepts and academic discipline knowledge with the service experience, along with your own personal reactions and insights.

4. Observation: During and immediately after the service experience, you will be guided to describe the project in its social context, as well as your personal reaction to being part of the service experience.

5. Analysis: Additional reflection assignments will help you go beyond description and reac-

tion, to applying academic knowledge and course concepts as a means of better understanding the service experience.

Post-Service Reflection: Reflection will help you further your analysis of the current situation and make larger assessments of what you have accomplished.

6. New Understanding: You will complete reflection exercises that promote an increased sense of self-awareness about how your understanding of community issues has broadened and deepened as a result of the service-learning class.

7. New Application: Reflection exercises will encourage you to assess and evaluate the accomplishment of your learning and serving

goals and to review the lessons of your service experience with a “bird’s-eye view” perspective. These then will lead you to the identification of issues and/or social contexts where the lessons of your current service-learning experience can be applied to other community engagements to produce positive results.

Models of Reflection

As we noted earlier, reflection is the means by which your service experience is linked to learning and learning is manifested as meaning. John Dewey was one of the first thinkers to recognize the important role that reflection plays in learning. Dewey argued that reflection, or reflective thinking, is the key to whether any experience is “educative,” meaning that it involves learning (1933). Reflection connects the world of observations and facts with the world of ideas. For Dewey, reflective thinking is what moves a person from mindlessly drifting through life to connecting the current situation with past experiences and knowl-

edge as a means of achieving a desired goal. That goal may be as fundamental as trying to make a more informed decision about whether and how to best offer your services to communities in the future.

Reflection, for Dewey, goes beyond experience. He believed that to really understand an experience, it is imperative to understand how you were connected to or affected by it. As you reflect upon your service-learning experiences, it is important that you place yourself in the middle of the process of connecting the current situation with past experiences and knowledge as a means of achieving a desired goal.

Kolb (1984) built upon the foundation of Dewey’s work on reflective thought in developing the *Experiential Learning Model* (figure 6.2). Experience is the cornerstone of this model, and learning is viewed as a process by which knowledge is created through the transformation of experience. Kolb developed a cyclical model of experiential learning that involves a repeated pattern of “grasping” or comprehending an experience followed by “transforming” that experience into knowledge. This model provides us with a conceptual framework for understanding the organic process of learning through serving.

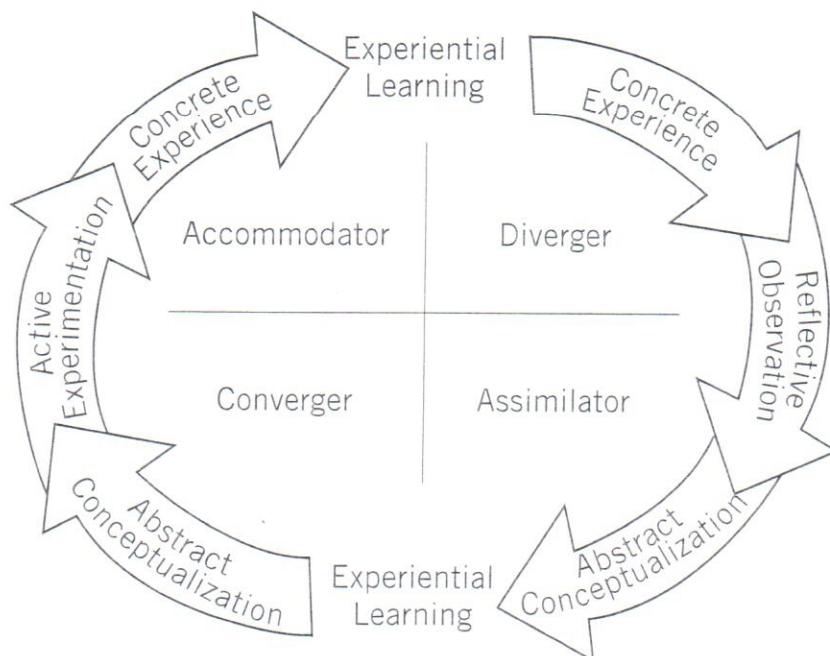


Figure 6.2. Kolb's Experiential Learning Model

Adapted from Kolb (1984)

The stages of Kolb's Experiential Learning Model can be explained using the example of Tina, a student engaging in a hunger awareness publicity campaign at her local food bank. As Tina first begins to spend time at the food bank, she realizes that this service experience is different and distinct from other school or everyday occurrences. In what Kolb calls the **concrete experience** stage of the model, Tina comprehends that this is something fundamentally different from anything she has ever experienced before. If we were to read Tina's journal, she might write an entry like the following:

I never imagined I could have an experience like this as part of a class. My time working at the food bank is drastically different from writing a term paper in another class or even just watching people shop at the food bank on the weekend.

Next, Tina enters the **reflective observation** stage of the model, as she begins to reflect upon her personal reactions to the concrete service experience.

I'm getting more used to it now, but sometimes working at the food bank and seeing so many people come in day after day after day—many of whom look a whole lot like me and my friends and family—is pretty overwhelming. I always assumed that people who didn't have enough to eat simply weren't working hard enough to earn a living or were spending their money stupidly. That just doesn't seem to fit the people I'm meeting.

The initial observation and description of the service experience has now been transformed into something that is personally relevant through the intentional process of reflection.

In the third stage of the model, **abstract conceptualization**, Tina ties in course-related and other previously acquired knowledge and theories to redescribe the service experience from a conceptual rather than a descriptive perspective. Tina might write,

Based on the materials we studied in class on social inequalities and political issues within our state, my service experience at the food bank is more than just a field trip; it is an opportunity to examine firsthand how what appears to be an individ-

ual social issue—for example, hunger—is really the result of societal-level structural inequalities. To think that individual people going hungry in my state is connected to political decisions that have adversely affected independent farmers in our region—frankly, I never understood or really cared about that before.

Finally, during the **active experimentation** stage, Tina uses her new understanding of the service experience developed during the abstract conceptualization stage to stimulate an application of her new understanding of this situation within the context of a set of options for her personal choices in the world.

If hunger in our state is better understood as being caused by societal, rather than individual-level factors, can this same perspective provide me with insights into understanding other problems, such as homelessness and illiteracy? What are the connections between these issues? How might I make sense of these things too?

This experimentation in new settings leads the student back to the beginning of the model—a new concrete experience—and the cycle begins again.

The different aspects of the learning process that make up the four stages of Kolb's model have also been linked to four different learning styles. Each learning style is defined by the stages of the learning process that immediately precede and follow it, and each represents a different set of skills that a student may acquire.

Before we go on, let's take a minute and revisit the "Marshmallows and Spaghetti" exercise from chapter 4 (exercise 4.3, on page 47). As you recall, in this exercise each group received a package of spaghetti and a bag of marshmallows. The goal of the exercise was for the group to build the tallest tower possible out of the marshmallows and spaghetti. Now we will illustrate the different learning styles associated with Kolb's model by linking them to the different roles team members may have played in the exercise. (If you didn't complete this exercise, try to imagine what type of learning style most resembles yours.)

Diverger: Kolb describes this learning style as emphasizing **concrete experience** and **reflective observation**. A diverger's strengths include imaginative ability and awareness of the meaning of a situation. A diverger is capable of viewing a problem from a variety of per-

★ Exercise 6.1: Reflecting on Community Partnerships Using Kolb's Experiential Learning Model

The following reflection exercise uses the stages of Kolb's Model to frame your service-learning experience and help you better understand your interactions with your community partner.

Concrete Experience: Typically, in service-learning classes, the kinds of community partnerships that you experience will involve multiple constituencies—your university, local government and nonprofit agencies, citizen groups, and students. First, think about a situation from your current service-learning class involving other “players” from your community partnership. Next, describe an interaction between yourself and at least one other player from that partnership. As you describe the interaction, make sure to include what you observed, what you and others said, and any nonverbal behaviors that you noted. Try to reserve judgment and be as neutral in your description as possible.

Reflective Observation: How do you feel when you reflect upon the interaction you described? Did the interaction turn out the way you expected it to? If not, what was different? What do you think the community partner expected from the interaction? Reflect upon the assumptions you brought with you about the other people in this relationship before this interaction occurred. What assumptions do you think the community partner had about you?

Abstract Conceptualization: Using materials from this service-learning course and knowledge gained from your academic major, how would you explain the nature of this community partnership? What concepts or theoretical models might help explain both the outcomes of this interaction, as well as the underlying processes? Specifically consider the following:

- What influence does culture have on this interaction?
- What influence does power have on this interaction?
- How does your understanding of service impact this interaction?

Active Experimentation: How have your plans for relating to future community partners changed as the result of your current service-learning experience? Has the experience changed your personal understanding of “service?” If so, how? How will your current understanding of “culture” and “power” impact your interactions with community partners in the future? What would you do differently next time?

sonal perspectives and then organizing these multiple views into a meaningful description of what's going on. In the exercise, a student who favors a *diverger* learning style might be very active early in the process, coming up with multiple ways that the team could approach the problem—for example, the team could stack marshmallows on top of each other like a tower, or it could connect pairs of marshmallows like tinker toys using a piece of spaghetti, or it could build a pyramid by constructing a wide base of marshmallows supporting vertical pieces of spaghetti that would support a smaller second story platform of marshmal-

lows with more vertical pieces of spaghetti that finally reach a point. Divergers tend to excel in situations that call for brainstorming and the development of alternative ideas and strategies. Divergers possess good data-gathering skills, tend to be sensitive, and are interested in people.

Assimilator: The emphasis in this learning style is on *reflective observation* and *abstract conceptualization*. An assimilator is very comfortable using inductive logic, in which one works from observations to make theory. In the exercise, a student who favors an *assimilator* learning style might take a more active role in determining

which of the various alternatives makes the most sense for the group to pursue. For example, after comparing the different possibilities from a theoretical design perspective, the assimilator might declare that the pyramid structure is the most architecturally sound and therefore should provide the team with the best chance of creating the tallest structure. Assimilators are particularly valuable in situations that call for the development and creation of theoretical models. Assimilators tend to be more interested in ideas for their own sake than the application of those ideas to practical situations.

Converger: The emphasis in this learning style is on *abstract conceptualization* and *active experimentation*. A converger's strengths include the abilities to problem-solve and make decisions and the willingness to search for the practical uses of ideas and theories. In the exercise, a student who favors a *converger* learning style might focus on the question, "What is the best way to put a pyramid together?" and would be actively involved in construction decisions with the project. The converger will wonder if it will provide more support to use two pieces of spaghetti rather than one to connect the marshmallows on the larger base level to the marshmallows on the smaller second story. A student favoring this learning style tends to perform well in situations where there is a single correct answer and the group task is to identify the "best" solution for a particular problem. Convergers are comfortable using deductive logic, in which they use theory to explain real-life occurrences; they prefer dealing with technical tasks and problems rather than social or interpersonal issues.

Accommodator: The emphasis in this learning style is on *active experimentation* and *concrete experience*. An accommodator's strengths lie in doing things, carrying out plans, and getting involved in new experiences. A student favoring this learning style will do well in situations that require a willingness to adapt to circumstances in order to successfully complete a task. In the exercise, a student who favors an *accommodator* learning style might become active only at a late stage of the actual building process as the exercise time limit is approaching and the team is struggling to make the pyramid design stay together. The accommodator might help modify the pyramid by putting in additional stability supports to prop up the structure so that, while it no longer looks like a pyramid, it is fairly tall and stays together until the assignment is "judged" by the instructor. Accommodators learn best from hands-on

experiences. These individuals are pragmatists—concerned with what works—and are willing to throw away a theory if it means a better way can be found to address a problem. Accommodators tend to rely on people much more than on analysis, but are sometimes perceived by others as pushy because of their focus on getting things done.

We should note that, while Kolb recognizes that individuals typically prefer one learning style over others, he also proposes that, to achieve real learning, students should develop some competence with all four styles. In most traditional learning experiences (such as lecture-format classes), students with assimilator and converger learning styles—styles that emphasize "thinking" activities—seem to be most comfortable. Interestingly, one of the strengths of service-learning classes is that they provide students preferring accommodator and diverger styles—styles that emphasize "doing" activities—with a more compatible learning environment. Kolb maintains that experiential learning involves both "thinking" and "doing," and, regardless of where you "start" (in terms of your preferred learning style) and which teaching approach is used (such as experiential activities in community collaboration), it is imperative that you visit all the stages in the cycle in order to fully integrate the learning experience.

Deep Reflection

You may already have had many course experiences in which you have been asked to reflect. Many instructors assign journals, for example, as a tool for students to record their thoughts and feelings about what they are learning or to write less formally about various subjects. Effective reflection in service-learning classes, however, needs to go deeper than most traditional notions of reflection, beyond a surface description to what anthropologists call a "thick" description (Geertz, 1973). *Thick descriptions* capture the richness of detail in what is observed, as well as the personal connection between the individual and the experience. We propose that deep reflection in service-learning experiences is composed of three components: *observation*, *personal relevance*, and *connection*. To practice deep reflection, you will need to pay attention to all three elements; no one component alone or pair of components is sufficient to connect "thinking" with "doing" in the service experience.

Exercise 6.2: What Is Your Preferred Learning Style?

Think about the different experiences you have already had in this service-learning course, such as class exercises, working with community partners, group projects, and the contributions that YOU personally made to each of these elements. Which of Kolb's four learning styles—*diverger, assimilator, converger, accommodator*—best describes your preferred style?

To investigate your preferred style, choose a specific example of an element that you have used in this course. Briefly describe the activity or event, and then itemize the ways you participated in it. Looking back on this experience and the learning styles described above, which learning style did you most fully work from? How has your preferred learning style impacted the collaboration you are part of in this class? What can you learn from others' preferred learning styles to more fully develop your capacities as a learner and a doer?

In eighteen years of schooling, I have never really questioned events around me, how I fit in, and how those events affect the way I fit in, until now. Now it seems like that is the major work of this course: to make connections, to understand how one thing is related to another, and how I am related to all of it.

The following descriptions offer ideas for how to practice reflection that is deep and thick. The students represented here were part of a service project to weatherize the homes of low-income and elderly residents. In the quotes that follow the descriptions, listen to how the students have articulated their own deep reflection:

Observation: Describe what you experienced: the setting, the community agencies, and the individuals with whom you interacted:

First off, I found it weird to winterize at the beginning of summer. Our class is meeting during the hottest time of the day, so it can be pretty brutal to be stuck in some attic feeding insulation into the wall. And it takes a good long while, too. But I guess with 200 homes to weatherize a year, the Community Energy Project must spread out the projects throughout the year in order to finish them. Yesterday we helped an elderly woman in a trailer park in Northeast. She and a friend of hers went on

and on about how fortunate she was to have these services for free and how we were a wonderful gift.

Personal relevance: Connect the service experiences to your own reactions and responses. How did you feel? Use "I" statements when talking about your feelings:

It was great for me to see the elderly woman's appreciation for our team and to have her say such nice things to us. I think she appreciated having young people around for a while. I realized that until I volunteered my time with the Community Energy Project, I didn't really have an understanding of what it feels like to make a difference in somebody's life, so that's good. But to be completely honest, as good as it was to have somebody appreciate our work, I just wanted to get out of there, to cool off and take a shower, and get back to my familiar life. I know I'll be ready to do some more houses next week, but for now I need some time to think about things.

Connection: Frame your observations and personal reactions in a context provided by relevant course readings, research, or other materials. How does the content of this service-learning class provide an inter-

preitive lens through which you can better understand other persons' experiences and feelings and the social and political context in which your work was accomplished?

In this class we've been reading about the qualities of effective leadership. I never knew that many, if not most, of the most skilled leaders have made a dedicated commitment to volunteering at some point in their lives. I never thought that there might be particular things I can learn through sacrificing my own time to benefit others, and that this could benefit me in the future. I have been forced to do volunteer work for other leadership classes, but I never truly understood why. Now I know it's because it brings out our true leadership skills. It makes us learn to work with others to accomplish the same goals, and it helps us to be learn how to be less selfish, which is a very important characteristic of leadership.

This class has exposed me to concepts that were not previously evident in my educational experience. They may have been present, but through ignorance, not caring, or whatever, I was not aware of them. Although my awareness of the issues presented in this class has developed over the years, never have I personally

grown and become more aware of these issues than in the last eleven weeks. At times that growth has been exciting, at times frustrating and agonizing. This class has inserted so many questions into my mind.

As in the case of the student quoted above, deepening our reflective capacities tends to leave us with even more questions than we had when we began reflecting. If we remember back to the whole purpose behind reflection—to offer us a tool for making meaning of our experiences so that we may recognize and use the learning those experiences promise—and to the work of Dewey and Kolb, this is as it should be. In other words, the whole point of reflection is to lead us into an informed understanding of ourselves, others, and the world in which we are all called to participate as lifelong learners and doers.

We encourage you to discover your own best setting and environment for reflection and to develop your own best practices of reflection. Here is a list of tips, offered by student service-learners, to help guide your reflective engagement:

Tips for Successful Reflection Experiences

- Seek out quiet moments. Talking—and being talked to—can be distracting.
- Be attentive to and mindful of the present moment.

★ Exercise 6.3: Reflecting on Reflection

Take a moment and return to Exercise 4.9: “How Am I in This Group?” on page 64. Look at both the reflection questions and your responses. This exercise walked you through all the elements of what we call “deep reflection.” The first two questions asked you to describe the situation that you participated in: “What task roles did you play? What maintenance roles did you play?” The third question asked you to go beyond a description of the group activity and connect yourself to the experiences: “Think about why you did not act in a certain situation.” Finally, the last question asked you to connect this experience with what you had already learned about group roles: “In a future group experience, which roles would you play and why?”

Reread your responses. Based on your experience since you first completed this activity, is there anything you might now add? What new insights have you gained in the past few weeks of this course? How did completing this reflection help you to achieve a deeper understanding of your relationship to teamwork than you might have experienced without it?

- Practice acute observation. Work to decipher the clues in the world around you.
- Figure out what matters most for the task being considered.
- Make a conscious effort to focus on the experience you're reflecting on.
- Permit yourself to feel emotional.
- Go beyond your "self" and your personal perspective.
- Use the lens of your past experiences to make links to the present.
- Recognize—and think about—the tension between being attached and involved and then stepping back to gain a detached perspective of the situation.

Modes of Reflection

Now that you have read more about the reasons you are asked to reflect in service-learning courses and the ways that you may direct yourself as a reflective thinker, we offer ideas for different modes of reflection. Your professor may have already selected the type of reflection activities you will complete. If not, discuss with him or her the various options. The activities may also be used alone as you process your learning-

through-serving experience. Figure 6.3 identifies four primary modes of reflection—telling, activities, multimedia, and writing—along with a few representative examples of each type.

Because each type of reflection exercise has different strengths, the decision about which mode of reflection to use should be based on two major factors:

- **What is the context of your current class?** Perhaps your instructor has very deliberately structured and assigned reflective activities for you and your classmates based on her expertise and experience with service-learning courses. Even if the benefits of completing the reflective assignment in the way she has indicated are not apparent to you, follow her guidelines. In fact, you might deepen your own reflection on the assignment by investigating your ideas about why the instructor chose to frame the assignment in the way she did. What impact does this framing have on you? What did you learn as a result of completing this reflection in this way? How might you use this particular reflective assignment to understand your experience more fully? What questions do you now have as a result of having completed this reflection?

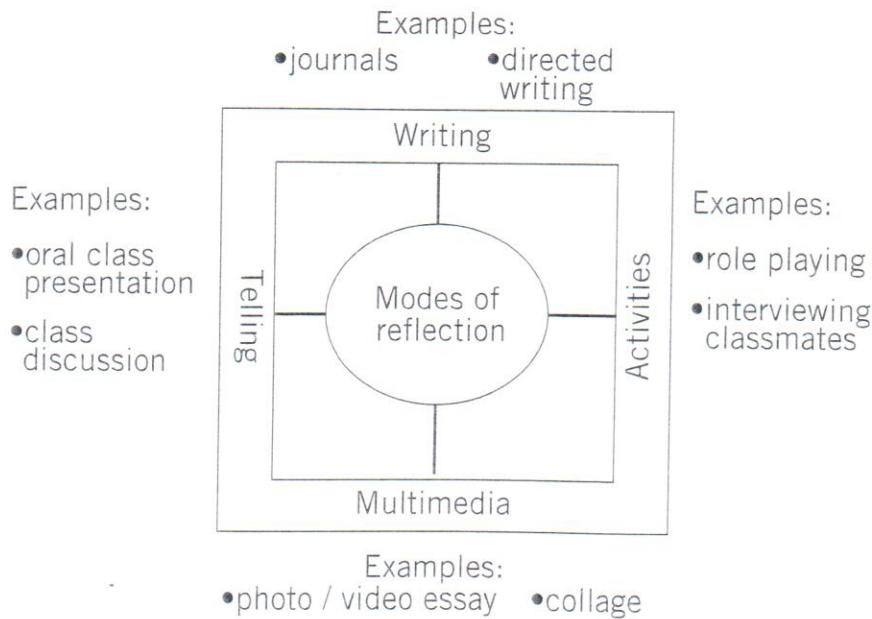


Figure 6.3. Modes of Reflection

- **What is the best means for telling the story of your service experience?** Whether or not your instructor has assigned reflective activities for you and your classmates, you may choose to practice reflection both formally and informally beyond the scope of those assignments. In creating your own reflective opportunities, you may experience greater freedom in using new and different modes of reflection than you have in past courses. Sometimes photos, drawings, collages, or videos may capture the essence of a service experience with much greater clarity than written words. Remember, whatever form your service-learning reflection takes, the underlying elements of deep reflection—observation, personal relevance, and connection—need to be present.

Telling

Reporting our insights orally to others is a great way to deepen our understanding of those insights. Storytelling remains one of the most important ways that humans transmit information to each other. The benefits of storytelling, however, don't only apply to those listening to the story; the teller, too, has his or her understanding enhanced through the act of communicating it to others.

In a formal way, oral presentations can offer several advantages in service-learning courses: providing students with opportunities to practice their public speaking skills, allowing the use of nonverbal behaviors to reinforce an emotional message, and providing the starting point for dialogue between different stakeholders in the service project. Other less formal examples of “telling” reflection activities can include talking casually about the service experience with classmates or with others outside the service-learning experience.

For an example of “telling” as reflection, see **Exercise 6.5: Telling the Tale**, on page 95.

Activities

Activities, projects, and other forms of “reflection through action” can also offer some specific advantages in meaning-making. Often, these sorts of exer-

cises speak to a variety of learning styles, help to develop groups, and allow forward momentum to be built into the project.

If you are interested in exploring these experiential ways of reflecting, you might choose to spend time, on your own, in the environments experienced by the persons you are serving. For example, if you are tutoring refugees in basic English-language skills, you might spend a day attempting to read a newspaper or follow directions in a language you do not know. If you are writing grant proposals for a camp for stroke survivors and their families, you might spend time living as if you had limited use of language or movement. If you choose to reflect in this very experiential way on your role as a service-learner, remember chapter 5 and the importance of behaving and interacting with integrity around the differences between you and those your service impacts.

For an example of using activities as reflection, see **Exercise 6.6: Showtime**, on page 96.

Multimedia

Collages, drawings, photo or video essays, and other forms of multimedia reflection offer additional advantages for the reflector through incorporating multiple learning styles, serving as excellent tools for capturing subtle emotional truths, and providing great opportunities for creative expression. If you choose to explore multimedia reflection, you might collect objects from your service site to create a visual representation of your community-based experience. (Be careful about the use of confidential materials, making sure to get permission before collecting any items.) Consider writing a piece of music to capture the essence of your service to the community. You might also paint a picture that captures the community-based experience or that expresses your vision of how the community will be changed for the better by your collaborative efforts.

For an example of using multimedia tools as reflection, see **Exercise 6.7: Every Picture Tells a Story**, on page 96.

Writing

For many students in service-learning projects, the predominant form that their reflection takes is written. Written reflection techniques offer several unique advantages compared to other modes: They provide an opportunity to practice and refine writing skills, challenge us to organize our thoughts in order to make coherent arguments, and generate a permanent record of the service experiences that can be used as part of future learning activities.

Written reflection can take a variety of forms, including directed assignments, in which a writer responds to topics framed by an instructor; portfolios, in which a student compiles multiple pieces of evidence to demonstrate what he or she has learned; and journals, which might track the evolution of thought throughout a period of time. In this service-learning course, your instructor very likely has assigned you written reflections. In addition to these assignments, you might choose to engage in self-directed writing activities to fully mine the depth of your community-based experience.

For an example of writing as reflection, see **Exercise 6.8: Newsflash**, on page 96.

While journals can take a variety of forms, certain types have distinctive characteristics and focus. For example, the “Newsflash” exercise above is a directed writing assignment and may be thought of as a **structured journal**, a format that most closely resembles a series of directed writing assignments. In assigning a structured journal, your course instructor or campus service-learning coordinator will provide you with topics or key questions to focus each specific assignment and may leave room on each journal page for her feedback.

A **critical incident journal** takes a completely different approach. Instead of the instructor telling you what the important topics are to reflect upon, you, the student, are asked to identify a “pivot” or “turning point” in your own service-learning experience. Reflection is focused on this key situation or event in which a decision was made, a conflict occurred, or a problem was resolved. This can help to focus your attention

on the idea that not all events have equal significance in realizing the goals of a service-learning project and encourage you to identify those particularly meaningful events.

A **role-taking**, or **shift-in-perspective**, journal differs from either of the previous types because, even though you are writing in the journal, you are asked to take on the perspective of some other participant in the service experience. Instead of asking you to reflect on the meaning of the class service experience to you, this format encourages you to reflect upon key questions and aspects of the community issue being addressed from a different perspective—for example, community members or the director of the community agency you are partnering with—rather than as students. Such perspective taking can enhance compassion and acceptance of others.

Finally, a **triple-entry journal** is a format that works very well for promoting “deep reflection.” In it, you will reflect upon three distinct issues in each journal entry by (a) describing what happened during your service experience, including what was accomplished as well as things that puzzled you (*observation*); (b) analyzing how aspects of course content apply to the service experience and how these theories and concepts help you understand what occurred (*connection*); and (c) applying the course materials and the service experience to your own life, particularly with regard to how you will approach similar experiences in the future (*personal relevance*).

Why Reflect? Revisited

We reflect to understand where we have been, what we have experienced, and where we go from here. In this chapter, we went beyond a mere definition of “reflection” to investigate its theoretical underpinnings and underlying processes. You have learned why reflection may be especially important for community-based learners and have investigated multiple modes for practicing reflection. You have expanded (and will continue to expand) your reflective capacities by starting with the activities assigned by your instructor and developing a more fully self-directed and continuous commitment to practice reflection on your own.

While most reflection techniques focus on the

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Exercise 6.4: Triple-Entry Journal

Use the format from the sample triple entry journal (appendix 6.1, p. 97) to reflect upon your next several experiences at your service project site. Make at least two complete entries during the course of the week, preferably directly after a meaningful interaction or event. At the end of the week, go back and reread your entries. Do they accurately capture what you experienced? How do these entries compare with your previous journaling efforts?

positive outcomes of service experiences, others, such as the critical incident journal, draw attention to the fact that learning through reflection can occur even “when things go wrong” in a service-learning class.

Chapter 7, “Failure with the Best of Intentions: When Things Go Wrong,” explores the issue of dealing with unexpected challenges in the community setting in greater detail.

Key Concepts

abstract conceptualization	critical incident journal	Service-Learning Cycle
accommodator	deep reflection	socially relevant
active experimentation	diverger	knowledge
assimilator	process knowledge	structured journal
concrete experience	reflection	thick description
content knowledge	reflective observation	triple-entry journal
converger	role-taking journal	

Key Issues

- How does reflection promote learning?
- How do differences in learning styles affect learning?
- What is necessary to turn simple description into deep reflection?
- What are the strengths of different modes of reflection?

ADDITIONAL EXERCISES

Exercise 6.5: Telling the Tale

Pair up with another classmate who was not part of your team in “Marshmallows and Spaghetti.” In two minutes, tell your classmate the story of your experiences building the marshmallow and spaghetti structure. In the next two minutes, answer any questions your classmate has about the story you just told.

Reverse roles. Repeat the process, with your classmate now telling you about her experiences.

For a final two minutes, discuss together how having to respond to questions about your story affected your own understanding of the experience.

Exercise 6.6: Showtime

Have each team from “Marshmallows and Spaghetti” sit down together for fifteen minutes to develop a five-minute skit about the group’s experiences building the tower. Everyone on the team must have a role in the skit, and everyone must play another person.

When it is your team’s turn, present your skit to the rest of the class. How is your own understanding of your experience affected by taking on another student’s role? How is your understanding affected by observing other teams’ skits? What insights have you gained by watching this reenactment of the activity?

Exercise 6.7: Every Picture Tells a Story

Along with the other members of your team from the Marshmallows and Spaghetti exercise, gather magazine and newspaper photos, cartoons, advertisements, pieces of text, and even your own drawings that relate to your group’s experience completing this building exercise. Put together a group collage on a large piece of poster board. When presenting the collage to your class, have each member of the team explain how at least one section of collage relates to his or her personal experience with this group project. How does the group’s reflection on building the marshmallow and spaghetti structure, as shown in the collage, relate to your own understanding of your experience? Did the experience of making the collage itself reinforce any of the group’s dynamics from “Marshmallows and Spaghetti”? If so, how?

Exercise 6.8: Newsflash

Imagine that you are a newspaper reporter assigned to write a “human interest” article on your team’s experiences completing the “Marshmallows and Spaghetti” exercise. First, come up with a headline for your story. Next, follow the steps of basic journalism as you answer the following questions: Who? What? When? Where? With what results? Finally, pretend that you, the reporter, are interviewing you, the student, and answer two final questions: “What did you learn from this experience?” and “How does this relate to the other material you’ve learned in this course?”

After asking yourself these questions, write that newspaper article. What new insights have you gained about your participation in this activity after interviewing yourself and crafting a news piece from that interview?

Exercise 6.9: Reflecting on Reflection, Revisited

Take a moment and reflect on the process of reflection. From your own personal experiences as a reflective thinker, what, if any, are the benefits of reflection? How do you feel when you reflect upon your service-learning experience? How do you feel when you are able to connect course concepts with what has occurred at your service-learning project site? Which do you think is more important—“doing” the service project or being able to make the connection among course concepts, your personal values, and the service experience? Explain your position.

Appendix 6.1: Triple-Entry Journal

Section 1: Describe the situation.

Section 2: Connect course materials to the described situation.

Section 3: How does the combination of class materials and the service experience relate to your personal life and how you might approach similar situations in the future?