

Service-Learning Reflection Activities

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“Tried and True Teaching Methods to Enhance Students’ Service-Learning Experience”

compiled by

Professor Diane Sloan (Miami Dade Community College) and based on the work of Julie Hatcher and Robert Bringle in “Reflection Activities for the College Classroom (Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis)”

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. (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 the students and prompt new questions for students to consider during the semester. (Goldsmith, 1995)*
3. Highlighted Journal - *Before students submit the reflected 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 instructor to identify the student to 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 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 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 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. 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: Describe a significant event that occurred as a part of the service-learning experience. Why was this significant to you? What underlying issues (societal, interpersonal) surfaced as a result of this experience? How will this incident influence your future behavior? Another set of questions for a critical incident journal includes the following prompts: Describe an incident or situation that created a dilemma for you in terms of what to say or do. What is the first thing 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)*

7. 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. (Bingle, 1996)
8. 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 feeling they had when they first heard about their service-learning requirement. After they finish the first question, have them write down all of the feeling they had when they experienced their first "field encounter." After finishing question 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 newspaper papers strategically located and taped to walls around the classroom. Have one with a large happy face, one with a sad face, and one with a bewildered face. Ask students to now place their words on the newspaper paper that closest fits their brainstormed feelings. Then have them stand next to the newspaper that has most of their feelings. This exercise involves both writing and speaking and is seen as nonthreatening in an oral presentation sense. (Sloan, 1996)
9. 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:

"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.

"A different world cannot be built by indifferent people."
—Horace Mann

"I believe that serving and being served are reciprocal and that one cannot really be one without the other."
—Robert Greenleaf, educator and writer

"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

"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 feelings 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 Community College)

10. Quotes in Songs - Ask the students to find a song where the singer uses lyrics that describe what he/she feels about the service-learning project. Emphasize that it does not need to be a whole song but a lyric in a song. If they have access to the song, tell them to bring it in 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 songs 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 Community College)
11. Reflective 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 to 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)
12. Directed Writings - Directed writings ask students to consider the service experience withing the framework of course content. The instructor identifies a section from the textbook or class readings (i.e., quotes, statistics, 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 of 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.
13. Experiential Research Paper - An experiential research paper, based on Kolb’s experiential learning cycle, is a formal that asks students to identify a particular experience at the service site and analyzes that experience withing 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 inter-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)
14. Service-Learning Contracts and Logs - Service-learning contracts formalize the learning and service objectives for the course. Students, in collaboration with their instructor and agency supervisor, identify learning and service objectives and identify the range of tasks to be completed during the service experience. Oftentimes, a service-learning contract cannot be completed until the student is at the agency for a couple of weeks and has a clear idea of how their skills and expertise can be of service. A service log is a continuous summary of specific activities completed and progress towards accomplishing the service-learning goals. The contract and log can become the basis for reflection when students are asked to assess their progress towards meeting the identified objectives and identify the obstacles and supports that had an impact on their ability to achieve the service-learning objectives. These items can also be submitted in a service-learning portfolio as evidence of the activities completed.
15. 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.

16. 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 the 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)
17. 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: list phrases that describe your senses/feelings at the service site. List phrases that describe your actions at the service site. List phrases that describe your thoughts at the service site. What contradictions did you sense at the service site? What connections can you make between your service and the course content? (Nadine Cruz, Stanford University)
18. 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 Community College)
19. 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 met the learning objectives of the course is suggested for the portfolio.
20. 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 the time) item(s) that remind them of how they feel about their service-learning project. Tell

them to bring this bag with the 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. (Adapted through a speech exercise provided by Prof. James Wolf, 1998)

21. It's Your Thing/Express Yourself - This reflection exercise takes a long time in preparation (probably several weeks, if you want them to use lots of creativity). You can use a solo version or group. Both usually turn out to be very rewarding for the individual performers and the class. Tell the students that they will have the opportunity to create their own version of their feeling toward the service-learning project. Examples could include poetry, visual art (paintings, drawings, sculpture), music (rap is a rather popular choice for this exercise), individually created games or puzzles, any form of creative outlet that gives the student the chance to perform or explain in front of the class is what you are looking for. Be sure to require that it must be some kind of individual work that he/she created. This type of reflection works well if you have each student create something. However, if you are limited for class time, ask them to form groups and give them the same directions explaining that at least one of each group member's feelings must be included in their creation. You will be amazed at the kind of creativity that surfaces either way you do it. (adapted from Multiple Intelligence exercises created by Profs. Michael and Donna Lenaghan, Miami Dade Community College)
22. 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 Community College)
23. 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.
24. 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 public format. A similar presentation can be offered to the community agency as a final recognition of the students' involvement.