

Reflection Strategies for Enhancing Critical Thinking

A good teacher is prepared to set his or students upon a journey to knowledge and then be willing to go along for the ride. -- David Cooper

PLANS & PROPOSALS

Portfolio: A written document in which the student reflects on their academic learning to date, questions past assumptions, reviews their interests, and relates their past work to the current endeavor. Can include specific questions about skills, community involvement, disciplinary expertise, and feelings about group work.


Personal Learning Plans: A set of learning objectives set by the student for their academic/service work as well as personal development.

Secondary Project Proposals: Some S-L courses provide students with alternative and/or additional assignments which are completely designed by the student based on their personal interests.

WORKSHOPS/DISCUSSIONS

Consciousness-raising: Small groups of students discuss a topic relevant to their service and identify common themes in their experiences.

Identity Circle



Objectives:

- To locate the self within the context of the service-learning assignment
- To reinforce concepts from the scholarship
- To break down stereotypes about others
- To create opportunities for identifying commonalities and differences
- To build community in the classroom

Identity Circle: Before conducting this exercise, students complete an Identity Narrative -- a written essay on a part of the student's identity that makes them both the "same as" one group of people and "different than" another. The instructor should choose a timeframe and or experience related to the service assignment. The exercise begins as students form a circle and begin to process commonalties and differences in their experiences by stepping into the circle and identifying an experience/moment/identity. Other students who share the experience join in the center.

Standpoint Exercise: Based on the identity narrative and the identity circle, students participate in a workshop that helps them to realize how assumptions/stereotyping affects our views of others. Students answer the following questions: What kinds of messages did you get from others (family, the media, schoolmates, etc.) about people LIKE you? What kinds of messages did you get from others about people DIFFERENT THAN you? What kinds of messages do we take for granted about [the people the students will work with in their service assignment].

A Collective of Our Own: Students do a group activity where they identify how they commonly work in groups. They fill in questions such as: When I am in a group I tend to be _____; I like being in groups when _____. The class uses the student insights to form a consensus list of guidelines for working collectively as part of a learning community.

Boundaries to Commitment: Students are asked to do a free-write in the class about all the other commitments they have beyond this course and then rank those commitments. A discussion follows



about what commitment to others, community, etc. means. Each student then writes out a back-up plan for completing a service-assignment task if they have to attend to another priority.

Role-Playing/ Contrived Situations: Students perform roles related to their service assignment as both training for and processing specific tasks. Professors may contrive situations ahead of class, students may write them based on expectations (fears, frustrations) and students may bring them to class after the actual experience has occurred for processing. Shifting roles and stop-action journals can be used well here.

Fishbowling: A common technique for discussing problematic issues and/or debating. A small group of students act out a planned conversation in the center of the room. As the talk unfolds other students may join the "fish" and add their voice. A good way to represent the power of a learning community.

Interruption Skills: An important type of workshop on the skills necessary for interrupting prejudice/stereotyping in the community. Helps students to recognize their own prejudices and teaches them a new way to respond to the inequities they witness in their service placements.

Cross-Cultural Communication: Workshops/exercises which help students to understand the cultural differences in communication. Helps students to both prepare for their placement and interpret their experiences through multiple lenses.

Shadowing: Students shadow a client, agency contact, advocate for a period of time and then reflect on that person's roles, responsibilities, actions, perspectives, etc.

Exit Cards: Index cards passed out during or after class. Students reflect on the classroom content -- How does what I learned today relate to my service-learning project? What questions were left unanswered? The cards are then used by the instructor to begin the next class session.

JOURNALS

A variety of journal techniques are pertinent to our service-learning work [see the national Campus Compact website, the TOOLKIT, and others for standards/expectations for journals]. Here are some common journal types:

3 Part Journal: Describe the experience, Analyze/Interpret, Apply to Personal Life

Critical Incident Journal: Choose a "fork in the road," a frustrating moment, a conflict from the service assignment. Describe, Interpret, Discuss how you might have handled it differently (changes you might make)

Stop Action Journal: Stop a role playing situation OR have students stop a case study in the middle and discuss how they would act/react in the situation.

Key Phrase Journal/Thematic Journal: Students and/or instructor select key concepts, phrases, or themes from the week's work which must be used in the student's journal entry about the service assignment.

Double Entry/Split Journal: Field notes, concepts, timelogs, ideas, experience on the left; analysis, interpretation, connections to scholarship on the right.

Insight Entry Journal: Students include weekly reflections on: Things I Didn't Know I Didn't Know, Expanded Ideas about What I Knew I Knew, and New Questions emerging from What I Know I Don't Know.

Field Journal: Entries focus entirely on descriptions of experiences at the service site. Can be used as a basis for papers and essays or group projects and final products.

FORMAL WRITING ASSIGNMENTS

Problem-Solving Essay: Focuses entirely on a problem situated at the service site. Describes the problem and suggests plans for change, solutions. Helps students to place an emphasis on the need being addressed and the community participants.

Emotive Essay: Describe a situation. How did it make you feel? How has it challenged your way of thinking? What might you do differently?

Metaphor Essay: Write an essay that uses metaphor to interpret a situation at your service-learning site, your role in service, your feelings about the service, etc.

Directed Writings: Any writing assignment where specific questions are posed by the professor that are both situated for the student in the readings and are to be related to encounters at the site.

Ethical Case Study: A study of a specific ethical dilemma at the site. Begins with a detailed description and moves to analysis from one or multiple perspectives.

Issue Paper: Students find current articles, newspaper clippings, magazine pieces that are directly related to their service assignment. They compare the issue in the media to the complexities of a similar issue at their site.

Final Products: Any product that emerges from the service placement which is formal in design and content [e.g., a research report, executive summary, article, web-site, etc.] and includes student reflections on the process of creation and/or meaning of the work.

Learning Paper: Focuses entirely on the what the student has learned during the placement and/or the course. May be based on professor and/or student written learning objectives.

DISCUSSION/ORAL REFLECTION

Process Meetings: Meetings of the entire class where students are invited to process frustrating moments, conflict, successes. Students often ask for advice for further work in the field.

3/5 Minute Updates: Each team/individual provides a brief update of the placement. Specific issues might be introduced by the instructor to help provide a context for the updates. Students may be asked afterward to discuss common themes/issues that they heard across the updates. Time should be spent at the end working through common questions and problems.

Presentations: Presentations of community outcomes, final products, celebrations, etc. are important points in the S-L process. The public, community advocates, and university friends should be invited. Reflection on the experience can be an integral part of these summative events.