

UNIT 6: CRITICAL REFLECTION

This unit provides an overview of critical reflection and reflective activities that are an essential part of learning from community-engaged experiences.

HANDOUTS

- Journal Writing Guidelines – A Sample Form

WHAT IS CRITICAL REFLECTION?

Experiential learning, including service-learning, problem-based learning and community-oriented primary care curricula, is built on the foundation of action-reflection theorized by John Dewey and David Kolb. According to Dewey (1938), “Experience and education cannot be directly equated to one another. For some, experience can be mis-educative.” In order for students to make deep connections between the service experience and the course content, they must engage in critical reflection (Crews, 1999; Eyler & Giles, 1999; Ribek, 2000; Bringle & Hatcher, 2003; Ash & Clayton, 2009). Critical reflection, in the context of service-learning (and, indeed, all experiential pedagogies), is “a process of metacognition that functions to improve the quality of thought and of action and the relationship between them” (Ash & Clayton, 2009, p. 27).

Critical reflection, when thoughtfully designed, offers a mechanism to generate, deepen, and document learning (Ash & Clayton, 2009). Beyond that, critical reflection offers students a mechanism to explore their values and beliefs, challenge and deconstruct stereotypes, and consider present and future action based on their experiences. Finally, critical reflection should occur throughout the course and be structured such that it provides a means for both formative and summative assessment.

Critical reflection activities should (Bringle & Hatcher, 1999):

1. clearly link the community based experience to the course content and learning objectives
2. be structured in terms of descriptions, expectations, and the criteria for the assignment
3. occur regularly through the semester
4. allow for feedback and assessment by the instructor
5. include the opportunity for students to explore, clarify, and alter their personal values

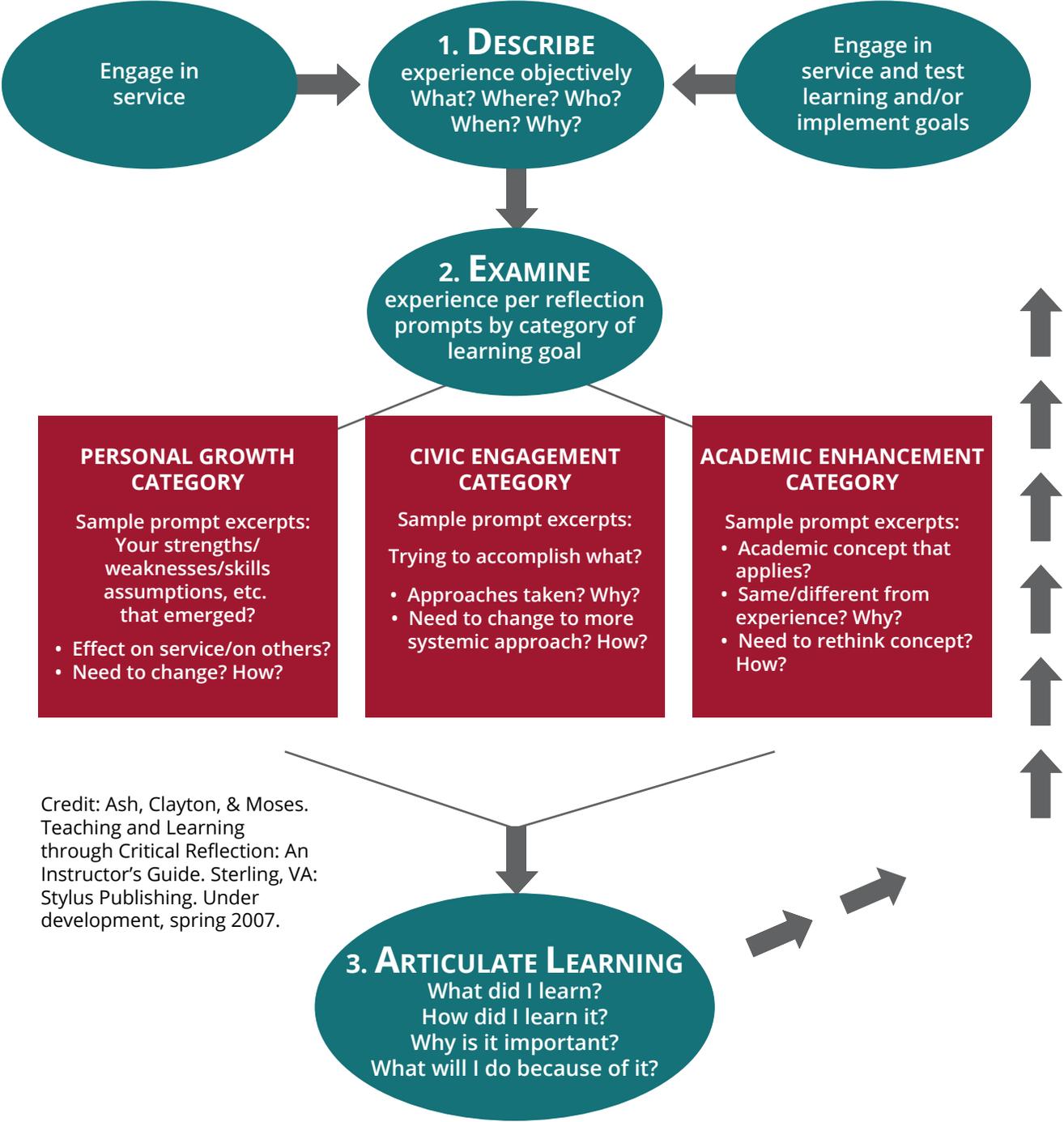
Reflection models:

The Kolb model suggests that when one learns from experience, one goes through a three-step cycle: (1) start with a concrete experience, (2) consider reflective observations, and (3) process information through abstraction and conceptualization. The key is to encourage students to base their reflection on concrete experiences, given that many individuals in academic environments have a tendency to leap prematurely into theoretical or conceptual discussions. Grounding students and connecting them back to real experiences is key for reflection exercises to be worthwhile.

Ash and Clayton’s D.E.A.L. model builds on Kolb to deepen learning and encourage students to prepare for further action. D.E.A.L. stands for Describe, Examine, and Articulate Learning. In this process, students:

1. Describe their service experiences in an objective manner, including as much concrete detail as possible
2. Examine that experience in the context of course learning objectives
3. Articulate their learning, including goals for future action in the service experience to improve and refine their learning

SCHEMATIC OVERVIEW OF THE DEAL MODEL FOR CRITICAL REFLECTION



Credit: Ash, Clayton, & Moses. Teaching and Learning through Critical Reflection: An Instructor's Guide. Sterling, VA: Stylus Publishing. Under development, spring 2007.

Reflection activities:

A variety of methods and tools can be used to foster reflection among students including dialogue, journaling, photo-journaling, directed writing assignments, and exams, just to name a few. Reflection activities should be conducted before, during and after the community-based experience. Reflection activities can be conducted alone, with classmates and with community partners. Below are examples of reflection activities. The instructor should select reflection activities that best promote student learning for a particular course. We encourage instructors to engage community partners in these reflection activities. For example, community partners can facilitate group dialogue in the classroom or at the community site.

Group dialogue: Whether in person or electronically, students can engage in active discussions that allow them to share their perspectives and experiences. Through the course of open and honest discussion, students are encouraged to discuss their values, beliefs and stereotypes related to the community service experience and the population they are working with. In addition to campus-based faculty, community and/or student leaders can serve as facilitators.

Journaling: Several different types of journaling techniques are practiced. To maximize reflection and learning, structured journaling in which students refer to a set of questions to prompt their thinking about their activities, feelings, perceptions, values, and attitudes is recommended. Students can submit their journals on a weekly or monthly basis. Instructors can respond to statements or elicit more thinking about a statement by writing notes or questions in the margins. One interesting approach to journaling is to ask students to pick out journal passages that reflect their transformation during the course, and to write an essay about that transformation.

Photo-journaling or video production: This technique allows students to take pictures or use video to document events and interactions within the community that help convey the community service experience and the learning that has occurred. *Photo-journals can be a reflective process and product, or can form the basis of a presentation or essay that elaborates further on the service and learning.* A note of caution: While this technique is useful for students who prefer to use art as a form of expression, it is important to receive permission from members within the community to take photos. For example, photos taken within a clinic setting will infringe on a patient's confidentiality. If possible, photos or videos may be used in future course assignments with student permission. For example, if a student produces a video on a community health center, then this video could be used for future class assignments and discussions.

Directed writing assignments: Students are asked to reflect on their service within the structure of course content. Instructors may structure questions identifying a section from class readings or the textbook (i.e., quotes, statistics, concepts). For example, students might be asked to connect their service experience with a competency requirement within their profession, such as improved communication skills, or skills in interdisciplinary collaboration. Students may describe how well they have achieved this competency as a result of their community-based experience, and what they may need to do to improve this skill. Students may need to provide evidence that they have achieved this particular competency. Another approach for a directed writing assignment includes asking the students to create and respond to their own directed questions.

Exams: Faculty may design exams that include at least one essay question that draws from the material they are being tested on and asks students to connect this to their community-based experiences.

Key Takeaways:

1. Critical reflection is a valuable way to achieve learning objectives and professional development.
2. There are many forms that reflection can take, ranging from the informal to the formal. However, the key for any critical reflection assignment is that it is challenging, grounded in concrete experience, requires critical thinking, and inspires interest in the learning.



SUGGESTED WEBSITES AND ONLINE RESOURCES

[Digital Storytelling as Critical Reflection](#)

Oklahoma City University

[What Makes Service-Learning Unique: Reflection and Reciprocity](#)

Faculty Focus

[Community Service-Learning Center](#)

University of Minnesota

[Critical Incident Questionnaires for Critical Reflection](#)

Oklahoma City University

[Emotion in PBL & Service-Learning](#)

SUNY Cortland

HANDOUT: JOURNAL WRITING GUIDELINES- A SAMPLE FORM

This sample form is adapted from *A Faculty Manual for Integrating Service-Learning in Health Education* written by Kerri Ribek.

Overview. Keeping a journal will be an important part of your learning experience. By having you think about what you are doing and what you are learning from the experience, the writing of a journal can increase the amount you actually learn. It can also make you aware of what you don't know, so that you can direct your efforts towards finding out more.

Instructions: Do a journal entry each time you work at the community site. Take a few minutes before you leave the site to make your entry or do it within a few hours of your experience to facilitate making an accurate entry. Journals will be collected on the dates indicated on the Course Outline. Each journal entry should include all of the following elements. Please clearly divide each entry into the following categories.

1. Date and hours worked (1 point)
2. Objective Description of your experiences (5 points)
 - What happened?
 - Write a factual account of the behaviors you observed that does not include your opinion.
 - Write at least 100 words.
3. Interpretation/Explanation (8 points)
 - Now try to understand the behaviors you described above in #2. Use principles and concepts from the course reading material and lectures in making your interpretations.
4. Personal Opinions/Feelings and Learning (4 points)

Thoughts/opinions. Interpret what you saw and heard today. What does it mean to you?

Feelings. Use emotion words (i.e., happy, surprised, frustrated) to describe your feelings.

- What knowledge and/or skills did you acquire today?
- What did you learn about yourself?
- What did you learn about others around you?

Please write clearly. Your journal provides important evidence of what you are learning from your experience. Your journal is also a very important source of information for writing your Final Project Report.

- Each journal is worth a total of 18 points and the following criteria will be used to evaluate your journal and allocate points:
- Entries respond to all four items listed for the journal above. Objective Description and Interpretation/Explanation are clearly distinguished from each other. Clear connections to course principles and concepts are made. Points may be deducted for each of the following: You are not present to participate in the class discussions based on the journal (3-9 points). And/or your journal is not handed in on the due dates (3-9 points deducted).