



CAL CORPS
Public Service Center

Essential Guide to Reflection

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Introduction

Reflection is the most important part of service because it distinguishes service-learning from community service. Both service-learning and community service fulfill a communal need through volunteering. But service-learning also uses that need as a reference and connection to better understand oneself, others and the larger social context. Regular reflection activities help to retain committed individuals, increase motivation, awareness, and meaning to any experience. However, implementing reflection is challenging because no two service-learning experiences or individuals are identical. There is no single way to reflect.

There are common perceptions that reflection simply involves people sitting around talking about their feelings and thoughts. With proper facilitation, reflection is a structured safe-haven for exchange of ideas and thoughts that challenges the status quo in a respectful manner. Another false perception is that service-learning and community service are the same thing. One can complete a term of community service and never learn anything new. The learning aspect comes from taking the extra time to question all aspects of what you've done.

This handbook is a quick guide to the what, why and how of reflection and is by no means complete. In the interest of not reinventing the wheel, this is a compilation of various other trainings, handouts, books and resources used by other agencies and service centers. It is challenging to compile a comprehensive guide to reflection because there are many other ways and activities to achieve the same goal.

Because there is no single way to approach an individual's learning styles, a couple of interpretations and theories are included. Each student group leader can choose whichever makes the most sense or applicable to your group or service experience. Feel free to experiment with different styles, including those not mentioned in this handbook.

"Service-learning resurrects idealism, compassion and altruism . . . we cannot survive as a nation unless we hold onto these qualities and teach them to our children."

Madeline Kunin, Former Deputy Secretary, U.S. Department of Education

What is Reflection?

Reflection is the process of thinking about our experiences and attributing meaning to them. It occurs naturally for all human beings and is the key to learning new things and increasing understanding. Debriefing, circling-up, and processing are other terms commonly used in lieu of reflection. However, they are incomplete descriptions since they fail to define and explain the full scope of activities or purpose of reflection.

Webster's definitions¹:

re·flec·tion

Function: noun

Etymology: Middle English, alteration of reflexion, from Late Latin reflexion-, reflexio act of bending back, from Latin reflectere

1 : an instance of reflecting; especially : the return of light or sound waves from a surface

2 : the production of an image by or as if by a mirror

3 a : the action of bending or folding back b : a reflected part : FOLD

4 : something produced by reflecting : as a : an image given back by a reflecting surface b : an effect produced by an influence <the high crime rate is a reflection of our violent society>

5 : an often obscure or indirect criticism : REPROACH <a reflection on his character>

6 : a thought, idea, or opinion formed or a remark made as a result of meditation

7 : consideration of some subject matter, idea, or purpose

8 obsolete : turning back : RETURN

9 a : a transformation of a figure in which each point is replaced by a point symmetric with respect to a line or plane b : a transformation that involves reflection in more than one axis of a rectangular coordinate system

med·i·tate

Function: verb

Etymology: Latin meditatus, past participle of meditari, frequentative of mederi to remedy -- more at MEDICAL

intransitive senses : to engage in contemplation or reflection

transitive senses

1 : to focus one's thoughts on : reflect on or ponder over

2 : to plan or project in the mind : INTEND, PURPOSE

fa·cil·i·tate

Function: verb

1: to make easier

2: help bring about <facilitate economic recovery>

¹ Merriam Webster's online dictionary <<http://www.m-w.com/>>

Why Should We Reflect?

Reflection is a crucial part of service-learning because in many instances we do not learn from doing, but from thinking about what we do. It is a means for people to recall their service experience, connect it to their lives, and analyze the issue they are looking at within a wider context.

Reflection

- Has positive impact on volunteers' attitudes regarding service
- Motivates people to get involved in systemic social change work
- Improves retention by engaging volunteers
- Helps to develop leadership skills within the organization
- Increases group cohesiveness through more time to share and bond
- Enhances critical thinking skills
- Forces people to consider the complexities of an issue instead of viewing things as black and white
- Helps people reexamine their values and lifestyle
- Gives meaning to the service experience
- Gives people new energy for volunteer
- May generate ideas for improvement of service
- Helps people reflect on their successes and see how their service has impacted others

There are different ways to learn from service, ranging from letting the experience speak for itself to having someone explicitly state what volunteers should have received from the experience. Reflection is the middle of these two extremes by having activities that encourage, at times challenge students to make specific connects between what they know and what they've done. Through reflection, students make connections to real world situations, experience personal growth and development, connect to others, gain understanding, develop citizenship skills, share their reactions and feelings about the event and learn.

“Reading (or serving) without reflecting is like eating without digesting.”
Edmund Burke

When – and with whom – to Reflect

The 4 C's of Reflection²

Four important elements of reflection are isolated in this model in order to develop effective strategies. Effective critical reflection is continuous, connected, challenging and contextualized.

Continuous:

Most effective reflection activities occur both during the course of someone's education and service. Continuous reflection should occur before, during and after the service-learning experience.

Connected:

Bridging the gap between classroom theories, personal service-learning experiences to the "big picture" context in order to understand the causes and potential solutions to social issues.

Challenging:

Provoking deep critical thinking in order to develop alternate explanations and question their initial perception and observations. Creating a safe environment that promotes trust, mutual respect, and open dialogue is crucial. It is one of the more difficult aspects for facilitators.

Contextualized:

The reflection activity is appropriate and purposefully implemented according to the topic, experience, and content.

Reflection Map (See next two pages)

A reflection map should be used as a visual aid in planning reflection activities. Ideally, each category of row and column would be filled in, but not all of the boxes have to be filled in. The goal of the map is to ensure that every group and time period is accounted for. Also, using the reflection map will help with planning while ensuring variation in the styles and types of activities.

² Eyler, Janet and Dwight Giles. 1999. *Where is the Service in Service Learning?*

Your Reflection Map³

	Before	During	After
Participant Alone			
With the Rest of Service Group			
With Community Partners			

³ Eyler, J. (2001). Creating your Reflection Map. In M. Canada (Ed.) Service-learning: Practical Advice and Models. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass New Directions for Higher Education Series #114, p35-43

Sample Reflection Map

	Before	During	After
Participant Alone	Letter to myself	Structured journals	Reflective essay Letter of advocacy
With the Rest of Service Group	Hopes and fears discussion	Theatre Mixed team discussion	Team presentation Collage, mural, video, photo essay
With Community Partners	Asset mapping Planning with community	Lessons learned debriefing	Presentation to community groups

How to Lead Reflection

What? So What? Now What?⁴

This is a well-used and successful framework to assist you in designing reflection activities. Although you can derive learning from each question, focusing on all three will provide broader insights and keep participants from getting stuck on only the facts or just the feelings.

Kolb's model separates the various stages of experiential learning into five: experiencing, sharing, processing, generalizing and applying. Service-learning theory uses this model to enhance the discovery and learning process by adding questions: What? So What? Now What?

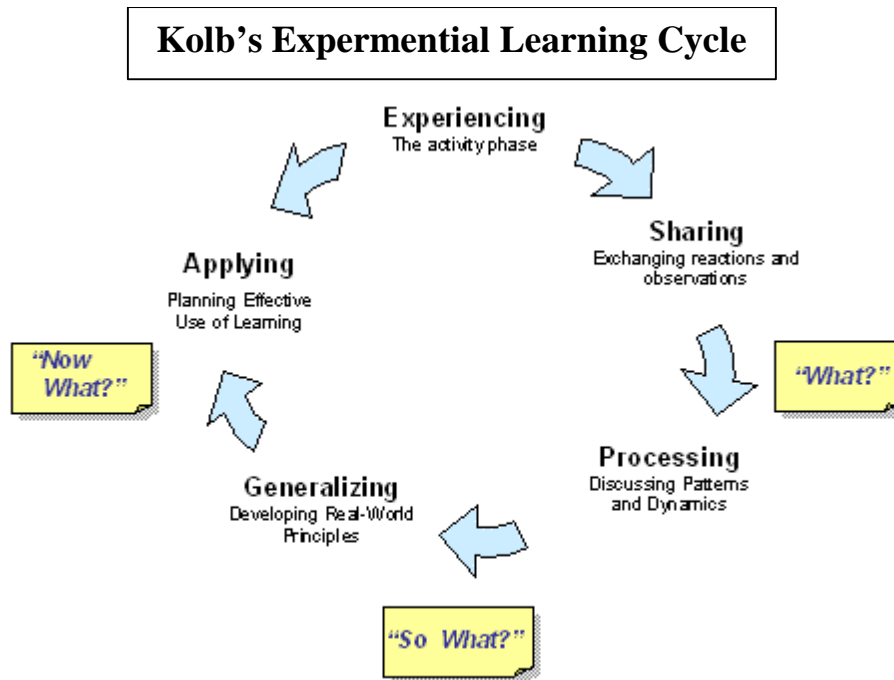


FIGURE 1

Source: National Service-Learning Clearing House

I. What (Happened)?⁵

Report what happened objectively in details about facts and event(s) without judgment or interpretation. It is important to spend time with this question, to talk about concrete particulars and not go right to the next question.

Example Questions:

- What happened?
- What did you observe?
- What issue is being addressed?
- What population is getting served?
- What were the results of the project?
- What events or "critical incidents" occurred?
- What was of particular notice?

⁴ Eyler, Janet and Dwight Giles. 1999. *Where is the Service in Service Learning?*

⁵ *The Student Coordinator's Guide to Reflection Planning* 2000. Campus Compact Leadership Gather

II. So What (Does it Mean to You)?

Discuss their feelings, ideas, and analysis of the service experience.

Example Questions:

a. The Participant

Did you learn a new skill or clarify an interest?

Did you hear, smell, or feel anything that surprised you?

What feelings or thoughts seem most strong today?

How was your experience different from what you expected?

What struck you about that? How was that significant?

What impacts the way you view the situation/experience?

What lens are you viewing it from?

What do the critical incidents mean to you? How did you respond to them?

What did you like/dislike about the experience?

Let's hear from someone who has a different reaction?

b. The Recipient

Did the "service" empower the recipient to become more self-sufficient?

What did you learn about the people/community that we served?

What might impact the recipient's views or experience of the project?

c. The Community

What are some of the pressing needs/issues in this community?

How does this project address those needs?

How, specifically, has the community benefited?

What is the least impact you can imagine for the project?

With unlimited creativity, what is the most impact on the community that you can imagine?

d. For Group Projects

In what ways did the group work well together?

What does that suggest to you about the group?

How might the group have accomplished its task more effectively?

In what ways did others help you today? And vice versa?

How were decisions made? Were everybody's ideas heard?

III. Now What (Are You Going to Do)?

Consider broader implications of the service experience and apply learning. Be aware to strike a balance between realistic, reachable goals and openness to spontaneity and change.

Example question:

What seems to be the root causes of the issue/problem addressed?

What kinds of activities are currently taking place in the community related to this project?

What contributes to the success of projects like this? What hinders success?

What learning occurred for you in this experience? How can you apply this learning?

What would you like to learn more about, related to this project or issue?

What follow-up is needed to address any challenges or difficulties?

What information can you share with your peers or community volunteers?

If you were in charge of the project, what would you do to improve it?

If you could do the project again, what would you do differently? What would “complete” the service?

Facilitating Reflection Activities: 11 Tips for Success

- ❑ Use open-ended questions when applicable
- ❑ Encourage participants to do most of the talking
- ❑ Ensure all participants have an equal opportunity to become involved
- ❑ Reflect at appropriate times
- ❑ Tolerate silence, allowing self-generation
- ❑ Use body language to convey a sense of openness (i.e. posture, hands, eye contact, etc)
- ❑ Work at the edge of a person’s comfort level
- ❑ Introduce using “I” statements to help people take responsibility for their feelings and thoughts
- ❑ Seek a balance between being flexible and staying on topic
- ❑ Set ground rules for discussion either by group (best but most time consuming) and as a standard (least ideal but quick)
- ❑ Use metaphors

Selecting Reflection Activities

An effective reflection activity should:

- ❑ Have an outcome in mind (i.e. leadership, team building, improved critical thinking, acknowledgment)
- ❑ Be appropriate for the team (age, culture, etc.)
- ❑ Happen before, during, and as soon after the service experience as possible
- ❑ Be directly linked to the project or experience
- ❑ Dispel stereotypes, address negative experiences, increase appreciation for community needs, increase commitment to service
- ❑ Be varied for different learning styles, ages, etc.
- ❑ Actively involve the service recipients for a really compelling reflection session
- ❑ Be facilitated well for maximum participation, creativity, and learning

List of Activities⁶

In addition to the “What/So What/Now What?” method, here are some other activities that can also be used. Keeping a rotation of different activities will help maintain the group’s interests and energy level. In addition, using various activities will ensure people with various “intelligences” and learning styles are accounted for. Also, different types of activities might be more appropriate during various stages of a service experience as well as commitment to service.

The following collection of reflection activities is divided according to time available. The intention is for reflection to be available and utilized any time, whether you have fifteen seconds or two hours. Endless supplies of activities are available from combining ideas from activities in the list. Please note that the activities vary in the amount of supplies needed, energy and risk level. Of course, most activities can be adjusted to accommodate appropriate learning styles and risk levels.

Risk level is often defined as the comfort level necessary to facilitate the activity. For example, an activity that discusses personal perceptions and definition of prejudice and fears would be classified as high risk. It’s generally best to leave high risks activities to closed groups who have a lot of past interactions with each other. Choosing an activity with an inappropriate risk level can lead to group members being uncomfortable and withdrawing from discussion. It can be difficult to gauge the exact risk level, but a good guideline is how much time the group has spent with each other: the longer the period, the higher the risk can be.

Appreciation/Acknowledgement

Yarn Ball

Each person states what he or she appreciates about the person they are throwing the ball to.

Appreciation Cards

Each person writes his/her name on a card, or slip of paper. Then, the cards are passed around the circle, and each person on the team writes (and draws, if desired) something they appreciate about that person. When they come back to the person of origin, have each person take time to read the cards and make comments.

Whisper-walk

The group forms two lines facing each other. One blindfolded or eye-closed person at a time walks down the middle of the two lines. People on either side of the line step into the middle (if and when moved to), tap the walker on the shoulder, and whispers in their ear something they appreciate about them. People at the end of the line help guide the person back in line, then they take their blindfold off.

Inside Circle

Each team member takes turns sitting in the middle of the circle with their eyes closed (or opposite the group with their back to the group) and remains silent while the rest of the team randomly share things they appreciate about that person. You might even have somebody writing down what was said.

⁶ *Service Reflection Toolkit* Northwest Service Academy, Metro Center, Portland OR, George Mason University’s *Service Learning Student Handbook*, and University of Maryland Community Service Programs’ *Reflecting on Your Service Experience* Handout.

Imitate-Exaggerate

Each person in the team picks from a hat the name of one other person on the team, and imitates their positive qualities with exaggeration, until the other team members guess who that is. This can be done with the entire group at once, around some task or decision, then discussed afterwards.

15 – 60 second activities:

Posed question

Reflection does not require a product or a discussion. Gather the group, obtain silence, and ask a questions (for ideas see below). Give a few more seconds of still silence.

Posed sensation

Same as above, but ask participants to check in with some sensory stimuli (sound, smell, sight) and make a mental bookmark of the project with that observation.

Capturing

Each participant makes a face, a sound, or movement capturing how they felt about the service project.

Snapshot

Create a silent snapshot of the service project. One person starts with a pose or action related to the project, everybody else joins the “snapshot.”

1 to 5 minute activities:

Question discussion

Randomly, or in a circle, each person responds to a posed question (such as “project highlight”)

One to Three words

Each person shares one to three words to describe the service activity or how you feel about the service activity or anything else regarding the project.

Journaling

Each person responds to a question in writing

Poetry/Writing Slam

Take turns; each day somebody else will write a short poem or sentence about the project, then share it with the group.

Sculptor

One participant chooses a topic and asks for a set amount of participants to be the clay. The clay people let the sculptor mold them into the sculptor's vision of their topic i.e. invasive plant removal or the plight of someone who is homeless or racism.

5 to 30 minute activities:

What? So What? Now What?

To get to each step in the model, allow five to thirty minutes for group processing.

Written Reflection

Pose three or four questions, using the “what, so what, now what” model, and allow time for writing. (i.e. What you did, why/how you did it, how you could do it better)

The Image

Prior to the project, each person writes or draws about the people or objects they will be working with (such as a tree for a tree-planting project or the community being served), the subject matter, or their feelings about the project. Revisit (or re-write/draw) it after the service project and discuss.

Senses

Before activity, project, event or even before the first day or service, ask participants to share what they expect to hear, smell, see, touch and taste. Then, follow up after the day with what the participant actually senses

Pictionary

Have a pictionary game about the experience and how you felt. Talk about it as a group.

Parables/Stories

Read a piece of pertinent literature and have participants respond and draw correlations to service experience

Sweet Reflection (from Jennifer Hofmann)

Instruct people to take some M&Ms, Skittles, or other multi-colored snack. For each color, assign a question, such as:

Yellow-something surprising you learned today

Green-something you wished for

Blue-something you felt sad about

Red-something you felt angry about

Orange-an action you'd like to take

What's your message? (Celine Fitzmaurice)

Cut rectangular pieces of paper and write your own bumper sticker about you and/or your values. Share with the group what you chose and why.

Name Your Gift

Ask “what skills do you possess? What skills do you possess that you think you'd like to share?” Include discussion about “now what?,” sharing what you'd like to do with your skills in the future.

Letter to self

Prior to a project, have participants write a letter to themselves about their personal and career goals regarding the project, or feelings about the project or community. Place it in a sealed envelope, mail it to yourself or hand out again to the team after six months and reflect.

Masks

Make a two-sided mask from a paper plate. Draw an image of how others might see you on one side, and how you see yourself on the other. Discuss the contrast. Or, could be work self/free time self, actual work/dream work.

Gingerbread Models

Draw a large gingerbread person at the beginning of the day, with drawings/writings of what makes a good (mentor, urban forester, team member, etc.). At the end of the day, share what you did well, how you thought you could improve.

Yarn Web

Stand in a circle with a ball of yarn. Each person throws it to another and says one word that explains what they will bring to the next project, something they appreciated in the person they are throwing it to, what they learned, etc. The yarn forms a web supported by the group. Use a thicker string, lower it, and have someone climb on, and try to support a person! (use caution with this one).

Hoshim Brainstorming (from STACS)

This technique is a variation of the Free Association technique. The Hoshim Technique asks participants to list answers, ideas, or opinions on “Post-it” notes or other stickies based on a proposed question or issue. The Post-It notes are then placed on the wall. The entire group then has a large gallery exhibit walk-through of all the notes in which they can review the responses, address questions or issues. The Hoshim Technique tends to be an effective tool for assisting a group that avoids discussion or is stuck on a particular issue.

Cartoon

Draw a cartoon that teaches something important regarding the service project.

All on the Wall

Put a large piece of paper up on one wall or all the way around the room. Participants write or draw feelings/thoughts/learnings on the paper. Facilitator leads discussion based on writings.

Stand and Declare (from David Sawyer)

This facilitator makes a statement to the group, to which members can strongly agree, agree, disagree, or strongly disagree. Groups form around each of the four responses to the statement, showing the group’s “differences.” Members from each opinion group are asked to explain their stance, fleshing out the many facets of the issue. People must listen carefully, and can change positions if they change perspectives. This activity helps everyone learn to disagree without being disagreeable, but must be carefully facilitated. Questions are intentionally stated to allow for personal interpretation and to limit responses to one of the four categories. Several group members will want to take some sort of an intermediate stance, but should be encouraged to choose the stance about which they feel the strongest, or which is their instinctive response. Part of the processing for this activity can then be discussion of how it felt to be so limited, or to be categorized. Questions should proceed from lower risk statements to higher risk, more controversial statements. Sample statements include:

- Service isn’t really service if people get paid.
- Direct service is mostly charity work and does little to promote social justice.
- Public education does a good job of preparing young people for the future.
- Service makes a lasting impact on the participants/community.

Lifeline Biography

Draw a line representing and plot significant periods/events (with writing or drawings) influencing who you are. Share with a partner or small group. This can be adapted many ways: do the same except using a river as a metaphor (where were there rapids, meandering, etc.) or do a Service

Biography line (when first service experience, what influenced you, positive and negative impacts on your life)

Object share

Each person brings in and passes around an object, and shares how the object is like them or the project they just did (pick a specific one) examples include: “what I contributed to the team, how I felt about this project, what I learned, etc.” The object can be something found in nature, a type of food, a book, etc. (pick one!) How did it taste: Bring a mixture of fruits and nuts, have them use these items as metaphors to describe their day, week, project, group interaction, etc, and answer the question, “how did it taste.” Then, “what would you like it to taste like?”

30 minute to two-hour activities:

Song, Poem, Collage, Sculpture, Written Story, Skit

Create something artistic as a large group, or individually then meshed together, to express what happened, how it felt, or what the service experience meant to you. It can incorporate what was learned, accomplished, challenges overcome along the way. Could be presented to people from organizations that helped, parents, community volunteers, etc.

Interview each other

Break the group into pairs or triplets and have them interview each other about their service experience, take notes, and summarize a couple of things to the group.

Photo Reflection

Many organizations and programs compile pictorial accounts of their work to share among participants as well as with the general public. These pictures can become tools for reflection when participants are asked to write reflective captions for the pictures. Doing this can transform this purely social “pizza and picture party” into an opportunity for meaningful reflection.

Shopping for Survival

Share with your group that a person on welfare has an average of \$.84 to spend per meal. Walk out the door of your site or bring volunteers to a location in an impoverished part of town. Give each person \$1 and ask them find as much food as they can with for the one dollar. Give them 30 minutes to do so and then meet back at a common location. When you meet back together, show each other what you found and then eat your meal together. Possible questions for discussion include:

- What things do our meals have in common?
- What places did you get your food from?
- What options did you see for fresh, whole foods?
- What might happen if you ate this food regularly?
- What actions could you take to address your awareness about food?

Tree Reflection

Give a sheet of paper and instruct participants to draw a tree. Have them label the roots as the values, people, beliefs that influence them, the bark as issues/causes they are passionate about and the branches as steps they will take to act on these passions or address the needs they identified. Share in pairs and/or in a large group. (Adapted from Community Service Learning: A guide to including service in the public school curriculum. Edited by Rahima C. Wade 1997)

Wall Exercises

Post newspaper clippings, stories, quotes, etc. around the room with blank sheets of paper on which students can write their reactions to the materials you have posted. Be sure the materials pertain in some way to the topic you wish to discuss during reflection. Have participants silently walk around the room, reading the material and sharing their opinions. When they are finished, select individuals to read the opinion papers aloud and discuss the articles as a group. Be sure that participants understand that, even though opinions are anonymous, everyone must be respectful of others' opinion.

Teach

Teach others what you learned through this service experience. Put together instructions or references for learning more about it.

Imitations: Each team member picks the name of another team member out of a hat, and imitates that person relating two or three positive traits/contributions to the team, and one quirky habit (something light – judgment is essential)

Inventory

Develop an inventory for the community being served or your own community, regarding the problem you are addressing or work you are doing. What are the resources, who are the local leaders, what roles to certain organizations play, what relationships exist, what other work has been done, what are the various attitudes about the project, what are the challenges, where are they, etc. (see CNS document “By the People” for more info.)

Media

Build a skill as well as reflect by writing press releases, taking pictures, contacting media, and obtaining some media coverage of the project.

Poetry

Each participant comes up with a metaphor to represent where they are in life (or in service) right now. The metaphors are shared in the whole group, writing them on the flip charts. Break into groups of six, each group chooses a metaphor to write about, each person writes (stream of consciousness) for five minutes. Each person chooses two favorite phrases from their writing and weaves them together with the phrases from other participants of their group to compose a twelve-line poem.

Quotes Exercise

Each participant draws a strip of paper and reads the quote to him/herself. Participants take turns reading their quote out loud, explaining what they think it means, and discussing how it might pertain to the service project at hand. The following quotes can be used in this manner.

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 sight.

-- Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Minister, Civil Rights Leader

A different world cannot be built by indifferent people.
-- Horace Mann, Philosopher

I believe that the serving and being served are reciprocal and that one cannot really be one without the other.
-- Robert Greenleaf, Educator and Writer

Freirian Fish Bowl (from STACS)

Often, for many reasons, certain individuals will feel uncomfortable voicing their opinion in a group environment. One mechanism for gaining full-group participation is to have all participants write their respective responses to issues on a piece of paper (do not include names). The issues, or pieces of paper, are then placed in a hat in the middle of a circle. For example, the facilitator asks that everyone explain (on paper) "why are there so many homeless people in this city?" Answers may range from, "people do not want work because they are lazy" to "there exists a government conspiracy and homeless funding is often misused." These are typical statements that are controversial but tend to not be voiced openly. Thus, the Freirian method gets all opinions down on paper. Once opinions have been recorded on paper and placed in a hat, pass the hat among the group. Everyone must respond with their interpretation of the written response and then voice their personal reaction to the paper.

Personal Shield

Supplies: Shields, Markers

Give each participant his or her own shield. Introduce the categories they are going to use on their shield and show an example of your own. Give them approximately ten minutes to make their shield. Ask them to share what they included on their shield with the group.

Suggested debrief questions:

How did it feel to share your shield with the group?

How did it feel to hear what other people shared?

Was there a particular category that was easy or hard for you? Why?

How did it feel to focus on your self during this process?

Did this activity help you see your positive characteristics?

How will you use what you learned in this activity?

Longer-term Project or Team Experience activities:

Scrapbook or Memory Box

Create a scrapbook of your memories with the team or project, including pictures, quotes said, skills learned, challenges overcome, etc.

Letter to Yourself

At the beginning of the year, write a letter to another person or yourself on something like what your expectations or goals are for the year or why you choose to do service. Collect, save and redistribute at the end of the year. Share and discuss.

Team Photo Trading Cards

You can add history, quotes, and service “stats.”

Video

Shoot a video about the project or about the topic related to the project.

Display/Mural

Create a group or project display/mural, which chronicles the project. If utilized, this can be an excellent outreach tool for recruiting new members or community volunteers, or the public awareness of the project.

Newsletter

Pool your service reflections, stories and pictures together to make a newsletter. This can be sent out to members, sponsors, staff, and community volunteers involved in the project.

Journal (see below)

A little writing, every day, goes a long, long way.

Report

Write a report on the project. Use photos!

ABC book

Illustrated with one sentence, thought and/or picture for each alphabet letter. For grown-ups, use the project or organization name instead of alphabet!

Journaling

Journaling is one of the best reflection tools. Ideally, the program or project would allow for a ten to fifteen minute period every day for the volunteers to journal; preferably at the end of the day or during/after a debrief. It is helpful if staff or the project leader provides substantial structure to insure quality, conscientious journaling, and even more helpful if the person leading the reflection activity is journaling him/herself! Regardless of the time allotted, it is important to encourage participants to write whatever comes to mind, and to not worry about grammar, spelling, punctuation, etc. This entails a commitment to confidentiality, that nobody will ever share what they have written unless they want to. You also want to be definite and clear about the time allotted, (five to fifteen minutes), and let them know when it is almost finished.

Journaling Methods

Clusters

Have people shout out words or phrases that describe the day. Ask each person to take two minutes to write five or six words in random spaces on their journaling page. Give a short speech about the interconnectedness of everything, the web of life, Quantum Physics, or whatever and ask them to do a free write focusing on those five or six items and how they are related.

The Critical Incident

Choose an incident that involved the entire team and give them a couple of minutes to think about the incident. Then ask them to write a detailed, factual report of what happened, making sure to answer the four “W” questions, “who, what, where, when.” You can then have participants share their stories to see how they differ from one another.

Dialogue

A good one for developing observation and communication skills. Ask participants in the morning to pay special attention to conversations they hear throughout the day, including light conversations between staff and volunteers, volunteers and sponsors or stakeholders, etc. Ask them to pay special attention to mannerisms, accents, and the tone of the conversation. Later, have the participants pick a dialogue and duplicate as closely as possible how it went. This should be done in a light-hearted manner on a light-hearted day to avoid a “bashing” session. This is an exercise that gets better with time, as their observation and retention skills improve.

Different Perspectives

A great one for developing empathy skills. Ask participants to recall a specific occurrence from the day that involved some degree of conflict. Ask them to assume the viewpoint opposite to which they actually held during this conflict (or the viewpoint they were the least empathetic with) and write a description of the conflict from this perspective. This can include what happened, their role in it, what they want, what they envision as the ideal solution. Good debrief questions are, “How did it feel to do this writing, how were you able to get in their shoes or how was it difficult, what is one thing you realized through this writing.”

The Fly on the Wall

Ask participants to take a couple moments to reflect on the day (where they've been, what they've done, whom they've worked with, tools they've used). Then ask them to pretend they were a "fly on the wall" observing but not participating in the scene, and write a short descriptive passage based on their observations. You can also use any animal or plant or person that was near the project site.

The Free Write

The easiest and perhaps most effective journaling method, wherein people that think they "can't write" or "have nothing to say" realize how much and how well they can write. For a predetermined amount of time participants engage in continuous writing by keeping their pens moving . . . even if only to write, "I don't know what to write." It is helpful to trigger the free-write with an open-ended sentence such as "I don't think I'll ever forget . . ." or "If I could do one thing differently, I would . . ." or make up your own! Let participants know when they are nearing the end of the write time, then ask them how it went.

The Letter

Have participants write a letter to themselves, a relative, a historical figure, a political figure, etc. describing the project and what it means to them, or ask for some piece of advice, etc.

Sample Reflection Questions

This list will give you an idea of what an effective reflection question is comprised of. Feel free to use these or make up your own.

- ❑ What is service? What is the difference between service and volunteering?
- ❑ Describe the atmosphere of this organization.
- ❑ Summarize the most important things you will take with you or learned from the experience.
- ❑ How does your service relate to your academic work or class?
- ❑ How did this experience challenge your assumptions and stereotypes?
- ❑ Compare/contrast your service with anything you've experienced, read about or imagined.
- ❑ Describe some of your interactions. Why do you think this happened?
- ❑ How are you different compared to when you began volunteering?
- ❑ If you were one of the people receiving services, what would you think of yourself?
- ❑ How does your service help you progress in terms of professional development? Intellectual pursuit? Spiritual fulfillment? Civic responsibility? Political consciousness? Understanding?
- ❑ What public policies affect this agency? What do they imply? How can they be improved?
- ❑ How would you do this differently if you were in charge?
- ❑ What is the best/worst/most challenging thing that has happened while volunteering?
- ❑ What is one way in which you expect the community you are serving to nourish, nurture, or satisfy you? What are two ways you will take responsibility for that community?
- ❑ Describe an internal or external conflict that has surfaced for you during your service work. Explain the factors that contribute to it and how you might resolve or cope with the conflict.
- ❑ Discuss a social problem that you've come across during your service. What do you think are the root causes of this problem? Explain how your service may contribute to its alleviation.
- ❑ What could an individual, group or society do to address the issues our agency serves?
- ❑ How can society be more compassionate/informed/involved regarding this community?
- ❑ What is the difference between generosity, charity, justice, and social change?
- ❑ Where do we go from here? What's the next step?
- ❑ Make a list of the skills used and learned on this project.
- ❑ Over the next two years, what's one issue you'd like to be a more respected authority on? How will this be a challenge for you?
- ❑ Have you ever felt hopelessness, despair, discouragement or burnout related to your service? How have you dealt with this? How can reflection help?
- ❑ What are some of the problems facing the world today? How did your service address them?
- ❑ Identify a person, group, or community that you got to know this year, who is significantly different from you. What are the needs or challenges facing them that particularly got to you? What is one way in which you've allowed yourself to be changed by meeting them?
- ❑ What community need, work challenge, or public issue have you given the most deliberate, critical, analytical thought to this year? Who or what resources did you consult? What are some factors and facts you looked at, or data you considered?
- ❑ Dedicating ourselves to service rather than selfishness or our own comfort can be scary. We risk honestly getting to know others who are different, and come face to face, day after day, with pain, abuse, hatred, and violence. What are two fears or inner worries you have, that somehow keep you from being the person of service you hope to become? What is something in your life that brings you courage, that gives you hope?
- ❑ Your commitment to service can involve many things: keeping your word, being realistic to your limits and "yes," sometimes resisting temptations to move on to new causes and needs. Think of an activity that you really didn't want to continue, but kept doing it the best you could. Was there something you got out of that?

Service Reflection Quotes

“The reasonable man adapts himself to the world: The unreasonable man persists in trying to adapt the world to himself. Therefore, all progress depends on the unreasonable man.” - George Bernard Shaw

“Nothing will ever be attempted, if all possible objections must first be overcome.” – Samuel Johnson

“The universe is made of stories, not of atoms.” – Auriel Rukeyse

“You cannot travel on the path until you have become the Path itself.” – Buddha

“It is better to light one small candle than to curse the darkness” – Confucius

“We didn’t inherit the land from our fathers. We are borrowing it from our children.” – Amish Belief

“The best test, and the most difficult to administer is: Do those served grow as persons; do they, while being served, become healthier, wiser, freer, more autonomous, more likely themselves to become servants?” – Robert Greenleaf, Servant Leadership

“All . . . are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny . . . I can never be what I ought to be until you are what you ought to be, and you can never be what you ought to be until I am what I ought to be. This is the inter-related structure of reality.” – Martin Luther King, Jr.

"A human being is part of the whole, called by us 'Universe,' a part limited in time and space. He experiences himself, his thoughts and feelings, as something separated from the rest, a kind of optical delusion of his consciousness. This delusion is a kind of prison for us, restricting us to our personal desires and affection for a few persons nearest to us. Our task must be to free ourselves from this prison by widening our circles of compassion to embrace all living creatures and the whole of nature in its beauty." -Albert Einstein

"If you want to build a ship, don't drum to the women and men to gather wood, and divide the work, and give orders. Instead, teach them to yearn for the vast and endless sea." - Antoine De Saint-Exupery, The Wisdom of the Sands

“Reading (or serving) without reflecting is like eating without digesting.” ~Edmund Burke

"Not until we are lost do we begin to understand ourselves." ~Henry David Thoreau

"We don't see things as they are, we see them as we are." -Anais Nin

“No problem can be solved from the same level of consciousness that created it.” – Albert Einstein

“No gem can be polished without friction, nor human perfected without trial.” – Confucius

“Not everything that counts can be measured. Not everything that can be measured counts” – Albert Einstein

“I was taught that the world had a lot of problems; that I could struggle and change them; that intellectual and material gifts brought the privilege and responsibility of sharing with others less fortunate; and that service is the rent each of us pay for a living . . . the very purpose of life, and not something you do in your spare time or after you have reached your personal goals.” - Marian Wright Edelman

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

"If you must dream of the world you want to live in, dream out loud." - Paul Hewson, Irish poet.

"Experience is not what happens to a man; it is what a man does with what happened to him."
Aldous Huxley

"You will find meaning only by sharing in the responsibilities, the dangers, and the passions of your time." President Lyndon B. Johnson