

# A Concise Guide to Reflection

Reflection is the very heart of service learning. By the process of sifting through their service experiences, students become aware of what they have actually learned and can start to make connections to their classroom subjects and to other parts of their lives. When there is no reflection, there is probably little or no valid learning.

Through our work with over two thousand educators, we have culled several principles that guide successful reflection activities in service learning programs:

- Reflection is most effective when it is done *before, during and after* service activities.
- Some of the most compelling reflection sessions actively involve people who are receiving the service as well as students who are doing the service.
- Utilizing a wide array of reflection strategies is the most effective way of engaging *all* students in learning from service.
- Post-service reflection needs to happen as soon after the service event as possible.
- Insights gained via reflection can be profitably reexamined a week, month, semester, and year later.

## Multiple Intelligences

Teachers and other people responsible for leading reflection sessions often rely on one or two tried-and-true methods of reflection. Group discussions, journal writing and essay writing are the most common. We encourage people to expand their notion of what reflection is and how it can be done. One of the most effective tools we have found to help people do so is Howard Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences.

Gardner articulated what we all know intuitively: people solve problems and construct meaning in very different ways. He found that those different ways can be grouped into seven types, which have become known as the Seven Intelligences. The chart below (continued on the next page) gives a good sense of the different kinds of learners.

### Howard Gardner's Eight Intelligences

TYPE	LIKES TO...	IS GOOD AT...	LEARNS BEST BY...
<b>LINGUISTIC LEARNER</b> "The Word Player"	read write tell stories	memorizing names, places, dates & trivia	saying, hearing & seeing words
<b>LOGICAL/ MATHEMATICAL LEARNER</b> "The Questioner"	do experiments, figure out things, work with numbers, ask questions, explore patterns and relationships	math, reasoning, logic, problem-solving	categorizing, classifying, working with abstract patterns & relationships

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<b>TYPE</b>	<b>LIKES TO...</b>	<b>IS GOOD AT...</b>	<b>LEARNS BEST BY...</b>
<b>SPATIAL LEARNER</b> "The Visualizer"	draw, build, design & create things, daydream, look at pictures & slides, watch movies, play with machines	imagining things, sensing changes, mazes, puzzles, reading maps	visualizing, dreaming, working with color/pictures
<b>MUSICAL LEARNER</b> "The Music Lover"	sing, hum tunes, listen to music, play an instrument, respond to music	picking up sounds, remembering melodies, noticing pitches/rhythms	rhythm, melody, music
<b>BODILY/ KINESTHETIC LEARNER</b> "The Mover"	move around, touch & talk, use body language	physical activities, dancing, acting, processing knowledge	touching, moving, and interacting through sports, crafts & bodily sensations
<b>INTERPERSONAL LEARNER</b> "The Socializer"	have lots of friends, talk with people, join groups	understanding people, leading others, organizing, interviewing, communicating, manipulating, mediating conflicts	sharing, relating, cooperating, comparing
<b>INTRAPERSONAL LEARNER</b> "The Individual"	work alone, pursue own interests	understanding self, focusing inward on feelings, dreams, pursuing interests, being original, setting goals	projects, interior reflection, having own space, individualized self-paced instruction
<b>NATURALIST LEARNER</b> "The Nature Lover"	observe/study nature, collect natural objects, care for animals	seeing patterns, understanding natural phenomena, uniting with nature, nurturing	being outdoors, observing and studying nature, discovering patterns

## Reflection Activities for Everyone

Have fun choosing and designing reflection activities! The ideas below are just to get your students started. Three suggestions: (1) give students *options*--everyone loves a choice; (2) over the course of a year, try reflective activities based on *all* the intelligences so that you are playing to everyone's strengths; (3) ask students to create reflective activities that use different *combinations* of intelligences.

### LINGUISTIC

- Keep an ongoing journal, either reflecting on your own about your service experiences, or responding to assigned questions and topics.
- Compose an essay based on the first day of your service job.
- Write a reflection paper that combines your service experience with what you are learning in class.
- Prepare a research paper on an issue that arises from your service experience.
- Create a resumé explaining the job skills you attained while volunteering.
- Write a job description for the service job you held.
- Compose a letter to your site supervisor offering suggestions for working with future youth volunteers.
- Write an article for the school or community newspaper highlighting your accomplishments.
- Find a newspaper article about the issue your agency works to address.
- Write a poem that reflects your volunteer experience.
- Report to your class the goals of the place where you work.

### LOGICAL/MATHEMATICAL

- Compile statistics or other quantitative data on your service learning project.
- Identify a problem you see at your work site and devise a solution.
- Connect your service learning experience to a larger issue at the state or national level: where does your service fit in?
- Write about any measurements, statistics, classifications or numbers that play a role in the work done at your placement.
- Construct a detailed time line of the service experience.
- Create a hypothesis based on your experience. Explain how you would test the hypothesis.
- Explain what scientific knowledge would help you in your placement, and why. Devise a plan for getting such knowledge.

### BODILY/KINESTHETIC

- Within three minutes, express the heart of your volunteer experience to the class *without using words*.
- Create and perform a skit about what happened at your site.
- Act out a possible television commercial that would encourage people to take advantage of the services your agency offers.
- Put on a skit for an all-school assembly that shows the younger students what it is like to do service work.
- Create and perform a dance that reflects your experience with service work.

## SPATIAL

- Draw the place where you volunteer and tell the class about your drawing.
- Draw your school and the place where you volunteer and what is in between; tell the class about your drawing.
- Create a display about the issue that your agency works on; display it at the agency and/or at school.
- Make a collage that shows something about your placement, or how you feel about your work there.
- Make a video commercial that encourages people to volunteer at your site.
- Record a TV commercial that you find offensive as a result of your work. Show it to the class and talk about it.
- Bring in a clip from a movie that expresses something you have experienced at your service work. Show it to the class and tell about.
- Create a video that reflects what you and your classmates have accomplished through this service learning project.
- Document the whole service learning project using pictures, video, essays, displays.
- Use charts or maps to help your classmates understand the work your agency does.

## MUSICAL

- Compose a song that captures your service experience. Either perform or record the song for your class.
- Bring in a song that reflects your service experience. Play it for the class and tell why you chose it.
- Notice sounds and songs while you're working: what are the sounds around you, what songs are people singing or humming? Create a presentation based on those sounds and songs.
- Bring in different objects that can make sounds. Have groups create rhythms that express their service experience. Put the rhythms together to make a composition.
- Bring in music without words; work in groups or as a class to create words from the service experience that match the music.

## INTERPERSONAL

*Many of the activities in the above categories can be done in groups and are therefore effective techniques for interpersonal learners. Some additional suggestions follow.*

- Have a small group discussion about your experiences doing service work.
- Share with one other person what you felt like before, during and after the volunteer work.
- Read the quote, "A ship in harbor is safe, but that is not what ships are built for" (William Shedd). Discuss how this quote relates to your volunteer work.
- Role play something that happened at your volunteer job that you did not know how to handle. Have your classmates role play appropriate and inappropriate responses to this situation.

## INTRAPERSONAL

*All reflective activities have an intrapersonal dimension: the moment when we stop to reflect about our experience. Once we move toward expressing that reflection in writing, talking, drawing, movement, etc., it takes on the characteristics of one of the other intelligences. Journalling is the most common intrapersonal activity.*

## NATURALIST

- Find a situation in nature that is similar to your experience of service. Compare the two.
- Collect natural objects that help you understand your experience better. Show them to others.
- Close your eyes and relax. Think back on your service activity. What was going on around you? Sounds? Trees? Grass? What else was in the environment? How did it affect the service? Write or talk about this.

# Journals

Journals can be structured or unstructured. Some students learn best by writing in a private journal that has no structure. Service learning experiences can stimulate strong independent writing by these students. Many other students, however, do not learn from journals unless they are structured. Teachers can assign a variety of questions and let the students choose which ones to answer, or have everyone answer the same question in order to facilitate group discussion afterward. Here are four suggestions for framing journal questions:

- (1) Journals can become mere reporting ("We went there, we worked."). Avoid this by asking higher level questions ("Why did it happen; how could it be changed," etc.).
- (2) Help students focus on the people around them.
- (3) Help them express their own emotions, reactions, changes, etc.
- (4) Help them articulate the bigger social questions (poverty, racism, literacy, treatment of elders, etc.).

## Samples of Effective Journal Questions

*Some of these questions were taken from [Reflection: The Key to Service Learning](#)*

- What did you do that was fun or satisfying?
- What was the best thing that happened to you there today? Why was it the best?
- What was the hardest part of being there today? Why?
- With whom did you talk at your placement today? Describe the conversation. How did you feel during and after your conversation?
- Picture one or two of the clients at the place you work. If you could ask them any questions you wanted, what would you ask? What do you think they would answer? Try to become one of the clients, and write down a conversation between the two of you.
- Look back to your first day at this placement. How did you feel that day, and how different is that from the way you feel there now? What has changed? Why has it changed?
- If you had a magic wand and could make changes in the lives of people at your placement, what would you change, and why?
- What is the most frustrating thing about working there?
- What do you think is the most frustrating thing in the lives of the clients you work with? What would it take to ease that frustration?
- Describe two things you've done there in the past month that you are proud of.
- How did you feel when you left your placement today? Why?
- What criticisms did you receive and how did you respond to them?
- What compliments did you receive and how did you respond to them?
- What have you learned from the people involved in this project? What have they learned from you?
- What have you learned about the community through doing this project?