

Ethical Reflection

“The students have been profoundly changed because they have seen how important these kinds of [service] acts are for people who are less fortunate.” A teacher in *SEE’s Youth: Ethics in Service (YES) Program* made this comment at the end of their school project. This was a positive observation as it provided evidence that our project goal of ethical reflection was being practiced.

Ethical reflection is a powerful tool to develop a respect for the concerns of others and has long been recognized as an important goal of character education. Thomas Lickona summarizes his own observations about ethical reflection and notes the ability of children with greater maturity in ethical thinking to help those with less maturity to develop their ethical awareness. This process requires sustained practice and is assisted by well-designed reflection activities. Mature ethical reasoning is generally defined by those who recognize the concerns of others, as opposed to those with less mature thinking, who focus on punishment and rewards. Employing the ethical thinking of mature students can be achieved during guided classroom discussion, reflection on in-class activities, or reflection during and after service activities.

Practicing ethical reflection is a necessary requirement to promote maturity in ethical thinking. During SEE’s YES program, teachers recognized that improvement of ethical reflection skills required multiple practice sessions. The application of a practical ethical decision-making framework also assisted the reflection process. The framework used during *YES* included values such as respect, honesty, and caring stated as behavior goals along with the principle of the Golden Rule.

Guided discussion using good literature is another useful strategy to cultivate ethical reflection. Robert Coles describes some of the reflection activities that have followed his reading from a short story *The Old Grandfather and the Grandson* by Leo Tolstoy. Coles notes, “In time, after we’ve talked, I’ve asked the students to write an essay about the Tolstoy story, about its meaning to them, about what they imagine themselves doing with the story if they were parents or teachers. Soon enough, . . . I am reading introspective memoirs or suggestions for this or that course of action – all of us become witnesses, with Tolstoy’s help, to the moral imagination at work.”(pg 12)

Class discussion within the traditional curriculum along with well thought out questioning strategies can also help cultivate moral thinking. Phil Vincent in *Developing Character in Students* provides excellent examples of graphic organizers to link ethical reflection to academic content.

Ethical reflection can be employed during and after service-learning activities, class discussion about literature, or during a variety of academic subjects. The skill becomes more powerful with practice and a focus on core values as outcome goals. Parents and teachers are encouraged to include reflection about character issues to cultivate ethical maturity. Regular ethical reflection can help all of us put our ethics in action.

Virtue without knowledge is weak and ineffectual, but knowledge without virtue is dangerous.

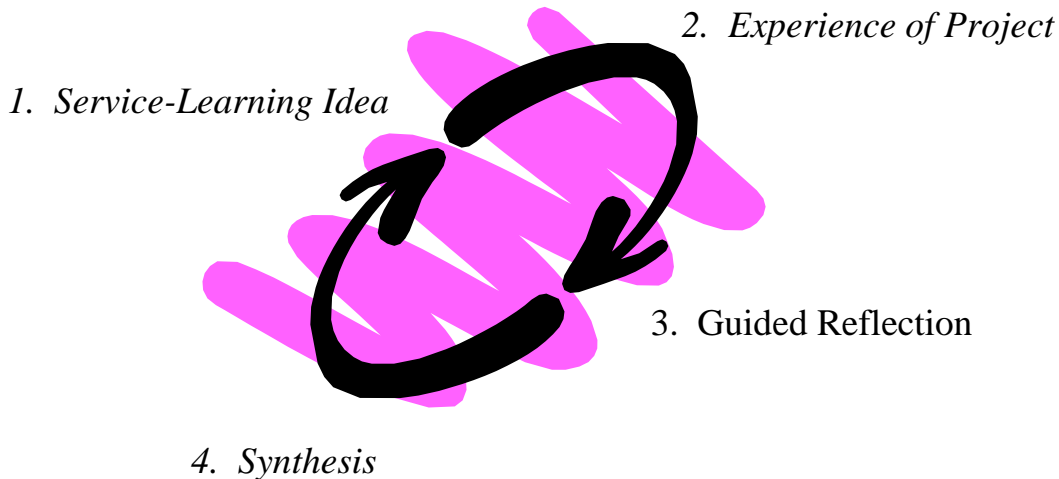
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Reflecting on Service

Why reflection?

- Connects service to learning process -- writing skills, critical thinking, gaining meaning, speaking skills...
- Program improvement -- opportunity to change goals, methods, obtain additional resources, improve or validate group norms...
- Personal development -- awareness of self and community, future commitment, identification of strengths, values...
- Celebration -- individual and group accomplishments

Reflection Process--Adapted from David Kolb (1979), Organizational Psychology. Prentice-Hall.



Written or Verbal Reflection Structures

Mirror

Reflecting on my own involvement-- how did I participate, what did I see, hear, experience, learn, did I get any new ideas, did I enjoy the activity, could I have worked smarter, harder, did this activity challenge me or help me grow...?

Microscope

Reflecting on a specific detail of the project-- describe the activity, what did the team do, who lead, who followed, did we have the necessary resources, did the team actions agree with it's norms, how did we connect the service to learning...?

Wide-Angle Lens

Reflecting on the big picture-- what did the team accomplish, how did those served seem to respond, could we have completed the project differently, what should be done in the future?

Reflecting on Service

- **Clear Objectives:** Set clear goals for reflection activities while recognizing outcomes may change because of the reflection
- **Effective Structure:** Quality reflection must be well planned and organized, not left to chance. Reflection methods must be appropriate to the situation. Always be prepared to include reflection during “teachable moments.”
- **Engaging Process:** Reflection should be interactive and interesting. It ought to be integrated throughout the service experience and help shape the ongoing project. Students should be involved in planning reflection activities.
- **Curriculum connections:** Reflection should be integrated into academic work. Academic material and reflection on service should be an interactive process.

Process Ideas

- **Speaking:** one-on-one with leader or peer, class/team discussion, small group discussion, oral reports, reports to peers, younger students, parents, policy makers, conferences, community
- **Writing:** essay, poems, story, expert paper, research paper, journal (daily, weekly, monthly), case study, history, project report, narrative for video or slide show, guide to future project participants, self-evaluation, newspaper or magazine article
- **Multimedia:** photo, slide or video essay, web site, paintings, drawings, collages, music
- **Activities:** analysis and problem solving, leadership training, drama, planning future projects, budgeting, celebrations, role plays, workshops

Reflecting on Service

Creative Reflection

Specify an objective for reflection--

Select a reflection structure--

(mirror, microscope, wide-angle lens)

Select a process for reflection--

(speaking, writing, multimedia, activity)

Outline a reflection plan--
