



The Health Disparities Service-Learning Collaborative
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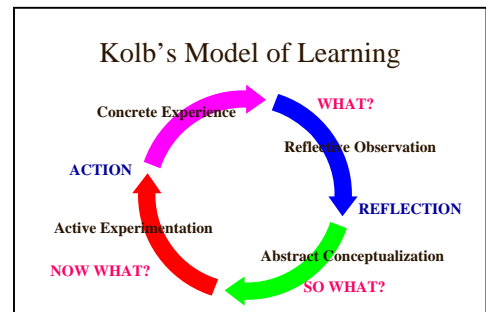
REFLECTION IN SERVICE-LEARNING

**HDSL C Teleconference Call #4
 January 30, 2008**

Janet Eyler provided an overview of reflection covering her research and reflection tools. Findings from her studies underscore that it's the quality of the service-learning (SL) that most benefits students, particularly a highly reflective SL that connects service to the student's academic learning. Furthermore, students who engage in continuous reflection exhibit higher problem-solving skills and complex thinking than either non-service-learners and service-learners lacking a strong reflection component. Reflection is more than an exercise in sharing feelings about an experience, but also facilitates making sense of these feelings and challenging past assumptions. A favorite motto of Janet's is "We don't learn from doing, but from thinking about what we're doing." Janet provided the following two tools to guide reflection activities:

The Kolb Model¹

A simple 4-step model based on the idea that learning is a cyclical, interactive process engaging concrete and abstract thinking. You can start at any stage, and use the model as a scaffold for building reflective activities. For example, having students share a field experience, the concrete experience phase, provides a descriptive activity around observations and feelings (reflective observation). From here, students can enter the abstract conceptualization phase where they make sense of their experiences by discussing how it reinforces and/or challenges what they've learned in school. This may lead them to do more research on the subject (active experimentation) preparing them to enter the field with new perspectives to be further tested.



Reflection Map²

The map is a useful "time management" tool for optimizing continuous reflection in light of the realities of busy academic schedules. The map's dual axes asks who is reflecting and when. While classroom reflection seem an obvious "when", getting students to reflect outside class is more of a challenge. Janet suggested an online journal that allows select checks by the instructor (so you don't have to read the entire journal). The student can then use the journal as the basis for a final reflection paper. The questions and

Your Reflection Map

	Before	During	After
Student Alone			
With Class			
With Community Partners			

¹ Kolb's experimental Learning Styles, Adapted from Alan Chapman 2005.

² Eyler, Janet. (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, 35-43

action steps presented in the Kolb Model can guide the reflection map activities. Janet again underscores the critical role of reflection in connecting service and academic learning so guided activities should incorporate this aspect. Finally, Janet highlights two components often underutilized in the reflection process:

- *Pre-reflection* – Before beginning service, students can prepare through various classroom exercises such as sharing expectations and concerns or responding to statements provided by the instructor. A primary goal of pre-reflection is for students to question their own assumptions so that they become more open to observing rather than judging in the field.
- *Reflecting with community partners* – Reflection can be built into the service experience through interactions with the SL organization and/or the community members served. Some agencies already engage in reflection through staff meetings or debriefs. Reflection activities can be developed as part of the collaborative SL planning process between academic and community partners.

Bobby Gottlieb shared her experiences using reflection with medical and public health students. She notes that educators face challenges with regard to the broad range of competencies and skills required to be taught to student with varying learning styles and life experiences, and where service and accountability is expected. Additionally, service-learning sites can be diverse, decentralized, and vary in terms of level and quality of supervision and environment. Reflection can help address these challenges by:

- Providing continuity for students in their diverse experiences
- Addressing gaps in learning
- Identifying and addressing problems either at the practicum site or within a student work group
- Providing feedback, reflection and direction for students. For example, Bobby looks for feelings, observations, and hypotheses in students' journaling. If any of these elements are continually absent, she'll ask the student how s/he feeling or what s/he saw, etc.
- Managing potentially negative attitudes expressed by students that can be unproductive in the community setting.
- Offering individualized communication to meet students' different learning styles
- Exploring concepts that are hard to discuss in the abstract like ethics and relational dynamics
- Assessing and addressing resource needs at the community site

Bobby offered the following Principles for Reflection:

- ☞ *Create a cultural for reflection* – Bobby uses a clip from the film *The Wire* to help students distinguish between observations, assumptions and testable hypothesis. This establishes a vocabulary for assessing reflections and builds the potential for approaching SL with an open mind. She also models reflection in the classroom by bringing in her own experiences to discuss.
- ☞ *Establish clear expectations* – an opportunity to reinforce the important aspects of SL
- ☞ *Select the level of structure in reflection activities* – Bobby finds that more structured activities yield richer reflections.
- ☞ *Provide a system for responding* – reflection cannot be done in a vacuum
- ☞ *Provide a system for sharing with other learners*