Ideas for Incorporating Reflection into Coursework

Reflection has become a central component of service learning by providing opportunities for linking experience to course learning through regular, guided activity. Reflection can present a way for students to not only record and synthesize their experiences, but also to understand, theorize, and question issues raised by them. Reflection activities and assignments can stimulate class discussions, connections to course materials, and opportunities to both review service experiences and imagine future action. Reflection can also be designed in ways that allow students to present their service experiences and discuss their learning in forms that can be evaluated by instructors.

Some ways you might incorporate reflection into your service learning project include:

- **Journals or Logs**: students keep written journals. This is done in a variety of ways: a double-entry journal (with columns for observation and analysis), timed freewriting (with or without instructional prompts), fieldnotes, interviews, critical incident journals, etc. It might be collected weekly, several times throughout the experience, or turned in with the final project.

- **Community Learning Goals and Contracts**: students negotiate learning goals into contracts with their community sites. This could be reviewed several times during the semester by both instructor and community partner.

- **Focus Groups**: students meet with peers to discuss their service experiences, the issues raised by them and connections to course content.

- **Representation Interviews**: students interview classmates about service experiences and record their findings. The interviewee then reads and reflects on the ways they have been represented by someone outside the immediate experience.

- **Community Maps**: Students map their community sites and experiences. This type of reflection can be directed to address course-specific content such as socioeconomics, values, gender, etc.

- **Photo Reflections**: students take photos (with permission) at their sites to create reflective visual essays. These might be catalogued on-line or donated to an agency web site.

- **Research Papers**: students employ qualitative, quantitative, or other research methodologies to produce a research paper. This might serve as a white paper for a community site or other audience.

- **Community Dialogues**: students research several personas (perhaps a community mentor, a client, and themselves) and construct dialogues to explore a course concept from a variety of perspectives.

- **In-class Written or Oral Reflection Sessions**: students write/speak in response to a prompt. Large or small group discussion can follow with a recorder noting the comments.

- **Visual Representations**: students draw and make public their sites/experiences by creating a classroom gallery. Students could exchange and analyze representations.

- **Class Presentations**: students present on an issue that has arisen during their community work OR students introduce peers to and analyze their community site OR students connect course material to their experience OR agency staff might be invited to participate and/or listen to student talks.

- **Course Projects**: students complete a capstone course or unit project that incorporates research, methodology and reflective components. These might include portfolios with newsletters, ads, web-based projects, research or advocacy writing or photos.

- **Web Pages**: students design web sites with the supervision of their community mentors.

- **End Notes**: students turn in a brief (directed or undirected) note at the end of class. This is a good way for students to share information on service experiences, make connections between class discussions/course readings and their community work, or ask specific questions.

Tobi Jacobi (tjacobi@colostate.edu)   Colorado State University English Department