

Service learning in Lutheran schools

Reflection

'Reflection is more than summarizing and talking about feelings during the experience (it's still important to do both of these). It should involve challenging thinking, analysis, problem solving and interpretation. Reflection experiences need to be intentionally structured to help participants internalise, interpret and apply their experiences, integrating into their knowledge and who they are. Reflection occurs before, during and after service learning experience.'

Understanding reflection

Effective reflection incorporates the following best practices:

1. Reflection should occur before the service learning experience, during the experience, and after the experience.
2. Reflection activities should clearly link the service learning experience to academic standards and curriculum objectives.
3. Frequent opportunities for discussion of service should be provided so students can interact with their peers, mentors, and those they serve.
4. Reflection activities should challenge students to test assumptions about their values and to explore, clarify, and possibly alter their values.
5. Students should be included in the planning of reflection activities so that they have ownership of the process.
6. Reflection activities should incorporate various learning styles (visual, auditory, kinesthetic) and experiences to encourage students to think in different ways.
7. Teachers should provide continual feedback to students so they can improve their critical thinking and analytical skills during the reflective process.

Key questions for reflection

Reflection is used as a powerful tool as it connects all the components of service learning together and aims to engage students to answer questions such as 'What are the issues?' 'What is my role within the world?' 'What does the bible say about justice? What does this mean for me? What did I learn about others? What did I learn about God?' etc

What?

- what did you do?
- what did you see, hear, smell, taste?
- what did you think?
- what did you feel?
- what happened?

So what?

- what difference did our actions make
- what does it mean?? For whom? How?

Service learning in Lutheran schools

- why do you think things are the way they are?
- what do you think and feel about it now?

Now what?

- what changes will you make because of what you learned and experienced?
- how will you apply what you've learned to your everyday life and learning?
- how will you apply what you've learned to the broader social and political issues that you care about?

RMC research (2008) suggests that well-designed, cognitively challenging reflection: helps students develop a deeper understanding of the world around them, as well as greater

- self-confidence, social awareness, and moral-political awareness.
- facilitates greater caring, deeper relationships, and a stronger sense of belonging.
- increases student engagement in school
- helps participants be open to new ideas, and see and analyze issues in new ways.
- increases the likelihood that students will apply what they have learned to real life.

Supporting students to improve reflective thinking

- template questions
- start small
- reflect as part of your lessons weekly (consistently), don't save it to the end of an assignment / term / year.
- vary the format.
- show models of good reflection
- discuss how to improve reflections and suggestions about how to make them deeper, more thoughtful, more specific.
- have students add their own reflection questions
- reflect in pairs, small groups.
- verbal reflection, written reflection, artistic reflection

Examples of reflective strategies

- evaluation of project by all – students, parents, teachers, community and how will this happen?)
- class discussions / circle time
- reflective journals
- panel presentations
- project performance tasks
- students' self and peer assessments
- blogs
- video diaries
- formal assessment task with set criteria for reflection
- thinking tools (eg six coloured hats)

References

RMC Research Corporation. (2007). Reflection in K-12 Service-Learning. Scotts Valley, CA:

Service learning in Lutheran schools

Bringle & Hatcher, 1999; Conrad & Hedin, 1997; Eyster & Giles, 1999; Eyster, Giles, & Schmiede, 1996; Toole & Toole, 1995

Service-Learning in Community-Based Organisations, Search Institute for Learn and Serve America's National Service-Learning Clearinghouse 2009