

# SCHOOLS ENGAGE

## O2 Service Learning Reflection Method

<https://schoolsengage.eu/>



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## A. PROJECT OVERVIEW

The SCHOOLS ENGAGE project aims at developing, testing, and validating an innovative educational package for secondary education that builds on Service Learning (SL) as a pedagogical context for cultivating citizenship competences and promoting civic engagement, participation and common values. Service Learning is globally recognized among the most effective pedagogies for building responsibility towards society and fostering civic engagement. It usually concerns the engagement of students in voluntary community service projects that create mutual benefit for themselves and community.

On this basis, the SCHOOLS ENGAGE project aims at:

- Enhancing teachers' professional development by supporting them to apply innovative teaching practices related to service learning and citizenship education and equipping them with tools, methodologies and ready-to-use materials. Teachers will be offered flexible ways of training that will enable them to integrate SL in their curricula and ensure their effective CPD.
- Supporting the real-life testing and application of SL interventions in schools in four European Countries (Germany, Greece, Bulgaria and Cyprus) and as an extension increase student's civic participation, strengthen their democratic values and cultivate active citizenship competences such as critical thinking, collaboration, social responsibility, advocacy etc. The project includes key activities: training directly through an international workshop 40 teachers and through online means more than 300; apply SL in the classroom involving more than 100 students, engage a high number of community stakeholders in the SL students' projects; reflect upon and evaluate the learning outcomes and impact on students' civic engagement.

In terms of intellectual inputs, the project will result in: i) a Service Learning teachers training programme, ii) A Schools engage online course offering a highly interactive e-learning course for enabling a larger number of teachers to become effective transmitters of SL and active citizenship education practices, iii) A SL Resource Bank offering a pool of practical resources, teaching and learning scenarios, case studies and experiential learning activities for connecting students' academic learning with meaningful SL experiences that will contribute to their personal growth and civic engagement, and finally iv) a SL Reflection hand book to help teachers collect accurate data and perform reflective practices with their students in line with the principles of experiential learning pedagogies.

It is envisioned that in the long term the projects results will contribute significantly in the introduction of SL and active citizenship education practices in secondary education which as an extension will bring a positive impact upon students' willingness and competences to actively and responsibly participate in society while strengthening and cultivating their common and democratic values.



## A. SERVICE-LEARNING

According to Furco (1996), service-learning refers to an educational method in which students participate in concrete projects adapted to real-life situations. What is more, service-learning initiatives are distinguished from other forms of experiential learning, such as volunteerism and community service, by its intention to benefit equally both students and service recipients (Sigmon & Pelletier, 1996). Service learning connects classroom work with community engagement by operating within an educational framework of respect, reciprocity, relevance, and reflection (Butin, 2003).

Over the last two decades, the positive impact of service-learning, especially in the USA has been captured in the field of teacher education through course evaluations and written student reflections that reveal satisfaction with the experience, greater understanding of course content, or an expanded perspective on community needs and strengths (Menard & Rosen, 2016; Tinker, et al., 2016; Lin & Bates, 2015; Cone, 2012; Santos, et al., 2012). However, little emphasis has been devoted to the planning and development process that underpins the implementation of effective service-learning projects that are perceived to be effective by students and community stakeholders (Jozwik, et al., 2017).

The process of developing service-learning projects is a challenging process for both teachers and students. The role of teachers is to design a project throughout which students participate in service activities that are aligned with curriculum and specific community needs (Jozwik, et al., 2017). In terms of students and their service experience, they are able to gain a richer understanding of the concepts related to the course, a greater appreciation of the subject matter and a deeper sense of civic responsibility (Bringle & Hatcher, 1995).

Successful service-learning initiatives need inspiration and willingness of all participants, and it is also important to set standards, continuous monitoring, and hard work. In addition, it is critical to clearly describe the goals and objectives of the course, its relationship to the service-learning project, the tasks of all participants, and the expected outcomes and meaning of the project. Before students explore the themes of their projects, teachers should thoroughly discuss with them the nature and goals of service-learning, as well as its meaning, history, philosophy, and conceptual frameworks.

Therefore, in order to achieve a successful preparation and implementation of service-learning projects, a proper preparation on the part of teachers is needed, for which they could use the material developed under the Schools Engage project. In this document the reader can find a variety of suggested ideas that serve as a guide including some selected examples of service-learning projects, as well as suggested service-learning scenarios and case studies from the project partners. In addition, it is important to note that all the material below is related to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).





Therefore, some information on the SDGs is presented below with the aim to inform the reader and develop their relevant knowledge, forming a comprehensive picture of the educational approach to service-learning under the SDGs.

## B. SERVICE-LEARNING REFLECTION TOOLKIT

Reflection indicates continuous engagement in a cycle of self-observation and self-evaluation in order to understand his/her own actions and reactions (Brookfield, 1995; Thiel, 1999). The goal is to address, to observe and refine practice in general on an ongoing basis (Cunningham, 2001).

There are many models one can use to guide reflection. However, there are 4 popular models (Schön, 1991) that are mainly used. Each model takes a slightly different approach but all share many similarities. The main difference is the number of steps included and how in-depth their creators have chosen to be. Below are brief outlines of the four models.

### ERA Cycle

The ERA cycle (Jasper, 2013) is one of the simplest models of reflection and contains three stages:

- Experience
- Reflection
- Action

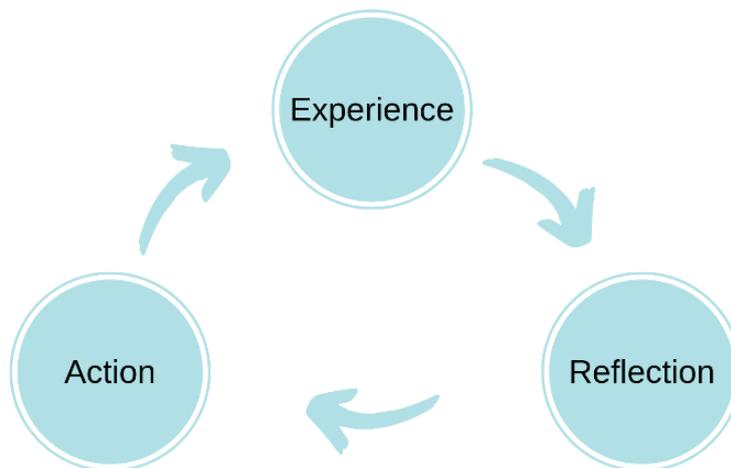


Figure 1: ERA Cycle (Jasper, 2013)

The first stage of the cycle shows that the process begins with the experience, either something one has been through before or something completely new. This experience can be positive or negative and may be related to our work or learning process or something else. Once something has been experienced we will start to reflect on what happened. This allows us to think through the experience,



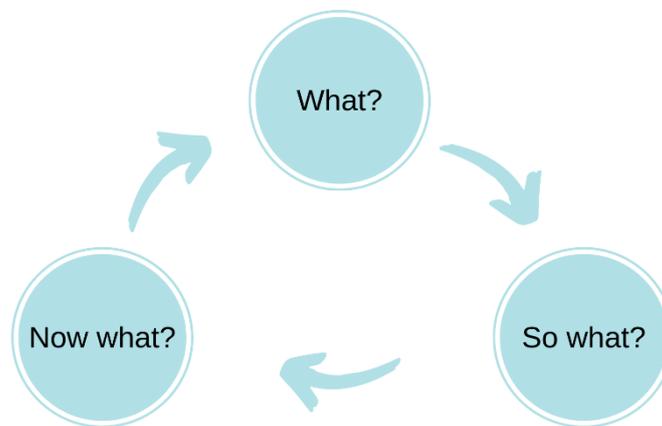


examine our perception about what happened and decide on the next steps. This leads to the final element of the cycle - taking an action. What we do as a result of an experience will be different depending on the individual. This action will result in another experience and the cycle will continue (Jasper, 2013).

### Driscoll's What Model

Another popular model is the model developed by Driscoll (2007). Driscoll based his model of the 3 what questions:

- What?
- So what?
- Now what?



*Figure 2: Driscoll reflection model (2007)*

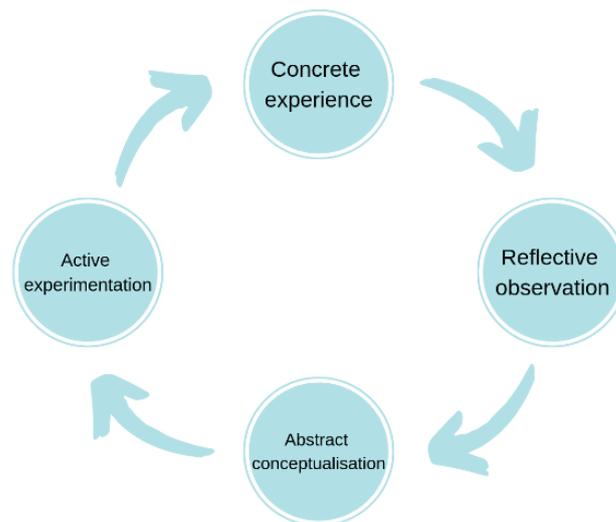
According to Driscoll reflection model, by asking these three simple questions one can begin to analyse and learn from his/hers experiences. Firstly one should describe what the situation or experience was, to set it in context. This gives a clear idea of what we are dealing with. We should then reflect on the experience by asking 'so what?' - what did we learn as a result of the experience? The final stage asks us to think about the action we will take as a result of this reflection. Will we change a behaviour, try something new or carry on as we are? It is important to remember that there may be no changes as the result of reflection and that we feel that we are doing everything as we should. This is equally valid as an outcome and you should not worry if you can't think of something to change (Driscoll, 2007)



## Kolb's Experiential Learning Cycle

One of the most well know models is Kolb's (1984) experiential learning model. The model takes things a step further. Based on theories about how people learn, this model centres on the concept of developing understanding through actual experiences and contains four key stages:

- Concrete experience
- Reflective observation
- Abstract conceptualization
- Active experimentation



*Figure 3: Kolb's Experiential Learning Cycle (1984)*

The model claims that we start with an experience - either new or a repeated one. The next stage involves us reflecting on the experience and noting anything about it which we have not come across before. We then start to develop new ideas as a result, and try to work out why this might have happened. The final stage involves us applying our new ideas to different situations. This demonstrates learning as a direct result of our experiences and reflections (Kolb, 1984).

## Gibb's Reflective Cycle

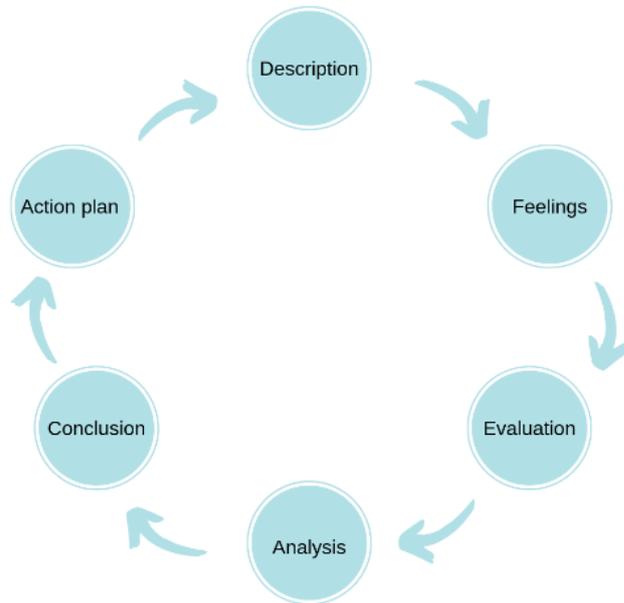
The final model builds on the other three and adds more stages. It is one of the more complex models of reflection but it may be that you find having multiple stages of the process to guide you reassuring. Gibb's (1998) cycle contains six stages:

- Description
- Feelings
- Evaluation





- Analysis
- Conclusion
- Action plan



*Figure 4: Gibb's Reflective Cycle (1998)*

As with other models, Gibb's (1998) begins with an outline of the experience being reflected on. It then encourages us to focus on our feelings about the experience, both during it and after. The next step involves evaluating the experience, what was good or bad about it from our point of view? We can then use this evaluation to analyse the situation and try to make sense of it. This analysis will result in a conclusion about what other actions (if any) we could have taken to reach a different outcome. The final stage involves building an action plan of steps which we can take the next time we find ourselves in a similar situation (Gibbs, 1998).

## Reflection in Service-Learning

Reflection is a crucial part of service learning. It allows students to look back on their experience, think critically about, and learn from it. Reflection may include acknowledging and/or sharing of reactions, feelings, observations, and ideas about anything regarding the activity. Reflection can happen through writing, speaking, listening, reading, drawing, acting, and it can be internal or external, individual or in a





group. Reflection is the key component of service learning. It is what distinguishes service learning from volunteering and community service.

Reflection provides the means to assess the experiential learning that occurs when students participate in service activities outside of the classroom. Additionally, reflection allows students to synthesize the obtained knowledge and experience and connect them with the formal knowledge available from classroom activities and materials.

Teachers and stakeholders play key roles in facilitating reflection by creating a safe environment for discussion, setting guidelines for the activities, and providing feedback and assessment of the students' newly gained knowledge. Through teacher guided reflection activities, students can expand their knowledge beyond concrete facts, reach a new understanding of social problems, interpret real-life situations, compare formal and informal knowledge, propose practical and meaningful solutions to societal problems, and take informed action.

Reflection activities vary and can be both formal and informal in nature. Designing effective reflection activities often depends on the nature of the course material and the stated learning objectives.

Effective Reflection:

- links service-learning to course objectives and fosters civic responsibility
- occurs throughout the course and not just at the end
- is structured, guided, purposeful, with well-defined criteria for evaluation
- challenges current realities, perhaps creating cognitive dissonance and/or conflict; see “Managing Hot Moments in the Classroom” (Warren, <http://bokcenter.fas.harvard.edu/docs/hotmoments.html>) or “Facilitating Reflection” (Reed and Koliba, [http://www.uvm.edu/~dewey/reflection\\_manual/](http://www.uvm.edu/~dewey/reflection_manual/))
- goes beyond the descriptive nature of the experience and asks students to interpret and
- evaluate the relevance of their experience in relation to classroom knowledge with real-life service experience
- asks students to apply new information to real-life problems and situations.

Bringle and Hatcher (1999) suggest that reflection activities should:

- a. clearly link the service experience to the course content and learning objectives;
- b. be structured in terms of description, expectations, and the criteria for assessing the activity;
- c. occur regularly during the semester so that students can develop the capacity to engage in deeper and broader examination of issues;





- d. provide feedback from the instructor so that students learn how to improve their critical analysis and reflective practice; and
- e. include the opportunity for students to explore, clarify, and alter their personal values.

### Benefits of Reflection<sup>1</sup>

- Gives meaning to the experience (was goal accomplished, how did we do, how is community served by this, how is this part of a larger effort, etc.)
- Provides an opportunity to establish expectations (individually, team)
- Can help volunteers understand the limitations and opportunities of the service site or community organization
- Relieves tension and provides re-energizing and renewal (especially important when service is emotionally challenging)
- Can create a sense of accomplishment that is crucial, especially where there are limited external rewards
- Can create a habit of appreciating ourselves
- Integration of service into the rest of one's life – developing a “spirit” of service and civic-mindedness
- Improved service – As volunteers examine the effects of their behaviour, they discover ways to improve the quality and quantity of their service.
- Can create a sense of closure, especially important after a long service period, project, or emotional experience.
- Personal and Team Development:
  - Fosters life-long learning skills– develops an ability to learn from positive and negative experiences
  - “Reality Check” – guards against reinforcing inaccurate perceptions/biases
  - Gain a broader perspective of other's experience
  - Builds community among the volunteers
  - Personal Problem solving increases personal empowerment, confidence
  - Group problem solving creates shared understandings, open communication, and better teamwork
  - Clarifies values as volunteers confront new situations
  - Provides practice clarifying goals and making choices to accomplish these goals
  - Encourages volunteers to do higher level thinking, as they look for root causes of complex issues

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<sup>1</sup> Info taken from “Learning Through Service,” Kate McPherson, Project Service Leadership, and “Possible Outcomes of Service Learning,” National Youth Leadership Council.





- Acknowledges gained skills gained builds confidence

### Applying the Driscoll (2007) reflection model<sup>2</sup>

Below you can find an example of how the Driscoll (2007) reflection model can be used in practice in order to assist you in designing the reflection activities. Although learning can be derived from each question, focusing on all three will provide broader insights and keep students from getting stuck on only the facts or just the feelings.

**1. What?** (Reporting what happened, objectively). Without judgment or interpretation, participants describe in detail the facts and event(s) of the service experience.

Questions include:

- *What happened?*
- *What did you observe?*
- *What issue is being addressed*
- *What population is being served?*
- *What were the results of the project?*
- *What events or “critical incidents” occurred?*
- *What was of particular notice?*
- *How did you feel about that?*

These are only indicative questions and teachers can adapt them to fit their needs and objectives.

**2. So What?** (What did you learn? What difference did the event make?) Participants discuss their feelings, ideas, and analysis of the service experience.

Questions can also be focused on the meaning or importance of the activity to:

The Participant:

- *Did you learn a new skill or clarify an interest?*
- *Did you learned anything that surprised you?*
- *Did you hear, see, smell, or feel anything that surprised you?*
- *What feelings or thoughts seem most strong today?*
- *How is your experience different from what you expected?*
- *What struck you about that?*
- *How was that significant?*
- *What impacts the way you view the situation/experience? (What lens are you viewing from?)*  
*What do the critical incidents mean to you?*
- *How did you respond to them?*
- *What did you like/dislike about the experience?*

The Recipient:

- *Did the “service” empower the recipient to become more self-sufficient?*
- *What did you learn about the people/community you served?*

<sup>2</sup> [https://www.gtc.edu/sites/default/files/files/documents/Service\\_Learning\\_Reflection\\_Toolkit.pdf](https://www.gtc.edu/sites/default/files/files/documents/Service_Learning_Reflection_Toolkit.pdf)





- *What might impact the recipient's views or experience of the project?*

The Community:

- *What are some of the pressing needs/issues in the community?*
- *How does this project address those needs?*
- *Has the community benefited and how?*
- *What is the least impact you can imagine for the project?*
- *With unlimited creativity, what is the most impact on the community that you can imagine?*

The Group (for group projects):

- *In what ways did the group work well together?*
- *What does that suggest to you about the group?*
- *How might the group have accomplished its task more effectively?*
- *In what ways did others help you today? (and vice versa)*
- *How were decisions made?*
- *Were everybody's ideas listened to?*
- *What was the most distractive incident?*
- *What was the most positive activity?*

**3. Now What?** (How will they think or act in the future as a result of this experience?) Participants consider broader implications of the service experience and apply learning. Be aware to strike a balance between realistic, reachable goals and openness to spontaneity and change.

Some questions include:

- *What seem to be the root causes of the issue/problem addressed?*
- *What kinds of activities are currently taking place in the community related to this project?*
- *What contributes to the success of projects like this?*
- *What hinders the success of projects like this?*
- *What learning occurred for you in this experience?*
- *How can you apply your new learning?*
- *What would you like to learn more about, related to this project or issue?*
- *What follow-up is needed to address any challenges or difficulties?*
- *What information can you share with your peers or community volunteers?*
- *If you were in charge of the project, what would you do to improve it?*
- *If you could do the project again, what would you do differently?*
- *What would "complete" the service?*





## Suggestions for Active Reflection<sup>3</sup>

### Class Discussions (Structured)

This is a technique where teachers create questions to guide group discussion in the classroom. Use structured reflection sessions during regular class time. Students can learn about the diversity of services and populations, see connections between different populations and agencies, collectively share successes and problem-solve challenges at their sites, and learn about societal patterns.

### Class Presentations

Class presentations are an effective technique that can be designed for individuals or groups. There should be clear and well-defined expectations and criteria so students will understand how their learning and the quality of the presentations will be evaluated.

Students share their learning with peers through a video, slide show, bulletin board, PowerPoint, Web page, panel discussion, or an oral presentation. This is an opportunity for students to synthesise and summarise their learning and connect the classroom knowledge and out-of-classroom learning. It gives students a chance to practice their presentation skills and to display their work in a public format.

### Mural

Creating a mural is a more non-traditional approach to student reflection. This technique enables students to express feelings and learning from the service experience and also allows for a creative collective statement about aspects of an issue facing a community. Murals are excellent final projects for the end of a course, and can be developed in concept and final product over the entire length of the course. Students can use various sources (magazines, newspapers, other art materials) to build their mural.

### Online Mural

Murals can also take a digital form, using available online tools. Instead of using tangible resources such as (magazines, newspapers, other art materials) for the mural, students can use online resources, such as pictures, excerpts from magazines, art, etc.

### Contracts and Logs

Service learning contracts and logs formalize the learning and service objectives for the course and may be used from the beginning to the end of the coursework. The student, the teacher and the “agency”

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<sup>3</sup> The following strategies are based on Robert Bringle and Julie Hatcher’s “Reflection in Service Learning: Making Meaning of Experience” (1999), and Reflection Toolkit, Northwest Service Academy, Metro Center, Portland, [www.northwestserviceacademy.org](http://www.northwestserviceacademy.org)





creates a contract that outlines learning and service objectives and identifies the range of tasks to be completed during the service experience, as well as the goals to be achieved and skills to be learned and/or refined.

A service log is a continuous summary of specific activities completed and progress towards accomplishing the service learning goals. Students can use the contract and the log to assess their progress toward meeting the identified objectives and reflect on how the experience affected their ability to complete tasks and achieve their goals and objectives. Students could also submit these items as part of a service learning portfolio.

### Directed Readings

Directed readings are additional readings outside of the traditional course textbooks that provide a broader or local context of social responsibility and civic literacy that can be used throughout the course. These readings are a means of enhancing a systemic understanding of societal concerns of students engaged in service. Faculty can use directed readings to challenge students to apply their current knowledge within a discipline to current social needs and current events.

Directed readings take all literary forms (newspaper articles, short stories, novels, poetry, essay, etc.) and can become the basis for class discussions or directed writings. Faculty can also allow students to create their own list of directed readings through web searches for key words, such as citizenship, service learning, civic responsibility, individual rights and responsibilities, etc.

### Directed Writings

Teachers can use directed writings throughout lessons to prompt students to reflect on their service experiences within the framework of course content. The instructor identifies a section from the textbook or class readings (i.e., quotes, statistics, and concepts) and structures a question for students to answer. Teachers can provide a list of directed writings at the beginning of the course, or distribute it to students as the course progresses.

Teachers can also ask students to create their own lists of directed readings/questions based on the course textbooks or materials. Directed writings allow students to analyse course content critically and apply it to current problems and issues.

### E-mail Discussion Groups/Blackboard Discussion Groups

Through e-mail or a Learning Content Management System (LCMS), students can create a dialogue with the instructor and peers involved in service projects. This dialogue can be ongoing (weekly) or directed at certain times throughout the course. Students write summaries and identify critical incidents





that occurred at the service site. Students can rotate as a moderator of the discussion every two weeks. Instructors can post questions for consideration and topics for directed writings. A log can be printed to provide data about group learning that occurred from the service experience.

Students are able to connect with other students about issues at their sites, help each other solve problems, identify patterns in their service learning, and have open discussions about societal issues. Faculty may not want to grade content from these discussion groups, but provide incentives for all students to participate.

### Essays

Reflective essays are created via essay questions provided at the beginning of the course or lesson. Students are expected to submit a specific number of essays (usually two to three) during the term. Reflective essays can focus on personal development, academic connections to course content, or ideas and recommendations for future action. As with any essay, faculty should clearly state the criteria for development and evaluation of these essays.

### Experiential Research Paper

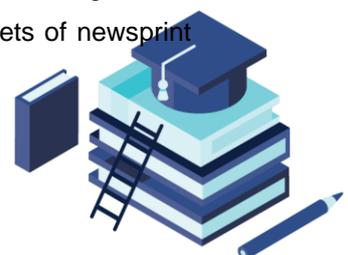
An experiential research paper, based on Kolb's experiential learning cycle, is a formal paper that asks students to identify a particular experience at the service site and analyses that experience within the broader context in order to make recommendations for change.

Students need to identify an underlying social issue they have encountered at the service site. They then research the social issue and read three to five articles on the topic. Based on their experience and library research, students make recommendations for future action. This reflection activity is useful in interdisciplinary courses and provides students flexibility within their disciplinary interests and expertise to pursue issues experienced at the service site. Class presentations of the experiential research paper can culminate semester work.

### Free Association Brainstorming

This reflection session takes place right after the end of the first third of the service experience. Students have 10-20 "post-it" notes or cards and write down all of the feelings they had when they first heard about their service learning requirement. Third, they write down all of the feelings they had when they experienced their first "field encounter." Finally, they write down all of the feelings they are having "right now".

Encourage them to write down as many different brainstormed thoughts as possible (one thought/word for each card). Students then distribute their post-it cards across three different sheets of newsprint





paper posted around the classroom: one sheet with a large happy face, one with a sad face, and one with a bewildered face. Students should place their cards on the newsprint sheet that matches most closely with their feelings. Then have them stand next to the newsprint in which they posted most of their feelings. Faculty may ask students the reasons why they are standing where they are and what they expect for the remainder of their service experience. This exercise is non-threatening, involves both writing and speaking, and allows for both public and private reflection.

### Group Exercises

Teachers can use the following exercises throughout their lessons, and can create their own variations in order to draw out from students the cognitive and emotional reactions to course content and the service experience.

**Fish Bowl:** Teacher asks for volunteers (5-7) to be in a circle in the middle of the room. The remaining students form a large circle outside of the inner circle. In essence, students form a set of concentric circles. Teacher provides the inner circle with open-ended questions about content in the class and their service experiences, and encourages students to maintain a discussion. If a student from the outer circle has something to add to the discussion, that student joins the circle and replaces an inner circle student. Important to this reflection technique is a clear set of ground rules (all ideas are respected, replacing a student happens after he or she is done speaking, and there is no talking from the outer circle).

This activity allows for students to speak freely about sensitive topics and allows for both internal and external processing, public and private reflection. Teachers may also enlist help from all students in the class for questions to ask the inner circle.

**It's My Bag:** Students find a bag at home (any bag) and fill it with one (or two, depending on time) item(s) that remind them of how they feel about their service learning project. Students bring the filled bag to the reflection session, and explain their item(s) to the rest of the class. The item(s) that they bring usually turn out to be inspiring visual aids that bring out excellent comments.

Students are given a chance to think metaphorically about their experience and connect the abstract with the concrete.

**It's Your Thing/Express Yourself:** This reflection exercise is a variation on a class presentation and might take a significant time (several weeks) for students to prepare. Thus, this is a good technique to use as a final project, with checkpoints throughout the course. Students can create the final project as an individual or with a group. If there is limited class time, this works best as small group projects. By using poetry, visual art (paintings, drawings, sculptures), music, individually created games or puzzles, or any other creative outlet, students reflect on their reactions and learning from their service experience.





At the end of the course, students "perform" their final work. This exercise allows for the development of creativity, group skills, and challenges students to communicate in non-traditional ways.

**Small Group Week:** This is a simple alternative to full-class reflection sessions when the teacher wants students to have a maximum amount of time to talk individually. Divide the class into groups of no more than 5-7 students, and then assign each group to a different day for group reflection. Groups not attending a reflection section can work on out-of-class assignments. Students will feel more comfortable sharing more significant material in smaller groups in a circle, and faculty will glean more substantive content during each session. Students will need a significant amount of time for self-expression as a reaction to faculty- guided questions, and will experience a greater connection between lesson content and their service experience.

**Truth Is Stranger than Fiction:** Best used toward the middle and end of a course, this exercise has students divided into groups of no more than three. Teacher asks students to write the most unusual story that happened to them during their service learning experience and to be prepared to share it with their small group at the next class session. At the next class session, have students share their stories in small groups and then come together as a class. Ask representative group members to share some of the stories and what it meant to group members. Open up the discussion to the rest of the class.

Teachers should be prepared to prompt students if needed. Students learn valuable writing skills, group communications skills, and have the chance to explore what situations/knowledge affects them. With student permission, teachers can collect stories and "publish" copies for all class members and/or share stories with the rest of the school.

**Values Continuum:** Teachers can use this exercise to assist students in clarifying their values and exploring the knowledge base for student opinions. This exercise can be used anytime during the course. Name each corner of the classroom as follows: Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Agree, and Strongly Agree. Name the middle of the room as Neutral. Instruct students to go to the place in the room for which they most identify after you read certain statements. Teacher can create questions based on classroom content and/or the service experience. For example, faculty may say, "I believe that individual rights are more important than the rights of the larger community," or "I believe that service to a community is the responsibility of all citizens," or "I believe our government has the responsibility to solve world problems."

Once students have gone to their respective places, allow time for students to discuss with other group members their reasons for standing where they are. Have each group report back their reasons for why





they believe what they do, and then allow others to "switch" to a different group if they have changed their minds. Continue discussion, and then repeat the process for as long as time allows.

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