Effective Assessment and Reflection

James Sage
Department of Philosophy – UWSP

This session aims to present some basic assessment and reflection strategies that can be useful when incorporating service-learning into an existing course. In what follows, we will begin with some basic terminology, survey some different types of reflection, and finish with some specific examples linking reflection with service-learning.

I. Some Basic Terminology

evaluation: - refers to ways of measuring student learning for the purposes of assigning grades (what)
- provides summative feedback
   e.g., assignments, pop quizzes, lab reports, short expository essays, homework sets, etc.

assessment: - refers to techniques for collecting information about student learning (how and why)
- aimed at improving teaching/learning (not as a basis for grades)
- provides formative feedback
   e.g., SGID, 1-minute paper, muddiest point, entry/exit question, etc.

➢ Cross-over application: some assessment used for evaluation purposes (found to be valuable).
➢ For service-learning: focus on assessment that prompts critical self-reflection, synthesis of service experience with academic learning, and development of civic literacy.
➢ Integrated into overall course design.

II. Service-Learning: Evaluation, Assessment, Reflection

When it comes to service-learning, we have a variety of teaching and learning techniques available to us, including different types of evaluation, assessment, and reflection. A central kind of assessment for service-learning is the notion of effective reflection.

Basic Course Design:

o Learning Goals: we must keep in mind our intended learning outcomes.
o Evaluation: we must create ways to measure the learning that takes place.
o Support Activities: we must organize support activities (reading assignments, lecture, discussion, etc.) that contributes to student learning.

Like any other course, students will complete a set of evaluated assignments (term papers, presentations, portfolios, etc.). This measures the learning that has taken place, qualifying students to earn academic credit for the course.

For a course that includes service-learning, students will engage in a service project of some kind. However, students will need to be prompted to connect their experience in meaningful ways to the academic learning goals you have set.

Assessment and reflection fall under the "support" heading in our course design. We can support student learning and student achievement by providing students with a set of deliberately-chosen, structured assessment/reflection techniques that contribute to the overall success of service-learning.

III. Broad Categories of Assessment/Reflection Techniques

(A) course-related knowledge & skills:

- Assess/Measure prior knowledge and understanding (compare with post-test)
- Assess/Measure skill in analysis and critical thinking
- Assess/Measure skill in synthesis and creative thinking
- Assess/Measure skill in problem-solving
- Assess/Measure skill in application and performance

(B) learning attitudes, values, & self-awareness:

- Measure/Compare/Discuss awareness of student attitudes, beliefs, and values
- Identify misconceptions, biases, gaps in understanding
- Document/Measure/Use learning strategies, course-related learning styles, study skills
- Encourage student self-awareness as learners

(C) learner response to instruction & activities:

- Document student response to instructor and instruction techniques
- Document student response to class activities, reading assignments, and other course materials
- Document student response to evaluative assignments, group work, lecture, and discussions

(SL) Assessment / Reflection about Service-Learning & Service Projects:

- Document student experience associated with service project, community experience
- Document student response to self-reflection, group reflection
- Measure student synthesis of service experience with academic learning goals
- Measure student self-awareness as citizens
- Document prior knowledge and understanding (compare with post-test)
- Measure awareness of attitudes, values, beliefs (including misconceptions, biases)
- Assess skills in analysis, synthesis, creative problem-solving, application (tied to social needs)
- Evaluate student assessment of project success, larger role of service, future directions, requirements for sustainability

IV. Some Examples

How, exactly, do we access all of these great insights? How do we get students to engage in reflection?

Discussions:
- in-class/on-site
- large/small groups
- structured/conversational
- class presentations (individual/group)

Written:
- journaling
- prompted responses (directed reflection)
- on-line (discussion threads)
- individual/group portfolios

As well as other discipline-specific examples: photo-essays, interviews, reports, performances, etc.

Choose a variety of types and times to engage in reflection:

Types & Timing	Beginning	Mid-term	End of course
Discussion / Oral	on-site in-class	on-site in-class	on-site in-class
Written / Prompted	on-site in-class	on-site in-class	on-site in-class

Journaling: The ABC-123 Method (thanks to Marshall Welch for this idea!)

This method of organizing reflection may help guide journaling and class discussions.

DIMENSIONS OF REFLECTION:	1 – personal level	2 – "other" level	3 – social level
A – Affect, feelings	This is how I felt. This is how I feel now.	This is how he feels. This is how she felt.	These feelings seem to be shared by society at large.
B – Behavior, actions	This is what I did. This is what I will do.	This is what other people are doing or have done.	This is what society is doing, has done, or should do.
C – Cognition, thinking	This is what I thought. This is what I think now.	This is what others thought, what they now think, or what they should think.	This is what society thinks as indicated by…<the legal & political system, etc.>

Other Journaling Ideas:

- Double-Entry Journal: entries include deliberate attention to service experience *and* classroom learning.
- Dialogue Journal: students submit bi-weekly journals to instructors for feedback, on-going conversation.
- Critical Incident Journal: describe significant event, articulate action taken, future plans, prevention.
- Self-Reflection: prompts students to keep track of responses to experience, impact on learning, thoughts about civic responsibility.
- Highlighted Journal / Key Phrase Journal: students re-visit journal entries seeking key phrases that link experience with learning, track concepts that are recurring and identify significant patterns.

Additional Outcomes, Assignments, Projects:

- Service-learning portfolios: documents evidence of both learning and service in a personal, creative way.
- Case studies: presentation and discussion of relevant case studies to illustrate learning and insight.
- Experiential / Community-based research: students research key social/political issue as connected to service projects, focus on community-based topics for investigation.
- Directed writings: in response to deliberate prompts students incorporate examples from service to academic assignments.

V. Additional Thoughts about Structured Reflection

From Campus Compact: "The term *structured* reflection is used to refer to a thoughtfully constructed process that challenges and guides students in (1) examining critical issues related to their service-learning project, (2) connecting the service experience to coursework, (3) enhancing the development of civic skills and values, and (4) assisting students in finding personal relevance in the work."

A well-designed reflection process is essential to service-learning for several reasons:

a. Service experiences provide few explicit guides to learning for students, unlike textbooks and lectures which typically highlight key points. Students need to be challenged, encouraged and supported in the reflection process to help connect experiences to these key points discussed during lecture.
b. The tasks of collecting information, framing the problem, identifying alternatives and recommending and justifying solutions appropriate to specific contexts are challenging tasks which can be effectively tackled through individual and group reflection activities. Reflection activities such as project logs and journals provide opportunities for students to share project progress and concerns on an ongoing basis. Project effectiveness and student learning can both be enhanced by reviewing student reflection and providing guidance.
c. A carefully structured reflection process can facilitate the exchange of relevant information between students, faculty and the community in a timely manner.
d. Reflection provides students a safe space for grappling with the range of emotions that can arise from a service experience.

Six Principles:

From Campus Compact: "The six principles below can help faculty in enhancing both the quality of students' service as well as the quality of student learning through reflection."

- Connected: Effective service-learning integrates service with course work. Reflection is the means through which faculty can help students develop meaningful connections between the service experience and course content.
- Continuous: Student learning is enhanced by providing multiple opportunities for reflection before, during and after the project. Project effectiveness is also enhanced by using reflection to prepare students for the service-learning experience and to guide students as they address community concerns.
- Challenging: Service-learning projects should challenge students to think in new ways, raise new questions, and explore new ways of problem-solving, including the kind of public problem-solving connected to democratic civic engagement. By encouraging students to explore issues more deeply and to think about issues and solutions they may not have considered, faculty can enhance students' problem-solving efforts as well as the resulting learning.
- Coaching: Faculty must challenge students while simultaneously providing support and creating a 'safe' environment—one where students are confident that their contributions and feelings will be respected. Furthermore, students need support in executing complex project tasks. Note that continuous reflection facilitates the faculty coaching role by providing project related information in a timely manner.
- Contextualized: Faculty can enhance the effectiveness of service-learning projects by ensuring that reflection activities are appropriate for the context and setting of the project. Faculty must consider factors such as student knowledge and attitudes, community needs, and course objectives and constraints in designing the reflection process.
- Communication: Structured reflection should provide opportunities for communication with peers, faculty and community organizations. Communication with community organization and faculty is essential to ensuring that the project is effective in meeting community needs. Communication with faculty, peers and community organizations can also enhance student learning by exposing students to multiple perspectives.