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Reflection in Service-Learning

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Location

VCU ASPIRE, 835 W. Grace St., Richmond VA

Disciplines

Higher Education


Presenter Information

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Reflection in Service Learning

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“Reflection is indispensable to the entire service learning process and is what weaves it all together intellectually and emotionally for everyone involved.” (Kaye, 2004)

How does “reflection” work?

- + Allows students to pause, evaluate themselves, their attitudes/beliefs, and the needs of the community
- + What are they learning, how does it differ from what they may have thought, and what can they do with this moving forward?
- + Cognitive dissonance can lead to change
- + Personal growth, developing empathy and moral reasoning, understanding social issues

Human Services Fieldwork (PSYC 493)

- + Places students in community agencies or organizations serving populations at risk for negative psychological or health-related outcomes (8 hours a week).
- + Promote student understanding of a multi-systemic ecological model of individual and community development and change through both in-class and practical experiences.
- + Sites: Communities in Schools, Fan Free Clinic, CrossOver Health Care Ministry, Hanover Safe Place, Peter Paul Development Center, etc.

Reflection in Human Services Fieldwork

- 1) 10 Journals throughout semester
 - + Most follow WHAT?, SO WHAT?, NOW WHAT? Format
- 2) As SL Fellow, added reflections specifically targeting morality and empathy: MORALITY/EMPATHY WHAT?
 - + “Baseline” paper assessing current level of morality/empathy
 - + Build from there throughout semester
- 3) Every other week we have placement discussions
- 4) Final peer portfolio – both presentation and written assignment

1) What? So What? Now What? Format

The Experiential Learning Cycle

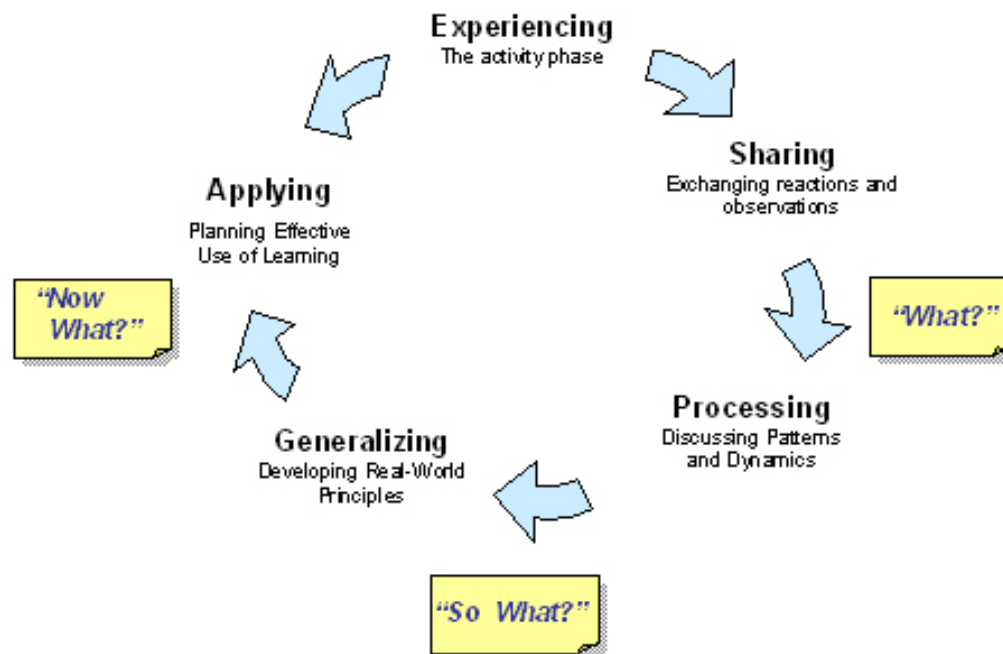


FIGURE 1

- + One or two solid paragraphs on what happened or what you noticed at your agency (this section labeled WHAT?)
- + One or two solid paragraphs on why what happened was important to you, your clients, or the agency (this section is labeled SO WHAT?)
- + One or two solid paragraphs on the implications of what happened or how this changes your long-term thinking (this section is labeled NOW WHAT?)

Example

- + Student was placed at Circle Center Adult Day Services
- + Focused on what a caregiver of someone with dementia may experience
- + Focused on family meetings and the role of staff in those meetings

2) Morality and Empathy Focus

- + How do students develop morality and empathy in a service learning course?
- + Self-assessment of morality and empathy:
 - + Moral schema from Lies et al. (2012) – personal interest, maintaining norms, or post-conventional
 - + Level of empathy from Wilson (2011) – shock, normalization, or engagement
- + Journals 2-9 include MORALITY/EMPATHY WHAT?:
 - + This section should include one to two solid paragraphs that describes how your level of morality and empathy are evolving and/or being challenged in your placement. You may wish to build off your self-assessment from Assignment 2.

Example

- + I really have felt significant growth in my sense of empathy towards others. You really will have a hard time being empathetic if you don't actually get to see and understand the situation that others are going through. Especially getting to see the people who come to food distribution, I was really able to put myself in their shoes and feel the need that they felt for something that I would normally take for granted.
- + I did find it hard to see changes in my morality level because I see my morality as something more concrete. I perceive it as something where I know what is right and wrong implicitly and it is not as much of a sliding scale, but there were moments in my placement when I wasn't sure whether something one of the teachers was doing was right or not, and that caused me to question morality more than anything.

Example

- + Empathy wise this week has really helped me to develop a stronger sense of what it means to be empathetic. I don't think that before my placement I could fully empathize with someone who is a client at the clinic and now I feel that I am getting a slightly better sense on how to. I have never nor will I probably ever face some of the trials and tribulations these clients do, but at least by being immersed in the process of trying to help them I think I am getting a better sense of how to relate and empathize with someone in a situation like that. While I will never become an expert, I do think the little skills I'm gaining so far will help me further down the line to be a much more empathetic person.

Example

- + Both my levels of morality and empathy were challenged. Morality refers to knowing the difference between right and wrong. Undoubtedly, fighting is wrong; however, I questioned my involvement in putting a stop to the fight. I believe I made the right choice getting involved. In this situation, the norm would have been to do what all the other students were doing, which as watching the students fight. Because I did not maintain the norm, I believe my moral thinking was post-conventional. Conversely, I am not sure I felt empathetic towards the situation. I definitely had an adrenaline rush and a flood of emotions came forward, but as for feeling emotionally connected to another individual, I did not. I think if I had known the students more than I would have been better able to take their perspective.

3) Placement discussions

- + Informal discussions
- + Reflect on what has been challenging in the last two weeks, what is working well/what is not
- + Students ask questions of each other
- + Make connections between their experiences and other students' experiences
- + More student-led

4) Peer portfolio

- + Chance to learn about another classmate's placement
- + How would working at that site contribute to development and personal growth?
- + Critique two selected reflections from their peer
- + Present to class in 8- 10 minute presentation

Example: Student at other placement

- + I believe that interning at Ginter Park would be a completely opposite experience for me. I have worked in a daycare before, which isn't exactly the same thing but it's very close in some aspects. Working in the school with younger kids would definitely aid me in learning a better sense of patience, and tolerance. I think this is important in the professional world, but much harder to exhibit when you are dealing with children who are younger.
- + In terms of my morality and empathy if I were at Ginter Park, I believe that it would be opposite of the way they developed in my own placement. Working with children in a significantly younger age group than you makes it somewhat hard to empathize with them. I believe that the moral aspect of being at that placement would develop easily because when working with such a young age considering what is right and wrong is a priority.

Example: Student critique of reflection

- + In your first journal, I find it great that you were able to learn more about addiction and can put that knowledge to use by educating others outside of your placement. I'm also a bit envious of the fact that you mention gaining more responsibility. While one could argue that working with children is a big responsibility, I can't help but feel that I would be more confident in my own placement had I experienced those "steps of responsibility." I also enjoyed reading that you were able to meet with your supervisor biweekly. I think having time set aside to evaluate your placement on a continuous basis can really help steer things in the right direction. I'm sure it was a much easier transition at your placement knowing that you could touch base with your supervisor if there were any uncertainties about your role. I know in my placement I sporadically saw my supervisor.

Written vs. Discussion?

- + Does type of reflection matter? (Yorio & Ye, 2012)
 - + Meta-analysis looking at effects of service-learning on learning outcomes
 - + Moderators included type of reflection
- + For both personal insight and cognitive development, either type works well.
- + For understanding social issues, larger effect when an element of discussion reflection is incorporated.

Final Thoughts

- + Reflection is a key ingredient of any service learning class
- + Incorporate both discussion and written
- + Be creative!



Questions?