

EXAMPLE Reflection Mechanism per DEAL: In-class Activity to Introduce Meanings of Service

[Excerpted from Clayton, P.H. & Moses, M.G. (2006). *Integrating Service-Learning: A Resource Guide*. Boston: Jumpstart.]

This activity can be used to expose students to the definition of service that underlies SL – the commitment that “those served grow as persons” and that service should address “highest priority needs” – and/or to other ways of thinking about service.

Activity

Project the following two quotes:

“One who serves takes care to make sure that other people’s highest priority needs are being served. The best test, and difficult to administer, is: do those served grow as persons; do they while being served, become healthier, wiser, freer, more autonomous, more likely themselves to become servants? And, what is the effect on the least privileged in society; will they benefit, or, at least, will they not be further deprived?” ~Robert Greenleaf

“If I knew for a certainty that a man was coming to my house with the conscious design of doing me good, I should run for my life.” ~Henry David Thoreau

Place a collection of items on a table in the room. Items might include: pens, coins, pieces of colored paper, a scarf, a bottle of water, fresh flowers, food (a plate of bagels, a bag of cookies, an apple), a book, etc. Virtually any collection of items will suffice, but you may be able to accomplish certain objectives through the materials you choose to include (e.g., if you want your students thinking about cultural associations with food, then include a food item that has cultural connotations; if you want your students thinking about issues related to reading, then include a book or other written document). Be careful to have some variety in the items (e.g., more than just 2 or 3 items) but also to avoid having too many items (e.g., more than 10).

Divide the class into two or more groups, depending on class size, and give them the following instructions: “In light of the two perspectives on service represented by these quotes, in your groups develop a plan to be of service using the materials provided. Present your plans to the other group(s). Be ready to move on to another activity in 15 minutes.” Do not warn the students when they are running out of time or answer questions about how they should approach their task. After 15 minutes, call the activity to an end. If the students have not completed the activity (including presenting to one another), at your discretion (depending on your objectives and constraints) give them additional time.

Reflection on the Activity

Provide a worksheet with reflection prompts (such as those that follow) and ask the students to reflect collaboratively in their groups, with each student taking notes on his/her own worksheet, including any private thoughts he/she has but does not share with the group. Be sure to include prompts that focus their attention on the learning objectives you have for this activity.

1. Describe the activity, objectively and in fair detail (Who? Where? When? What? Who did what? How? Etc.)
2. In what ways did I / we respond to the perspectives on service? To the task of producing a “service plan”? Why did I / we respond as I / we did (e.g., what previous experiences or expectations influenced me / us)?
3. What skills or abilities did I / other members of my group use in accomplishing this task? What skills or abilities did I / they have but not use, and why? What skills or abilities did I / we not have that would have been useful, and how can I / we develop them?
4. What assumptions did we make (e.g., about the instructor’s role, about the particular materials provided) and how did they influence how we undertook the task?
5. What roles were played by the various members of our group? Were there roles that should have been played that no one assumed? How did we determine who would play what role? To what extent were we successful in accomplishing the task we were given? Did we complete it on time? Did we present our plan effectively? What else might “success” mean, as we judge our efforts? How might we have approached the task differently, in order to be more successful?
6. What specific elements of our “service plan” emerged from our engagement with the perspectives on service? What did we agree with and try to adopt? What did we disagree with and try to avoid?
7. What alternative “service plans” might we have produced? Why did we produce the one we did? Is this the “best” plan we could have produced? What would have had to change in order for us to have produced a better plan?
8. In this activity and more generally, is it difficult to translate the perspective on service offered by Greenleaf into concrete action? Why or why not? Is it of value to try to do so? Why or why not?
9. What questions about the nature of service does our engagement with these perspectives lead us to identify? In what ways might these be important questions as our service-learning project unfolds throughout the semester?
10. Articulate one or more specific learnings from this discussion.

After 30 minutes, ask each group to share some of the most important learnings they achieved through reflection on this activity and then as a class set goals for future action.