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ABSTRACT

This book examines the issues involved in creating reflective learning environments and raises questions that will help guide individuals' development as facilitators of learning. Section 1 looks at reflection as the core of learning. Section 2 describes the three stages in the reflective process: creating, observation, and analysis of the environment. Section 3 provides examples of reflective activities that can meet the needs of diverse learners: interactions, introspections, initiatives, and interpretations. Section 4 describes the process of reflective questioning in service learning. Questions are suggested for each of the three stages: preparation, action, and reflection. A graphic illustrates the cyclical nature of reflective service-learning projects. The process of reflective questioning is also condensed into a chart. Section 5 lists the skills and abilities the reflective facilitator uses to create the most effective learning environment for all learners. Section 6 lists the abilities essential to providing a well-facilitated inclusive learning environment. Section 7 provides a checklist for facilitators to use to periodically chart their development as a reflective practitioner. Section 8 suggests practice opportunities that include experience in areas that develop reflective abilities. Contains 60 recommended readings and 12 references. (YLB)

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LINKING LEARNING WITH LIFE

Reflection:

A Guide to Effective Service Learning

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Reflection

A Guide to Effective Service Learning

by Ande England and John Spence

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Linking Learning With Life

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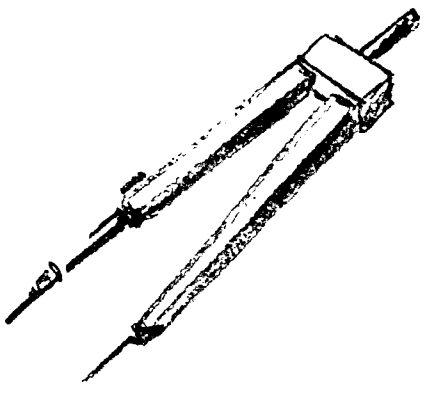
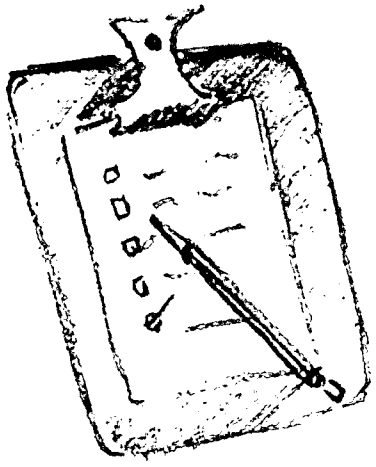
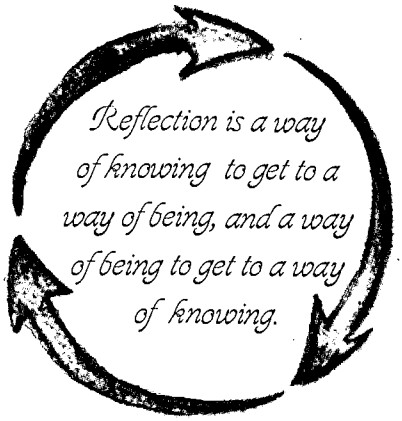




Foreword



This book represents our reflections on the process of learning and the ways that we can help facilitate that learning for ourselves and for others. Reflection on experience is what makes service learning unique in the world of volunteerism and community service. By focusing on what participants can learn by engaging in reflection upon meaningful service, service learning programs help develop self-directed learners who seek to better understand themselves, others, and the world at large.

The "knowing" that results from reflection can occur immediately after an experience, sometime thereafter, or in the distant future, depending upon the nature of the experience and the developmental state of the learner. Some experiences are so impactful—cognitively and emotionally—that the learner "gets it" immediately. Sometimes that impact is intentional on the part of the learning facilitator, and other times not.

Our work is designed to make this connection intentional. Learning facilitators who develop and refine their skills can help learners become more open to knowing and more eager to know. These skills involve not only the ability to develop and use appropriate reflection activities to "enhance" learning, but also—and more importantly—the ability to construct learning environments that promote reflection and personal development and thereby enrich learners, schools, and the larger community. This book examines the issues involved in creating reflective learning environments and raises questions that, we hope, will help guide your professional development as facilitators of learning.

— Ande England and John Spence

Reflection: The Core of Learning

Reflection occurs naturally in all humans. We act daily based upon our life experiences. We have a built-in system to make continual comparisons to the present situation from previous, perhaps similar, experiences. Based upon these comparisons, we make our moment-to-moment decisions.

Reflective thought is the active, persistent, and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in light of the grounds that support it and the further conclusions to which it tends.

(John Dewey, 1910)

Because our world is growing exponentially complex and ambiguous, learning environments must exist that develop an individual's abilities to assess seeming chaos, detect pertinent patterns, and make decisions based upon his or her current developmental levels. Reflective practice enables learners and practitioners alike to function well in a world of uncertainty, complexity, and variety.

This guide is as dimensional as the process of reflection, which involves both the application of specific techniques and the experience of ongoing practice. Practitioners can use this guide to assess their reflective skills and abilities and determine the extent to which their practice manifests reflective learning environments for all learners.

Reflection has a threefold purpose: to focus attention, create opportunity for experiencing varying perspectives, and elicit insight. Reflection focuses on action and is experienced in relation to action; allows learners to view themselves, others, and groups (including systems); and provides opportunities for individual insight and collaborative sharing and contributions.

Learning environments which include reflection as a critical component promote thoughtful exploration of experience and help learners make decisions that have greater potential for positive outcomes. Learners are able to look outwardly and **introspectively,** develop abilities to understand **implications** of decisions and actions, acquire more immediate insight into personal learning processes, and

determine effectiveness based on comparison with previous experience **(impact).**

Reflection contributes to cognitive development in numerous ways specific to the learner and to the collective wisdom of the group and community. Well-facilitated group discussion is one of the most effective means for individual and group development. Critical discussion can develop patterning and organizational abilities, thereby increasing learners' abilities to consider whole systems and think transformationally.

A reflective learning environment rich in discussion generates oral language development, one of the most critical learning abilities. Even Stanley Pogrow, developer of the HOTS (Higher Order Thinking Skills) computer-based program in which students experience activities which foster cognitive development acknowledges, "The most underused technology in America is not computers, it's conversation." Learners who have the most effective experiences have had intense reflective discussion sessions. (Eyler, Giles, & Schmiede, 1996)

Reflective learning offers students opportunities to learn about the process of learning, recognize what they've learned, and affirm that they know. This learning method creates such self-knowing that students travel through experience to knowing, constructing knowledge from experience. (Dewey, 1938)

Reflection is a skill, more accurately a cluster of skills, involving observation, asking questions and putting facts, ideas, and experiences together to add new meaning to them all. Learning to learn in this way, and instilling the practice as a habit, can allow program experiences to live on in the students' lives in new experiences and new learning.

(Conrad & Hedin, 1989)

A supportive reflective environment provides learners with the courage to risk learning, thus motivating learners who might not otherwise be able to take that risk. This environment must be safe for questioning, trying, and learning. An environment considerate of all members' uniquenesses contributes as well to the development of the group, allowing learners to learn from one another through reflective interaction guided by the facilitator.

En-COURAGE-ment

The Process of Reflection

The fully trained artistic eye is the smaller half of the journey; the principal thing is the beginning, the opening of the eyes.

(Hermann Hesse, "On Little Joys")

Creating is a critical component of any learning process and the first stage in the reflective process. Reflection begins with an awareness of how things are, how things came to be, and how an individual or collective action can help make it better.

Reflection is being aware of yourself and your environment and being able to ask essential questions (Billig & Kraft,1997). These questions may arise from curiosity or interest in learning, but they lead to the conscious creation of meaning about an experience, event, or situation. In addition to recognizing what is happening, critical awareness includes questions such as:

- How did this happen? How did this come to be?
- What can I (group/project) do to help?
- What will be the results if nothing is done?
- What are the personal, moral, and political implications of this action?

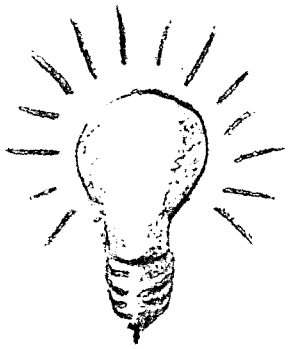
Stage two of the reflective process involves **observation.** The learning facilitator plays a critical role by helping develop learners' abilities to attend to details and to make sense of them, encouraging opportunities for observation and reflection on those observations.

Analysis of the environment constitutes the third stage of reflection. Analysis can be focused inwardly (on senses, perceptions, beliefs, and other individual perspectives on experiences) or outwardly (on the external environment in part or in whole). Critical inquiry is an essential analytical process in reflection, utilizing the basic tenets of the scientific process and the dimensional aspects of reflective practice to:

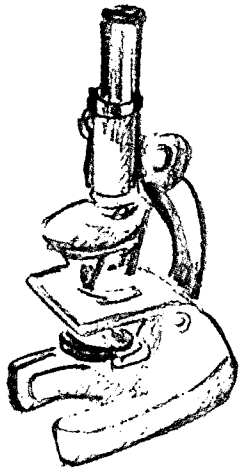
- identify the problem;
- consider all evidence;
- validate evidence;

- view evidence from various perspectives, seeking conflicting evidence;
- seek previous solutions to similar problems;
- consider alternative solutions, including implications; and
- initiate, evaluate, and modify "best" solutions.

When learners progress through these three stages of reflection in a well-designed, well-facilitated environment, and experience the insight of knowing what they know and **that** they know, they recognize the impact of their actions.



Awareness +



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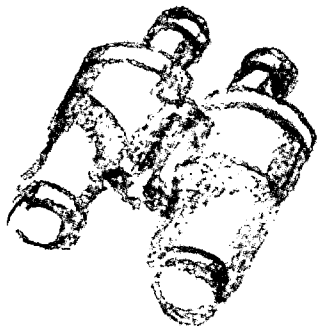

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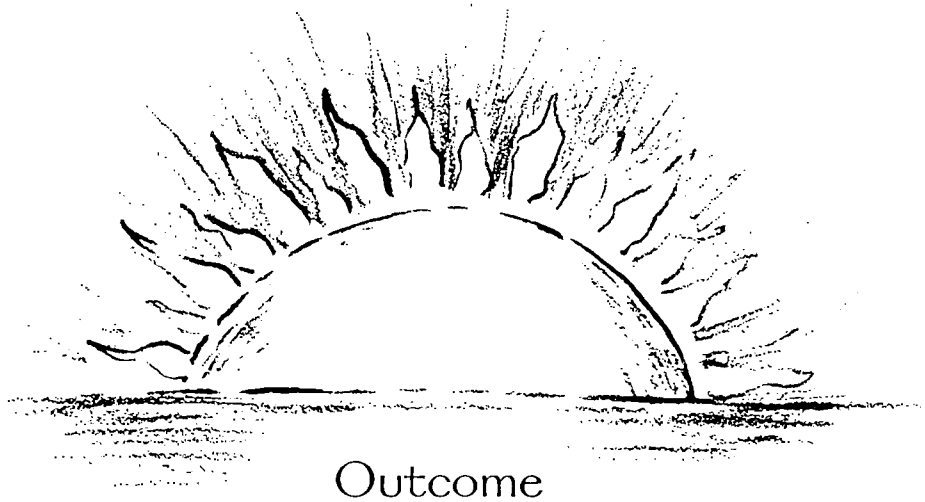


Outcome

Activities to Promote Reflection

The practice of reflection includes as many variants for expressing learning as the mind can imagine. The diversity of activities for promoting reflection closely mirrors the diversity of learners in any given group. Some will learn best by writing, others by speaking, and still others by doing or creating. Some learners choose not to say what they know, don't realize that they know, or are not yet able to say what they know and so must be provided opportunities to exhibit, express, or display their knowledge in other ways.

The following provides examples of reflective activities that can meet the needs of diverse learners.

Generating Reflection

Interactions

- one-on-one conferences with teacher/leader
- whole class discussion
- small group discussion
- oral reports to group
- discussions with community members or experts on an issue
- public speaking on project—to parents, teachers, school board, etc.
- teaching material to younger students
- testimony before policy making bodies
- simulation or role playing
- conference or workshop presentations

Introspections

- essay, expert paper, research paper, final paper
- journal or log—kept daily, weekly, or after each service experience
- case study, history
- special project report
- narrative for a video, film, or slide show
- guide for future volunteers/participants
- self-evaluation or evaluation of program

- newspaper, magazine, and other published articles
- portfolio

Initiatives

- gather information needed to serve or understand a project through surveys or field-based research
- plan a training session for other students, program leaders
- design recognition and celebration programs
- plan new future projects
- recruit peers to serve
- allocate program budget

Interpretations

- photo, slide, or video essay
- painting, drawings, collages, etc.
- dance, music, or theater presentations

(adapted from National Youth Leadership Council, 1991)

Reflective activities need not be constrained to a single category, however, and are often, in fact, interconnected. For example, learners may write poems that express thoughts, feelings, and insights about an experience; do public readings of their poems; and present the poems graphically in collages, paintings, sculptures, or other artwork. All learners are capable of diverse expression; facilitators need to allow for such diversity and encourage learners to experiment.

Reflective Practice in Service Learning

Service learning as a strategy for teaching and learning includes reflective practice. To be most effective, the entire process must include reflection. The practitioner must be a reflective individual and be able and willing to facilitate a reflective learning environment that ensures that all learners will benefit from experience.

Part of the assurance that all learners will learn is implicit in a well-facilitated design and experience, which are directly related to the facilitator's skills and abilities in creating reflective environments. Service learning adds a further assurance in the concept of meaningfulness, which incorporates prior experience, learner interests, and core beliefs as elements that can influence a learner's relationship to and interpretation of future experience (Vygotsky, 1962).

$$\frac{\text{experience} + \text{reflection}}{\text{meaning}} = \text{learning}$$

Ande England and John Spence

Throughout the entire learning design, consideration is taken of the meaningfulness of this experience for all parties concerned. Learners' experiences are facilitated so that their own meaning can be included from the outset, the meaning to the school and larger community can be anticipated, and projects can be chosen accordingly. Following the experiences, insightful meaning can be drawn from all dimensions and elicited from participants and recipients alike.

Preparation Stage

When assessing community needs, designing a project, or preparing for a worksite, learners can encounter a host of questions that elicit reflection:

- How do we determine a real community need?
- What constitutes a community?
- What are the root causes of an issue?

- How can we come to consensus on a project?
- What can our project reasonably address?
- What skills do we need in order to accomplish this project?
- How can we ensure a meaningful role for all participants in the project?
- What can we anticipate as a result of our service efforts?
- How can our project have a lasting effect?
- How can we increase our impact by partnering with community organizations?

Action Stage

During the service experience, learners can apply skills of critical observation and analysis to prompt further insights and understanding. Questions at this stage can include:

- What steps are we undertaking?
- What skills are we using?
- What do we notice about our environment?
- What do we notice about the people we're working with?
- How do we feel about the tasks we're working on?
- How do we feel about the people we're working with?
- How are our actions affecting others?

Reflection Stage

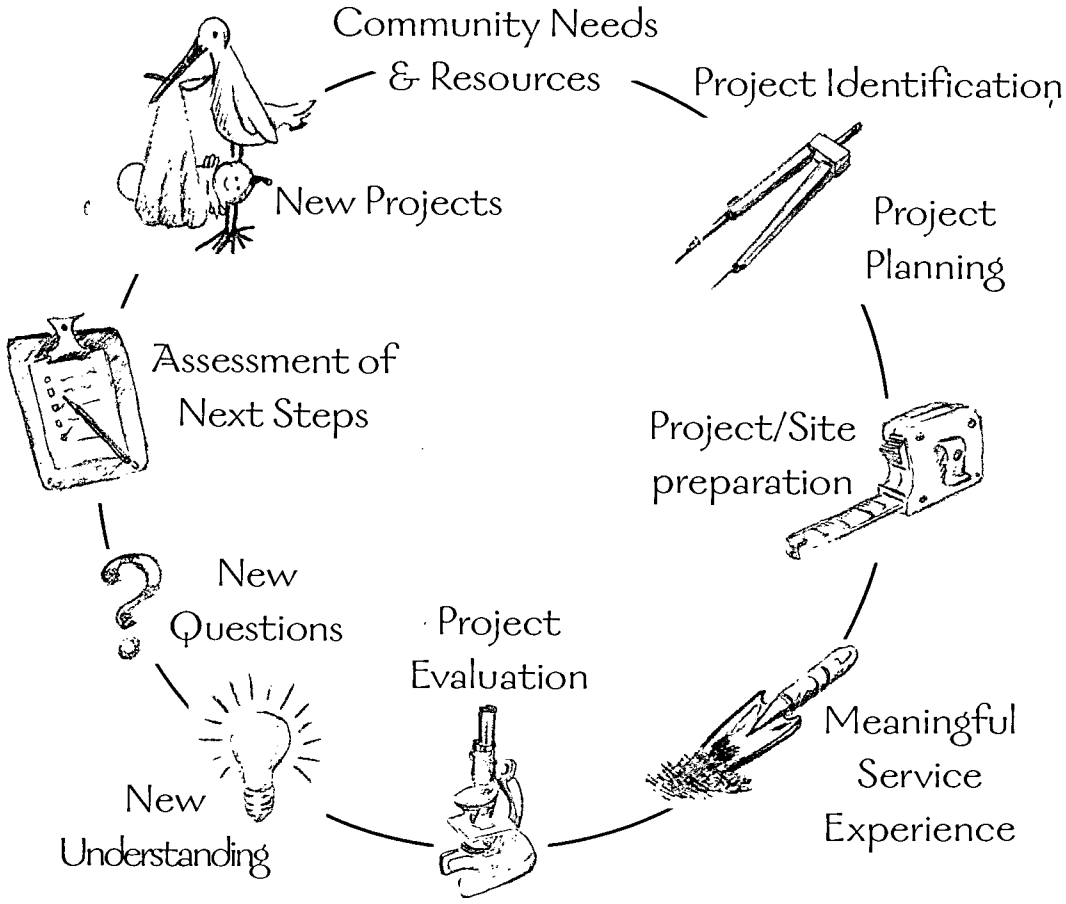
The questions that can arise after the service experience provide a follow-up and extension of those that preceded:

- How effective was our project in meeting our goals?
- How did our planning contribute to the effectiveness of the project?
- What evidence can we identify to document the impact of the project?
- What skills did we develop during the project?

Reflection involves the use of creative and critical thinking skills in order to help [learners] prepare for, to succeed in, and to learn from the service experience and then to connect that service experience with broader issues and outcomes.
(James & Pamela Toole, 1993)

- What could have been done differently to enhance the effectiveness of the project?
- What other issues does the project raise?
- How can we apply what we've learned to subsequent projects?

The following graphic illustrates the cyclical nature of reflective service-learning projects, where questions evoke new learning and new questions impact subsequent projects.



adapted from National Youth Leadership Council

Learning Chart

This process of reflective questioning is condensed in the following chart, an adaptation of the KWL chart (what do I Know, what I Want to know, and what I Learned) that can be used by groups or individuals as a guide to reflective learning.

Project:

What we know:

Our questions (what we want to know):

What we learned:

What we need to change:

What we can now do:

Further questions:

Next steps:

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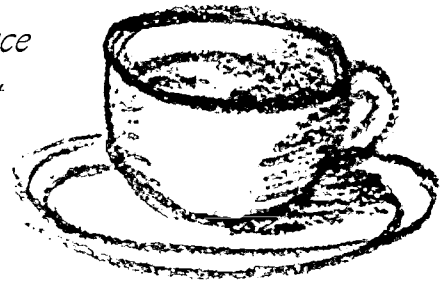
Reflective Facilitation

Although reflection is a process for developing self-directed learners, it can and should be facilitated. Part of the role of the facilitator is to act as a learning guide, helping learners make connections and develop abilities to respond thoughtfully to experience (Schön). The learning environment is kept open so that, when the learners are able to "see", they then have the opportunity to "say" (operate) in ways that depict their developing critical abilities to reflect in action.

The reflective facilitator uses a number of skills and abilities in order to create the most effective learning environment for all learners. Those skills and abilities include:

- critical questioning
- coaching
- understanding learners' present abilities
- the ability to devise learning opportunities that meet learners' needs to help reach stated goals
- the ability to listen carefully and critically
- the ability to look at the parts in relation to the whole, thereby providing opportunities for all learners to look at the process in light of the goals

Through reflection, practitioners can surface and criticize the tacit understandings that have grown up around the repetitive experiences of a specialized practice and can make new sense of the situations of uncertainty or uniqueness which [they] may allow [themselves] to experience.

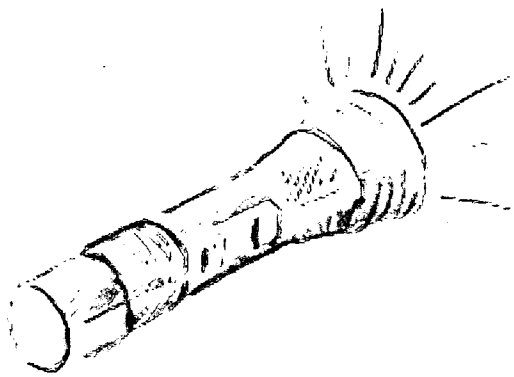


(Donald A. Schön, 1987)

Crafting an Inclusive Learning Environment

Facilitators must work to develop expertise in a number of areas in order to facilitate a learning environment which includes and considers all learners. The following abilities are essential to providing a well-facilitated learning environment:

- intervening appropriately and considerately
- eliciting reciprocal reflection
- noticing new variations in behavior and responses of the group and individuals
- coaching considerately, especially where values may conflict, parallels may not have yet been drawn to previous experience, or the environment is so complex or unstable so that the outcome is uncertain (Schön, 1987)
- modeling adjustment in action
- making room for learners knowing more than they can say
- creating a maximizing environment so that all viewpoints can be considered
- considering learners' interests
- valuing all voices/contributions
- considering all learners' abilities and styles in performance expectations
- accepting learners' present abilities
- considering learners' knowledge in developing cohort teams



Developing Facilitative Skills and Abilities

Reflective skills and abilities can be developed with practice. Professional development opportunities abound that develop reflective skills and abilities, such as cooperative learning, coaching, and multiple intelligences. Comprehensive training models for developing reflective practitioners are becoming available that integrate these specific skills and abilities in a reflective framework.

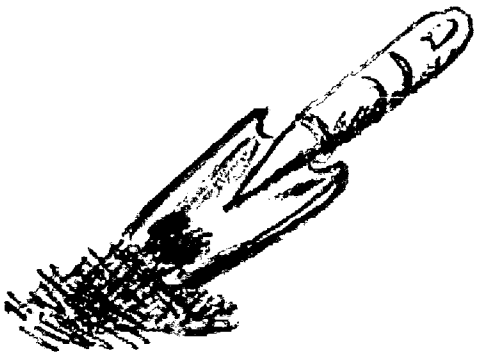
Developing skills is merely one aspect of becoming a reflective facilitator, however. Practitioners need to continually engage in the process themselves by practicing self-awareness, observation, and analysis, eventually becoming experts who respond to ever-changing situations based upon reflected experience.

Facilitating Reflection

Reflection on practice in its broadest sense refers to the capacity to think creatively, imaginatively, and at times, self-critically. Check the points below on which you are typically reflective. Consider copying this form and using it periodically to chart your development as a reflective practitioner.

Y	N	
☐	☐	I provide opportunities for learners to practice multiple forms of reflection.
☐	☐	I create an environment where all learners' voices and contributions are valued.
☐	☐	I provide opportunities that reflect student interest.
☐	☐	I provide opportunities for informed choice.
☐	☐	I consider all learners' abilities in performance expectations.
☐	☐	I coach learners to help them reach their stated goals.
☐	☐	I consider learners' knowledge in developing cohort teams.

Y	N	
☐	☐	I provide opportunities for learners to practice cooperative skills.
☐	☐	I provide opportunities that are considerate of learners' styles.
☐	☐	I provide opportunities for learners to engage in reflective discussion of experiences.
☐	☐	I practice active listening.
☐	☐	I encourage active listening.
☐	☐	I employ critical questioning.
☐	☐	I encourage students to question.
☐	☐	I help learners identify and examine assumptions.
☐	☐	I help learners identify issues.
☐	☐	I help learners consider and validate all evidence and view all evidence from various perspectives, seeking conflicting evidence.
☐	☐	I help learners weigh alternative solutions.
☐	☐	I help learners identify implications of possible solutions.
☐	☐	I help learners initiate, evaluate, and modify "best" solutions.



Practice Points for Learners

Learners must have abundant opportunities to practice critical reasoning in order to develop reflective abilities. A reflective environment is a coaching environment in which learners can participate in practice sessions prior to field-based activities to prepare them for learning while doing. This anticipatory set is crucial for creating a successful experience.

A reflective environment also helps learners infer what is not explicit. Learners gain experience in drawing together seemingly unrelated details to make logical inferences. Opportunities to practice "what-ifs" can abound.

These practice opportunities should include experience in areas such as:

- awareness
- observation
- analysis
- understanding relationships
- critical questioning (such as Socratic dialogue)
- developing the ability to contemplate
- noticing feelings, thoughts (including images), sensations
- coming to senses of self/worth/priorities/balance/values
- learning to listen to self and others
- learning to communicate in ways that others can understand
- intentionality
- working with feedback
- consideration of environment, including others

The process of gaining wisdom is listening to experiences and considering effects of actions.

(Paula Underwood, 1995)

Looking Back

Reflection enables learners to create an immediate consciousness concerning what is newly known and, therefore, what may be applied directly or straightaway. By utilizing reflective practice to make these connections explicit, teachers reduce the likelihood that many of their students will continue to wait a generation or more before finally realizing—after a considerable maturing at a later adult developmental stage of "looking back" on their lives—that the experience in a particular course meant something, was beneficial, or taught them something they could or wanted to use.

In creating this guide, the authors realize that the more we engage in the reflective process for our own learning, the more we need to continue this process for our own development. Likewise, the more practitioners engage in the reflective process, the more they recognize the wisdom of new questions and the need for ongoing learning. In other words, the more we practice, the more we gain, and the more we realize how much more there is to learn. All humans are continually learning. Reflective learners make their learning conscious and intentional. We hope this book will help you examine your life and work as reflective learners and facilitators. Practice makes progress.

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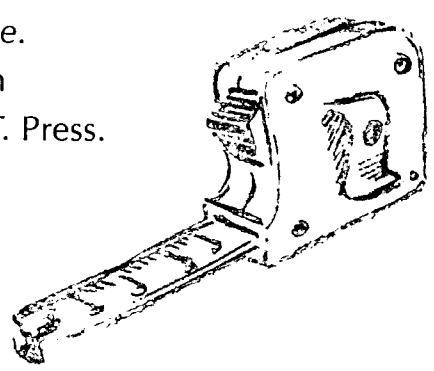

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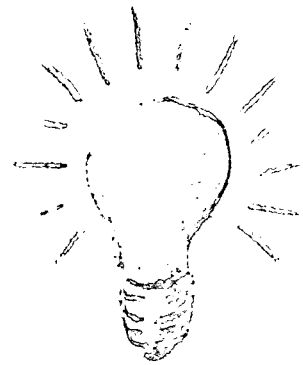

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