

Learning & Serving Together:

An Introduction to Service-Learning as Democratic Engagement for all Partners

EXCERPTS related to CRITICAL REFLECTION
(modified from Ash & Clayton, *Learning through Critical Reflection*, 2009)



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[June 2014 DRAFT – Please provide feedback but do not disseminate]

Why this guidebook?

From Sigmon's (1979) early insistence that all partners teach, learn, serve, and are served to contemporary articulations of democratic epistemologies and practices, service-learning positions all partners as co-educators, co-learners, and co-generators of knowledge. Enacting that commitment has proven difficult—for all partners. Challenges include lack of shared understanding, language, visions, and power; the flip-side opportunities include transformation of our purposes, partnerships, and identities.

What, then, is needed to build capacities of all partners to understand and undertake service-learning as democratic engagement? And what resources and professional development strategies might we create together to support such capacity building? Perhaps, in part, a shared set of materials and activities to introduce all partners to service-learning as democratic engagement--establishing common conceptualizations and language with which partners can envision potential futures, design effective collaboration, address tensions, and generate questions and knowledge.

This guidebook is designed for use by all partners and with input from all partners. ***It explicitly invites all partners to reimagine our work together through the lens of our identities as co-educators, co-learners, and co-generators of knowledge.*** We welcome the opportunity to include the experience and expertise of colleagues from around the world in its development and will be soliciting feedback and pilot sites between fall 2013 and summer 2014. The guidebook will be available in the fall of 2014.

Patti, Trish, Barbara, & Colleagues
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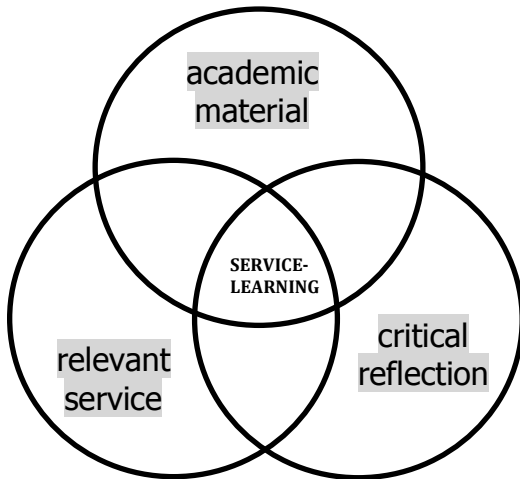
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For additional information, to provide feedback, or to discuss participation in piloting this guidebook, please contact Patti Clayton at patti.clayton@curricularengagement.com. Thank you for your interest!

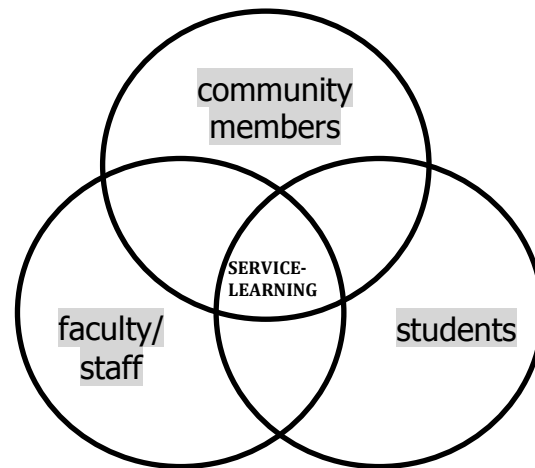
EXCERPTS related to CRITICAL REFLECTION

In Chapter 1 we introduced the common components, goals (learning and service / change), and partners of service-learning through a series of Venn diagrams:

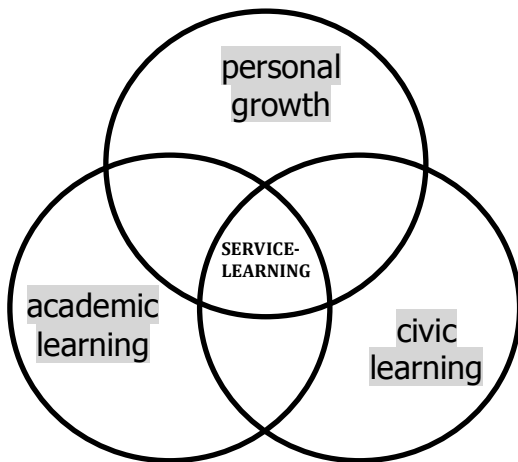
Components of SL (integrated)



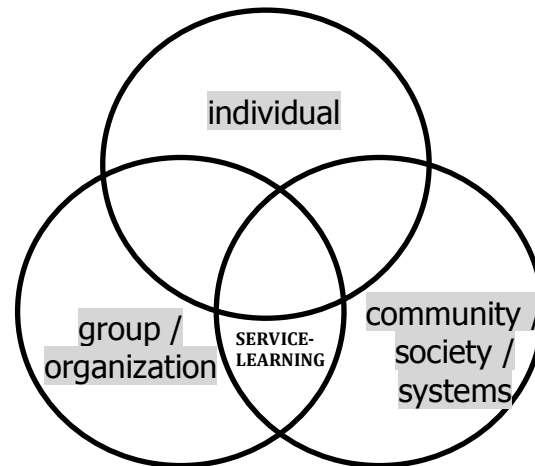
Partners in SL (co-creators)



***Categories of Learning Goals in SL
(critical thinking in all)***

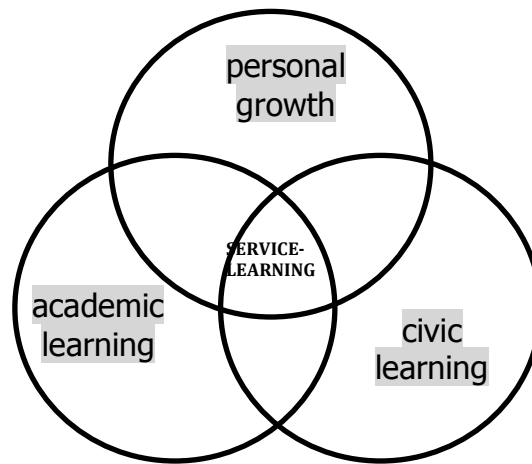


***Categories of Service/Change Goals in SL
(short- and/or long-term in all)***



We indicated that critical reflection is key to helping all partners recognize, explore, and learn about the connections between the service experiences we are engaged in together and the conceptual lenses we are using to inform and help us make meaning of that work. Another way to think about it is that critical reflection is the means by which all partners achieve the learning goals of service-learning and also continually improve the quality of our collaboration as we work to advance our service / change goals.

Focusing in on the learning goals, service-learning has three defining categories of learning, which may be separate or integrated, and it is characterized by a focus on critical thinking:



(critical thinking in all categories)

1. Personal growth

... involves learning more about who you are (your strengths, weaknesses, assumptions, skills, values, etc.) and who you want to become (perhaps including professionally as well as personally) and developing strategies for owning your own growth processes

2. Civic learning

... involves learning more about how individuals and groups act as part of larger processes to effect change—in other words, how collective action and change come about, and just as important, why sometimes they don't; why some individuals have a voice when groups come together while others don't; and how to address not only surface symptoms of problems with short-term fixes, but also underlying systemic, or root, causes with long-lasting solutions

3. Academic learning

... involves learning more about the academic material / conceptual lens / body of thought that provides the intellectual grounding for the service-learning activity/project

Critical thinking

... involves thinking about your thinking and deepening the quality of your reasoning by, for example, considering multiple perspectives, asking "why?" questions, and supporting your judgments with evidence

What is critical reflection?

Although we often hear it said that “experience is the best teacher,” it actually isn’t. Having experiences without reflecting critically on them can easily lead to reinforced stereotypes and simplistic interpretations or to completely missing the opportunity to learn from them. We learn not from experience itself but from *thinking about* our experiences: considering what they might mean to us and to others and examining them for what they can tell us about ourselves, others, and the world around us and for the light they can shed on the questions we bring to them. That is, we learn from *reflecting critically on* experiences.

Critical reflection was defined by John Dewey, noted philosopher and educational theorist, as:

“[T]he active, persistent, and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in the light of the grounds that support it, and the further conclusions to which it tends.”

(How We Think, 1910)

In other words, it involves *critically* examining what we think we know by considering the evidence we have and the conclusions we are drawing.

Critical reflection is the component of service-learning that helps all of us

- ❖ *generate* (our own and others’) learning,
- ❖ *deepen* that learning (or explore it in its full complexity), and
- ❖ *document* (or express and provide evidence of) that learning
- ❖ while also *improving the quality* of our partnership and its outcomes.

Critical reflection can be very different from what many people think when they hear the word “reflection.” The word “reflection” often has connotations that lead it to be interpreted in ways that can interfere with engaging in it effectively (in service-learning and in our lives more generally). If we think of it, for example, as “touchy feely” or associate it with writing in a diary, we are misunderstanding critical reflection.

Several years ago, some faculty and students started a project called “reclaiming reflection” in order to help students, faculty, staff, and community members engaged in critical reflection develop a good understanding of what it involves, without bringing any baggage they may have associated with the term “reflection.” Some of what critical reflection is not and some of what it is that were identified through this project are presented below.

Critical Reflection <i>IS NOT</i>...	Critical Reflection <i>IS</i>...
Touchy-feely	Analytical and rigorous
Stream of consciousness, like a diary entry	Carefully guided in accordance with the sort of learning we want and need to achieve and by standards of critical thinking
About our personal opinions (for example, whether we like broccoli or carrots better), which are not subject to critique or evaluation	About our reasoning and our considered judgments (for example, whether we judge broccoli or carrots to be healthier), which can and should be critiqued, improved, and evaluated against standards of quality reasoning
Introspective only / only done by ourselves / private	Looking both inward and outward / both individual and collaborative – because the quality of our thinking can be enhanced when shared with others
Therapy	An opportunity to learn about ourselves, about others, about the world around us, about concepts and theories, about professional practices, about learning itself ... actually, about almost anything
Busy work	A process designed to generate, deepen, and document learning and to improve the quality of action

Equally important, **critical reflection is not the same as summarizing what we have done or what we know or reporting facts about our experiences; it is, rather, a process that generates new learning and new questions.** Describing our experiences is an important part of it but only part; our previous knowledge and the facts the experiences bring to our attention are important elements of critical reflection, but they are only part of it. When we engage in critical reflection we examine our experiences thoughtfully, posing questions to ourselves and others that help us all think about potential meanings and interpretations from multiple perspectives.

The following vignette, written from a student's perspective about his group's use of critical reflection on an aspect of their teamwork, makes clear the ways in which the process leads to new understanding (NOTE: This vignette is not offered here as an example of critical reflection; it is a discussion of an earlier use of critical reflection):

My service-learning group had planned to meet at a coffee shop across the street from campus to plan our project. I was running late and could not find a place to park. Not wanting to hold up the meeting, I parked in a restricted spot that was close by and ran inside. When I got back to my car 2 hours later, I had a parking ticket! My group met for a reflection session two nights later, and when we were describing our service-learning experiences of the past week I shared this story. We ended up spending a good amount of time that night reflecting critically on my decision to risk a ticket: we talked about it as a trade-off between my individual good and the common good of the group and about whether I was really concerned about the good of the group or more about not wanting my group members to be angry with me. We talked about my tendency to always be running late and the factors that contribute to it and its associated consequences. Before we reflected on it, I thought it was all just about the fine I was going to have to pay – I couldn't believe how many really important issues were caught up in that one little decision!

As this example makes clear, it is through the process of critical reflection itself that we develop insights and ideas, make connections, see differences, etc. There are two important implications:

1. Critical reflection requires us to develop our own learning rather than reproducing what a textbook or another person has told us.

We are each responsible for determining the personal, civic, and academic, and other learnings **we** are achieving as we engage in critical reflection. Others will often guide our thinking toward particular questions or issues using prompts, of course, to help ensure that we are learning in particular areas; but the learning may very well be different for each us, even if we share the same experience and use the same conceptual lenses and the same prompts. What each of us brings to the experience individually, how we each interpreted the concepts initially, what connections we make to other ideas, etc. will all shape the specifics of our particular learning process and outcomes.

2. When critical reflection takes written forms, it is writing for learning, rather than writing to express what we already know or learning that has already occurred.

While we have all probably done a fair amount of writing in school and at work, critical reflection that takes written form may be different from the writing we are used to. When we engage in critical reflection through writing, we may very well find it helpful, even necessary, to take that writing through several stages and perhaps multiple drafts—often informed by feedback from others—as we consider *carefully* the conclusions we are drawing. Often, the more we reflect critically the more we realize we need to change our interpretations.

How can we engage in critical reflection?

Lets consider 3 questions about critical reflection:

1. What should we reflect on?

The short answer: absolutely anything. Any experience—from the smallest details to the big picture—can turn out to be an important grain of sand around which a pearl of a learning can be grown. Note the range of learning achieved through critical reflection on the choice to park illegally in the vignette above.

Further, critical reflection not only on what works well but also on what is frustrating can generate significant learning. If, for example, we find ourselves unable to make as large an impact as we had hoped in our service-learning project, having difficulties interacting with others, or confused by disconnects between theory and practice, we need to remember that an important over-arching objective of this process is for us to *learn ...* and learning can come just as much, if not more, from uncertainty, disappointment, or adversity as from an easy path to success. For example:

The limited impact of a project can make us more aware of the systemic issues that underlie the issue and more appreciative of how one issue is intertwined with others (*civic learning*).

Difficulties working with others can teach us about our strengths, weaknesses, skills, behavioral tendencies, emotional responses, etc. (*personal growth*).

Challenges putting theory into practice can teach us about the true complexities of a seemingly simple concept (*academic learning*).

2. Who can be a part of critical reflection?

Partners in service-learning can reflect by themselves or with others. Doing some critical reflection alone and some of it with others is a strong combination:

- *Reflecting critically on our own* can lead us to insights we might have missed if others were around to "interrupt" our thought process; it can also lead us to realizations we might be reluctant to share with others.
- *Reflecting critically with others* can help us identify our assumptions, provide alternative perspectives to challenge or supplement our own, and take our thinking in directions we might not have gone on our own.

We need to look for opportunities to discuss our experiences with a wide range of people, not only our service-learning partners but also others who are not involved in the project. Just as everything is reflection-worthy, almost anyone can provide a helpful stimulus and additional food for thought as we engage in the critical reflection that helps us to maximize the value of our service-learning (and other) experiences.

3. When should we engage in critical reflection?

The most impactful critical reflection is continuous: it takes place before, during, and after an experience.

Before

Reflecting critically up front about what strengths and weaknesses we bring to the experience, what objectives we intend to meet and challenges we might face, how we currently understand the public issues in question, and what particular conceptual lenses we want to apply are all important first steps towards achieving personal, civic, academic, and other learning outcomes and to improving the quality of our service as we move through our experiences. It also gives us a baseline for later use in monitoring our progress towards meeting goals.

The following vignette provides an example of the value of critical reflection before a service-learning project begins (NOTE: This vignette is not offered as an example of critical reflection; it is a discussion of an earlier use of critical reflection):

In my engineering class my group's service-learning project involved working with a citizen action group and a mill in a nearby rural town on issues related to water pollution. The two groups were trying to find a way to reduce pollution and improve water quality while also maintaining the economic viability of the plant, a key employer in the area. The night before our first trip to the town, our instructor asked us to use our online discussion boards to reflect on our assumptions about what we would encounter the next day. The discussion made it very clear that we were divided as a group over the value of meeting with the local residents as well as the engineers at the plant. Some of us shared the assumption that they would not be needed to help us understand the problem or think about possible solutions and, in fact, that our time would be better spent focusing solely on the engineering concerns. A couple members of our group, however, suggested that the concerns of the people living there have to be considered in tandem with the more technical dimensions of the project. This reflection before we ever left campus certainly helped us to better understand our differences as a group and the need to stay open-minded long enough to give a fair hearing to all of the community members involved in the project.

During

Being mindful and paying attention during an experience allows us to look for meaning while we are in the middle of it—helping us to see the important issues as they are unfolding, to ask relevant questions in the moment, and to change our thoughts and actions as needed “on the fly.”

The following vignette provides an example of the value of critical reflection in the midst of a service-learning project (NOTE: This vignette is not offered as an example of critical reflection; it is a discussion of an earlier use of critical reflection):

My technical writing class was working with a nonprofit that was trying to get enough grant money to stay open another year. They asked us to find more foundations to apply to and then to collaborate with them to develop additional proposals. As we talked about the unsuccessful proposals they had written so far we were struck by how similar they were, even though the funders to whom they had been submitted were quite different. I remembered the very first day

of class when my instructor talked about the concept of “audience analysis” and how it is key to effective communication. Talking about their history of grant writing in light of that concept as we broke for lunch helped us to see that this is exactly what the nonprofit needs to do more of: consider what makes each individual funder unique, what its priorities and values are, and how to present its work so as to better connect with what the audience – in this case the potential funding agency – cares about. The connection we saw between this course concept and the functioning of the organization led us go online after lunch, look together at some of the examples we considered in class of different pieces of writing for different audiences, and make some notes about what we need to learn about the potential funders before we come back together to revise our draft proposal.

After

Examining our experiences after they are over allows us to see more clearly how well we met our initial objectives and what helped and/or hindered us in doing so; to review the extent to which we were able to improve on a weakness or take advantage of a strength and set future goals accordingly; and to reconsider concepts in light of the completed experience, looking for additional connections or raising new questions.

The following vignette provides an example of the value of critical reflection after a service-learning experience is over (NOTE: This vignette is not offered as an example of critical reflection; it is a discussion of an earlier use of critical reflection):

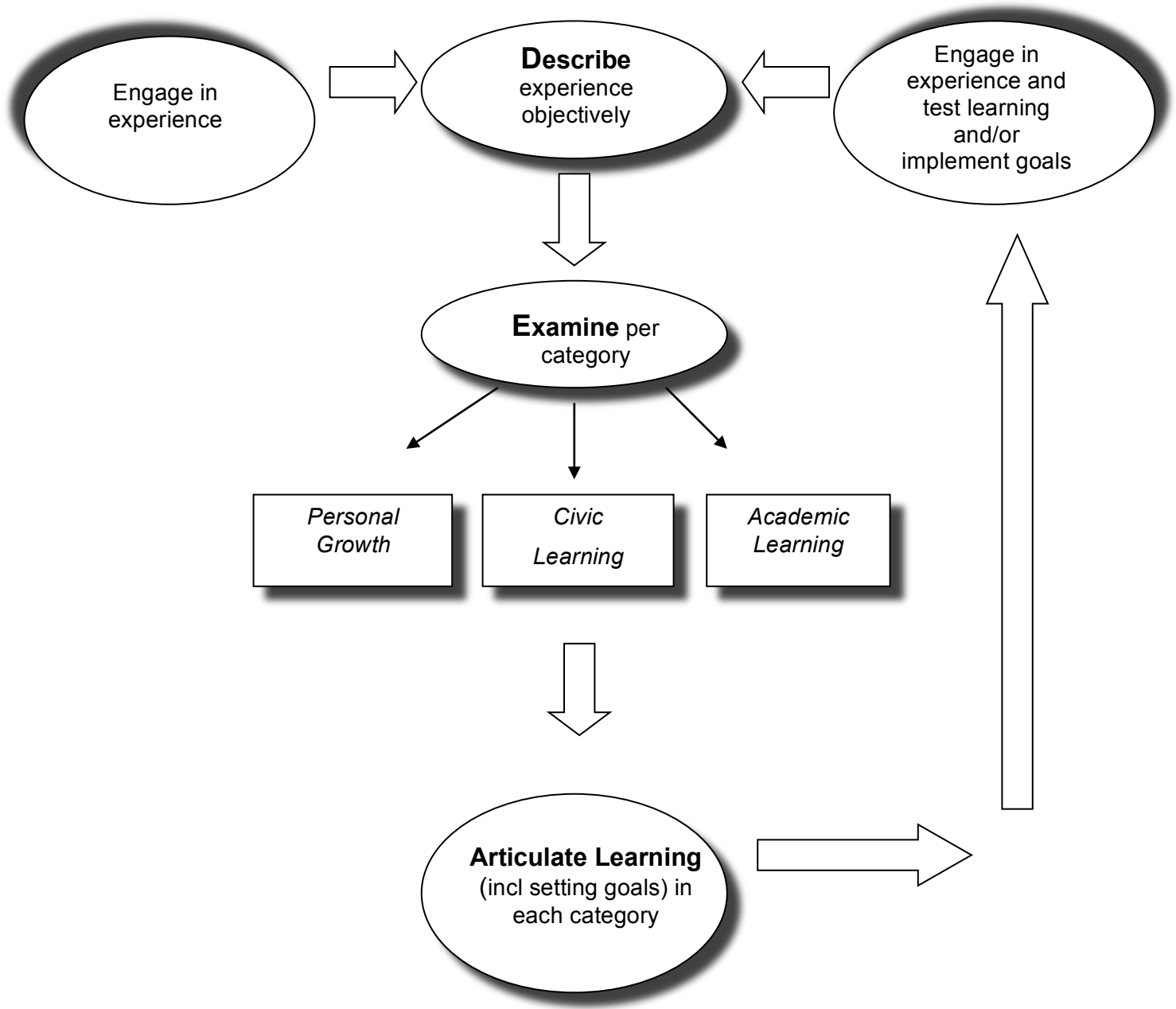
We spent two full hours on Saturday washing clay pots in a shed in a parking lot – it was hot and dirty and we didn’t even see the kids who come to the center after school. In class the next day we were talking about the community-building mission of the center and how it used projects such as a community garden to bring children and older folks together. As we reflected on our own experiences at the site, I shared my group’s frustration that our time was wasted cleaning pots rather than contributing our skills to the gardening project. My instructor reminded us of what the center’s director had told us when we met with her the first week of class: that the first step of the gardening project was for the kids to bring painted pots as gifts to the center’s social for older residents as a way to get them involved in the garden project. As we reflected further on our experience in this light we realized that in fact our time washing pots had not been wasted since the kids needed the pots to be clean before they could paint them. That in-class reflection were really important in helping me to change my attitude toward our work at the community center and toward service in which you don’t interact directly with others. You don’t always see the big picture your work is part of or see the ultimate impacts, but that doesn’t mean it isn’t still very important. This reflection also helped me to see that even what feels like a bad experience is important to examine carefully.

As we engage in critical reflection before, during, and after our experiences, we become increasingly **“reflective-in-action”** (Schön, 1983) – able to think continuously about what we and others are doing and why and with what consequences and to adjust our thoughts and actions accordingly.

The DEAL Model for Critical Reflection

The DEAL model — in which we move from **D**escribing our experiences to **E**xamining them in light of the learning goals and then to **A**rticulating Learning we have achieved in such a way that we can act on it to improve future thinking and action — supports us in reflecting critically on our service-learning experiences so as to achieve significant learning and to improve the quality of our partnership and our service.

The graphic below is visual representation of the DEAL model. At each step of the process we or others provide prompts to help stimulate and focus our thinking.



Consider the following examples of service-learning students using the DEAL model:

When Valerie sat down to **describe** in detail her experience at the first planning session for her group, she realized that she hadn't said a word during the meeting after the initial introductions. As she **examined** the experience from the perspective of *personal growth* she realized that she had had some good ideas but didn't feel comfortable sharing them and, just as important, that her enthusiasm for and commitment to the project was already beginning to fade. Valerie knows that she has a somewhat reserved personality, especially in unfamiliar situations, and she remembered that this was not the first time her reluctance to speak up has been problematic. As she **articulated a learning** about her tendency to stay quiet in such group processes and its implications, she set a goal to speak up at least twice at the next meeting. She knew that she would likely be very nervous but hoped that since this would be their second meeting she would feel more relaxed.

When David's project group reflected together on the interactions they had had with the staff at the assisted living facility where they were serving, their **description** included the nurse telling them that unless the resident agreed ahead of time, they were not allowed to know the diseases or other health conditions associated with anyone with whom they would be interacting (because of the HIPAA regulations that are supposed to protect the privacy of personal health information). As they **examined** their experience from the perspective of *civic learning* they considered the objectives the HIPAA regulations were trying to achieve and how they affected the students' ability to interact with the residents. They also thought about how the regulations affected the residents' relationships with the facility's regular volunteers as well as with friends and family. They wondered whether this was a policy with good intentions but sometimes problematic consequences. As David **articulated a learning** about the benefits and costs of making private information public, he considered the challenges of protecting privacy without compromising care.

When Matt started to **describe** in detail his experience at the afterschool tutoring program he realized that the goal of the program – to improve the health-related behaviors of the children—reminded him of the Health Belief Model that he had learned about in his Community Nutrition class. As he **examined** the experience from the perspective of *academic enhancement* he was able to compare and contrast the five components of the model in the text with the approaches to changing behavior being used in the afterschool program. As a result, he was able to **articulate a learning** in which he made suggestions for how the program might be more successful in meeting its educational goals by applying the model's underlying principles, while also considering the barriers associated with the implementation of such the model with children.

More generally, Valerie, David, and Matt developed what service-learning can help all of us develop:

**The ability to use critical reflection to examine our experiences
and to act on the resulting learnings.**

The DEAL model is basically a series of questions that we can ask ourselves and others; sometimes we develop the questions ourselves and sometimes others develop them for us. Below are some example prompting questions for each step of the DEAL critical reflection model.

These questions should **guide but not limit our thinking**. We can come up with additional prompting questions as well, but the ones provided here will certainly help anyone engaged in service-learning get started on the critical reflection process that moves us from having experiences to learning and growing as we collaborate with others to improve the world around us.

The DEAL model makes explicit an effective thinking process that is relevant in any arena of life. It is a tool to help us all get better and better at thinking as we learn **how to think**; it is not intended to tell us **what to think**.

Lets look at the process step by step. In the pages that follow we consider the use of DEAL to guide critical reflection after an experience; it is equally applicable during an experience and can even be used before an experience (for example, with the Describe step focused not on an upcoming experience but on the organizational context in which the experience that is about to happen will take place or perhaps on an experience from the past that involved similar issues).

► Step 1 of the DEAL Model = DESCRIBE

A common shortcoming of “reflection” in service-learning is that it may be limited to description or summarizing only. Description is important, but primarily as a first step toward the real heart of critical reflection: the Examine and Articulate Learning steps, where the learning is really generated and deepened. Strong description is harder than you may think – and also more important.

At the start of each critical reflection activity (remember, here we are discussing critical reflection that takes place after an experience) it is important to carefully review the experience(s) in question by describing what happened **objectively** and in **detail** (detailed enough that someone who was not in the experience with us would have a good sense of what happened). Keep in mind that:

1. Description can include what happened at the service site itself as well as other related activities such as project planning.
2. Description may be aided by reviewing any activity logs we have been keeping of our activities.
3. If we are engaged in collaborative reflection, we can take advantage of the fact that others may have noticed details we missed as we produce a shared description.
4. If we have participated in more than one SL-related activity since our last reflection, it is helpful to begin with a high-level overview of all these activities, then narrow down to one or two to focus further description. If we have only one experience to reflect on, this will not be necessary.
5. Describing in chronological order may be helpful.

It can be helpful to think of ourselves as the **fly on the wall** who can only record actions (what he witnessed), not what people were feeling or thinking while it was happening. The fly knows what people did, not what they meant to do or why they meant to do it.

Strong description depends on our having paid careful attention during our experiences (in other words, it depends on our becoming increasingly “reflective-in-action”). Training ourselves to be good observers and to be mindful of our experiences while we are in the midst of them is an important by-product of this reflection process.

Example DESCRIBE prompts

- When did this experience take place?
- Where did it take place?
- Who else was there? Who wasn't there?
- What did I do? What did others do? What actions did I / we take?
- What did I / we say or otherwise communicate?
- Who didn't speak or act?
- Did I / others laugh, cry, make a face, etc.?
- What did I / we hear? See? Smell? Taste? Touch?
- Why (as a matter of objective fact) did the situation occur?

► Step 2 of the DEAL Model = EXAMINE

The second, Examine, step continues the process of critical reflection by helping us make meaning of the experience(s) just described in Step 1.

Each category of learning goals (at least personal growth, civic learning, and academic learning and perhaps others) has its own series of questions, designed to help guide us in moving from that initial, objective description to a deeper understanding of its meaning. Although we can examine experiences at the interface of these categories (e.g., personal characteristics that promote or hinder citizenship), in the pages that follow we separate out the categories. Additional questions can, of course be added to the examples provided below; and additional categories of learning can be added to the three discussed below.

Personal Growth -- As we examine our experiences from the perspective of this category:

- ❖ *We explore what they tell us about ourselves*
- ❖ *We think about how we felt, why we acted the way we did, what assumptions we made, what characteristics contributed to our successes and difficulties, etc.; and we think about what changes, if any, we want to make in ourselves and what will be involved in doing so.*
- ❖ *We consider what our experience may teach us about who we are relative to who we want to become as people.*

The primary goal of critical reflection in this category is for us to learn more about ourselves and to consider what changes we want to make as a result. We are all engaged in a lifelong process of personal growth, and critical reflection in service-learning is well-suited to helping us in that process.

Critical reflection in this step may often begin with releasing the subjective impressions we reined in during the DESCRIBE step. Now we consider our attitudes, assumptions, interpretations, etc. However, this does not mean that reflection here is just about “venting”; rather, it is about examining what happened carefully and critically, in light of what it has to teach us about ourselves.

Example EXAMINE – PERSONAL GROWTH prompts

- What assumptions or expectations did I bring to the situation? How did they affect what I did or didn't think, feel, decide, or do? To what extent did they prove true? If they did not prove true, why was there a discrepancy?
- How did this experience make me feel? Why? How did I handle my emotional reactions (e.g., What did I do as a result of my feelings? Was I in control of my feelings?)? Should I have felt differently? Why or why not?
- In what ways did I succeed or do well in this situation (e.g., interacting with others, accomplishing tasks, handling difficulties) and what personal characteristics helped me to be successful (e.g., skills, abilities, perspectives, attitudes, tendencies, knowledge)?
- What does this tell me about how I define success? Is my definition appropriate? How might it change? Should it change?
- In what ways did I experience difficulties (e.g., interacting with others, accomplishing tasks,) and what personal characteristics contributed to the difficulties (e.g., skills, abilities, perspectives, attitudes, tendencies, knowledge)?
- How does / might any of these personal characteristics positively and/or negatively affect my interactions with others, my decisions, and/or my actions in this situation and in other areas of my life?
- What are the possible sources of / reasons for any of these characteristics? How does my understanding of these sources / reasons help me to better understand what will be involved in using, improving, or changing them in the future?

In contexts in which personal growth is framed explicitly in terms of *global learning*:

- How did movement in and out of cultures affect me (in terms of my emotional life, my sense of self, and my confidence level)?
- What assumptions do I hold about different people/cultures to which I have had little or no previous exposure?
- What skills in communicating across language and cultural barriers did I use and what do I lack or need to develop?
- How willing was I to modify my behaviors in accordance with local norms? When and why did these modifications happen (if they did)? What trade-offs did I make (or not make) when doing so (or not doing so)?
- What (if anything) did I compromise in terms of my own values and beliefs in the name of social interactions, access to others/situations, gaining approval, or learning in a different culture that I would otherwise not be willing to compromise? In what ways did my interactions shed new light on or lead me to rethink my values and beliefs?

Civic Learning -- As we examine our experiences from the perspective of this category:

- ❖ *We explore the approaches that people take as part of larger processes to meet objectives and generate change, including whether those approaches are appropriate and the factors that contribute to their use.*
- ❖ *We think about the dynamics of leadership, power, privilege, and collaboration; the tensions between individual interests and the common good and between short-term responses and long-term change; and the various meanings of community and citizenship.*
- ❖ *We consider the challenges and trade-offs involved in creating change in all types of settings, from small groups to complex systems.*

Critical reflection in this category helps us take a *systemic* perspective: to look at *underlying* causes and to explore issues in light of the many interconnections that comprise them. It helps us to recognize and better understand the underlying issues associated with our service-learning activities and to consider what is involved in both “band-aid” responses and systemic change.

Example EXAMINE – CIVIC LEARNING prompts

- What was I / someone else trying to accomplish? Why?
- In taking the actions I / they did, was the focus on symptoms or underlying causes? Was the focus (symptom or cause) appropriate to the situation? How might I / they focus more on underlying causes in the future? What trade-offs will be associated with doing so?
- What roles did each person / group / organization involved in the situation play and why? What alternative roles could each have played? Did I / other individuals act unilaterally or collaboratively and why? Should I / they have worked with others in a different way?
- In what ways did differences in power and privilege emerge in this experience? What are the sources of power and privilege in this situation? Who benefits and is harmed? How might any inappropriate dependencies be eliminated?
- How did leadership emerge in this situation, on my / others part?
- What is in the interest of the common good in this situation? In what ways is the individual good (mine / others) linked to and/or contrary to the common good? What tradeoffs between them are involved?
- In what way did any other tradeoffs (long-term / short-term; justice / efficiency; etc.) emerge in this situation? Who made the trade-offs? Were the trade-offs made appropriate or inappropriate and why?
- How do members of this community define concepts such as ‘community,’ ‘leadership,’ ‘power,’ etc.? What are the similarities and differences between their definitions and my own? What role does nationality / ethnicity / culture / history / etc. play in these differences?

In contexts in which civic learning is framed explicitly in terms of *global learning*:

- What connections (economic, political, environmental, social, cultural, historical) does this experience suggest between local (my home and/or host community?) and global communities?
- What are the points of tension surfaced in this experience between my responsibilities to each of these local communities and to global communities? What trade-offs do I experience between my responsibility to my home community and to this community? How might these trade-offs impact the choices made at home and vice versa?
- To what extent and in what ways does this experience suggest that I am a “citizen” of my host country while I am there? In what ways should I/do I have voice in this community?

Academic Learning -- As we examine our experiences from the perspective of this category:

- ❖ *We explore where and how specific concepts or theories emerge in our service-learning experiences*
- ❖ *We think about how the emergence of these concepts or theories in our experiences is similar to and different from our previous understandings of them.*
- ❖ *We consider where there might be gaps in our academic knowledge – what else we might need to learn?*

Example EXAMINE – ACADEMIC ENHANCEMENT prompts

- What specific academic material is relevant to this experience? Explain the concept, theory, etc. clearly and concisely so that someone unfamiliar with it could understand it
- How did the material emerge in the experience (When did I see it or note its absence? How did or should I or someone else use it?) ?
- What academic (e.g., disciplinary, intellectual, professional) skills did I use / should I have used? In what ways did I / others think from the perspective of a particular discipline and with what results?
- In what specific ways are my understanding of the material or skill and the experience the same and in what specific ways are they different? What are the possible reasons for the difference(s) (e.g., bias, assumptions, lack of information on my part or on the part of the author / instructor / community?)

Learning generated through critical reflection on experience in any of these three categories has the potential to ***improve the quality of our service-learning activities***. Toward this end, we can also use Examine prompts focused specifically on aspects of our work together, as in this example:

Example EXAMINE prompts focused on IMPROVING GROUP PROCESSES

- What roles did the various members of our group play? Why did each play the roles he/she played, and what does the role each person played suggest about his/her personality, the way others within the group define him/her, his/her strengths, etc.?
- What issues did we all agree on? Why? What disagreements arose? Why?
- Did we function effectively as a group? Efficiently? In what ways “yes” / “no”?
- Why did I / we take the approach we took to our task? What might I / we have done differently? What difference might a different approach have made?

► Step 3 of the DEAL Model = ARTICULATE LEARNING

In this, the third and last step of the DEAL critical reflection model, we deepen our learning even further by re-considering and re-framing it using four final questions:

What did I learn?
How did I learn it?
Why does this learning matter?
What will I do in light of this learning?

These products of one complete critical reflection cycle using the DEAL model are called Articulated Learnings or ALs; a different AL is produced for each category of learning each time the DEAL model is used. Examine prompts in the Personal Growth category will lead to a Personal Growth AL, Examine prompts in the Civic Learning category will lead to a Civic Learning AL, etc.

The ARTICULATE LEARNING step both uses and builds on the DESCRIBE and EXAMINE steps. Recalling from earlier in this chapter that we learn best from reflecting critically on experiences rather than from experiences alone, it should be clear now that ***our response to these four questions will emerge from our thinking in the earlier steps of the DEAL process***; further, as we continue our critical reflection in this third step – including considering how the learning has value outside the context of our particular experience and the complexities of taking action associated it – ***our learning will continue to change and deepen***.

More specifically, the final step of DEAL:

- Helps us to get beyond the learning of a fact by re-framing our learning in a more generalized way. (*I learned that*)
- Requires that we provide specific evidence from our experience and/or our critical reflection on it to back up our learning. (*I learned this when*)
- Asks us to find significance in our learning (*This learning matters because*) that is both specific to our experience and broadened to:
 - Other areas of our lives (in the category of Personal Growth)
 - Other examples of community engagement (in the category of Civic Learning)
 - Other situations in which a concept might be relevant (in the category of Academic Enhancement)
- Provides us with a framework for exploring how our learning can be acted on, now and into the future, and supports us in considering the benefits and challenges of such action. (*In light of this learning*)

Characteristics of each section of the Articulate Learning step

"I learned that" ...

- Expresses an important learning, not just a statement of fact
- Provides a clear and correct explanation of the ideas in question (e.g., the personal characteristic in a PG AL, a specific concept or theory in an AE AL) so that someone not in the experience could understand them
- Explains the enhanced understanding of the idea(s) the learner has achieved as a result of describing and examining the experience
- Is expressed in general terms, not just in the context of the experience (so that the learning can be applied more broadly to other experiences)

"I learned this when"

- Connects the learning to specific activities that gave rise to it, making clear what happened in the context of that experience so that someone who wasn't there could understand it.

"This learning matters because" ...

- Considers how the learning has value, both in terms of this situation and in broader terms, such as other organizations, communities, activities, issues, professional goals, courses, etc.

"In light of this learning" ...

- Sets specific and assessable goals; considers the benefits and challenges involved in fulfilling them
- Ties back clearly to the "I learned that" statement.

Making critical reflection critical

As we go through each step of the DEAL model (or any other structure for reflecting critically on our experiences), we need to ensure that our reasoning is sound and our conclusions meaningful. In other words, we need to make our critical reflection critical.

To do this we need to ensure that our critical reflection incorporates critical thinking. One thing that is not unique about critical reflection is that it uses the same standards that should characterize all good reasoning: the Standards of Critical Thinking.

As defined by Richard Paul, from the Foundation for Critical Thinking:

"Critical Thinking is a systematic way to form and shape one's thinking.... It is thought that is disciplined, comprehensive, based on intellectual standards, and as a result, is well-reasoned."

(www.criticalthinking.org)

This definition applies to any kind of thinking, including the critical reflection we engage in as part of service-learning. In fact, using the standards of critical thinking in service-learning improves our thinking and learning and our actions in all parts of our lives (e.g., evaluating what we hear on the news or read online, writing letters of recommendation or personal statements or reports, making stronger and more persuasive arguments).

Perhaps the best way to introduce critical thinking is with an example of “un-critical” thinking:

“Being effective at improving the lives of a group of disadvantaged people (in this case the academic performance of underprivileged children) includes not only being good at the specific task or activity we are bringing to the community (explaining academic concepts to them), but also making them feel special and loved. This helps to make them more receptive to our efforts. It became clear that the more we got to know the kids and showed them that we actually cared about them, the more willing they were to pay attention to us and their homework. For example, when I first started working with William, he wouldn’t even look at me or acknowledge my presence. But every week I brought him little gifts, like candy and stickers, and slowly he began to warm up to me so that now he runs up when I come in and is ready to get to work... This matters because underprivileged children are not getting the attention that they need at home....”

There are several fundamental problems with the “learning” in this example:

First, the learner came to her conclusion that under-privileged children lack attention through flawed reasoning (e.g., assuming an association between levels of socio-economic status and levels of parental affection). This is problematic and can even be dangerous: through her role as a member of a larger community the learner has the ability to influence the lives of others, through her actions and her words, either of which could be flawed if they are based on the conclusions she draws from this un-critical thinking.

Second, she left un-explored several potentially interesting ideas. In particular, she could have re-oriented her reflection around the nature of motivation, particularly as it relates to young children in an educational setting. Is giving gifts to encourage attention to schoolwork a form of bribery? Whether or not it is effective, is it appropriate? Who should decide on its appropriateness? How does giving gifts in this way affect development of the intrinsic motivators necessary for long-term success?

This is a good example of what TS Eliot (1943) meant when he said that we might have had the experience but missed the meaning.

Lets look more specifically at how this thinking could and should be strengthened.

The author of this excerpt does clearly explain what she means by some of the terms she uses (e.g., what she means by “disadvantaged people” and by the “task or activity we are bringing to the community”) and does offer examples to support her thinking (e.g., “For example, when I first started working with William ...” and “... little gifts, like candy and stickers, ...”). There is some **clarity** in this excerpt.

However, unpacking this excerpt further:

- “[U]nderprivileged children are not getting the attention that they need at home.”
 - What is the evidence for this claim? Did she actually see the children interacting with family members? If not, how does she know it is true?

This failure to provide evidence to support the **accuracy** of a claim allows an “elitist” point of view—that poor people don’t love their children as much as wealthier people—to go unchallenged.

- *Bringing presents means we care.*
 - What additional questions does this raise? What are the complexities here? Why is it that bringing gifts means that you care? What are the implications of equating gift-giving with caring, especially in an educational setting?

That the student assumes that gift-giving is synonymous with a demonstration of caring without questioning that assumption represents a lack of **depth** in her reasoning.

- *Poor children lack attention and are therefore unmotivated to learn; bringing them gifts is a good way to show them that we care, and that motivates them to learn.*
 - Is there another way to look at this? Might any child (not just one from a disadvantaged background) be shy with strangers at first and become more attentive and responsive over time as he/she gets to know the tutor?

In this case, no alternative explanation is sought for the learner’s experience. Put yourself in William shoes: you are a 12 year-old boy with little interest in school who as a result has been made to attend this after school program, and one day a college-aged girl you’ve never met before shows up and suddenly wants to be your friend and tries to make you do your homework. Failing to think about the situation from someone else’s perspective, especially someone directly involved in the experience, represents a lack of **breadth** in her thinking.

How can we make sure that our critical reflection on experience really leads to learning that is as meaningful and significant as possible? And just as important, how can we make sure that it doesn’t produce problematic learning and problematic action (as in the prior examples)? What we need is a way to continuously check the quality of the thinking that is leading to our learning as we go along. The **Standards of Critical Thinking** help us do just that.

The table on the next page summarizes each of these standards and associated questions that we can ask ourselves and one another.

Critical Thinking (CT) Standards Table (Ash & Clayton, 2009)

CT Standard	Explanation	Associated questions to check our thinking
Integration	<i>Service experience clearly related to the learning</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have I clearly shown the connection between my experience and my learning?
Clarity	<i>Expands on ideas, express ideas in another way, provides examples or illustrations where appropriate.</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Did I give an example? • Is it clear what I mean by this? • Could I elaborate further?
Accuracy	All statements are <i>factually correct</i> and/or <i>supported with evidence</i> .	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How do I know this? • Is this true? • How could I check on this or verify it?
Precision	Statements contain <i>specific information</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can I be more specific? • Have I provided sufficient detail?
Relevance	All statements are <i>relevant to the question</i> at hand; all statements connect to the central point.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How does this relate to the issue being discussed? • How does this help us/me deal with the issue being discussed?
Depth	<i>Explains the reasons behind conclusions and anticipates and answers the questions that the reasoning raises and/or acknowledges the complexity of the issue.</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Why is this so? • What are some of the complexities here? • What would it take for this to happen? • Would this be easy to do?
Breadth	<i>Considers alternative points of view</i> or how someone else might have interpreted the situation.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Would this look the same from the perspective of....? • Is there another way to interpret what this means?
Logic	The <i>line of reasoning makes sense</i> and follows from the facts and/or what has been said.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does what I said at the beginning fit with what I concluded at the end? • Do my conclusions match the evidence that I have presented?"
Significance	The conclusions or goals represent a (the) <i>major issue</i> raised by the reflection on experience.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is this the most important issue to focus on? • Is this most significant problem to consider?
Fairness	<i>Other points of view are represented with integrity (without bias or distortion)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have I represented this viewpoint in such a way that the person who holds it would agree with my characterization?

Modified source: Paul, R., & Elder, L. (2001). *The Miniature Guide to Critical Thinking*. The Foundation for Critical Thinking. Santa Rosa, CA.
www.criticalthinking.org

APPENDIX

Below is an example (excerpted) of a student's use of the DEAL model to critically reflect on a service-learning experience. Included here is only the EXAMINE step and only in one category (Personal Growth). Consider what questions from the Critical Thinking Standards Table you might pose to help this student deepen her learning.

EXAMINE – PERSONAL GROWTH

What *assumptions* or *expectations* did I bring to the situation? How did they affect *what I did or didn't think, feel, decide, or do*? To what extent did they prove true? If they did not prove true, why was there a discrepancy?

I assumed:

- I would be doing manual labor outside
- I would learn about the mission and daily activities of the community organization
- I would gain insight into the animals' behavior, needs, natural habitat, and conservation issues
- That the community organization had a large conservation message and mission

I expected:

- I prepared myself mentally to have mixed feelings about the community organization because I expected to see animals in fences and I know that in some situations this can upset me.
 - To be able to come close to the animals.
 - To see and learn about large cats and binterrongs.
 - The staff and volunteers to be mostly focused on the scientific purposes of the community organization, and to have as much "heart" or emotional investment in the animals and the community organization's conservation mission.
- These expectations and assumptions mostly caused me to think positively about the community organization and the animals I saw in enclosures because I assumed they needed to be there, they wanted these animals to survive, and I was going to get to see tigers! So this caused me to not feel as upset as I may have otherwise by seeing large, wild animals enclosed. It did cause me to ask a lot of questions and be very inquisitive about the lives of the animals at the community organization so I could better understand my assumptions of why they were there and how they were managed. Because I had mostly positive assumptions and expectations, I did not criticize the facility and had more of an open mind about their practices.
- My assumptions and expectations were quite realistic about how I would feel, what I would see, and how the community organization is run. The community organization even exceeded my expectations regarding their conservation message and how well the animals are treated. My expectations regarding the mind-set and attitudes of the staff were discredited by the way they spoke compassionately about the animals, named them, and interacted with the animals. The community organization also had a wider variety of species than I expected to see.

*How did this experience make me **feel** (positively and/or negatively)? How did I handle my emotional reactions (e.g., what did I do as a result of my feelings)? Should I have felt differently? Why or why not?*

- This experience was extremely positive for me, but I still felt confused about the reasons behind the community organization's existence. Positive feelings surfaced because we spent the whole day outside, work, and being active, which I always enjoy. Also, I truly like and enjoy the people I was working with, and I got to see and connect with remarkable wild animals. Even though there were twinges of sadness and empathy for these animals that had to live their lives in captivity because of people who selfishly wanted them as pets, I saw that the community organization needed to exist and was "making the best out of a bad situation"; I would not want to imagine what these animals would do without the community organization. At the end of the day I felt good because I helped an organization that needed it and whose mission I agree with.
- Part of me thinks I should feel differently, not positive, because the community organization brings to light/represents the impending extinction of many wild animals and nature in general and this most often a depressing subject to me.
- However, as a result of my actual positive feelings, I feel inspired to continue being an advocate for species conservation, habitat preservation, and environmental stewardship in general. I think this is the feeling that the community organization is trying to provoke; they want and need public support to function, and in order to inspire others to protect wildlife, they need to be positive.

How did I interpret the thoughts, feelings, decisions, and/or behaviors of others [e.g., How do I think others felt? What assumptions and expectations do I think others brought to the situation (including their assumptions about me)]? What evidence do I have that my interpretations were or were not accurate?

- It appeared that the others in my group were also in support of the community organization; they were excited and interested to see the animals. They also seemed motivated to build the fence and help the community organization; they had positive attitudes, had fun, and everyone did some task the entire time. Everyone seemed motivated to help this organization and on our tour seemed excited to see the animals by asking questions.

In what ways did I experience difficulties (e.g., interacting with others, accomplishing tasks) and what personal characteristics contributed to the difficulties (e.g., skills, abilities, perspectives, attitudes, tendencies, knowledge)?

- I experienced some difficulties accomplishing the work because I was tired and cold in the morning, so I was moving slowly.
- It was easy to work with the people in my group and even the staff at the community organization; they were all motivated, helpful, and laid-back.
- The volunteer that took over for name, name, was a little hard to me to warm up to working with because she was not as open as name; I got used to his personality type so name's stricter personality was surprising at first. Even in general she was a bit abrasive as a person and I always find it hard to work with people like this. She just didn't seem as fun as name, and she was more controlling in how to build the fence (not as good of a teacher).

In what ways did I succeed or do well in this situation (e.g., interacting with others, accomplishing tasks, handling difficulties) and what personal characteristics helped me to be successful (e.g., skills, abilities, perspectives, attitudes, tendencies, knowledge)?

- I succeeded in this situation by having fun with my group, doing an equal amount of work as everyone, and completing a large section of the extension on the fence. I also was able to learn a lot about fence building and the community organization from this and the tour.
- I succeeded in working with name as well. I worked closely with her to understand her personality better while being open-minded and positive; I also made sure to accept her knowledge and show her that I was capable as well. Through this I realized she was a "perfectionist" and this contributed to how she treated us. Once I understood where she was coming from and that she shared our same goal-to make a beautiful, sturdy fence-I was able to work harmoniously with her, without negative thoughts or feelings.
- In general, my positive attitude and open-mindedness helped me throughout the whole day to succeed. In addition to this, asking a lot of questions about fence building was what I needed to do to help build the fence because I did not know much about it. Being used to being outdoors and working with my hands and tools helped me enjoy the service and share the workload. My knowledge about captive breeding, conservation, and wildlife management aided me in better understanding the mission of the community organization, its practices, the behavior of the animals. It also helped me to ask the necessary questions to better understand it and maybe help my group to as well.

How did this situation challenge or reinforce my values, beliefs, convictions (e.g., my sense of right and wrong, my priorities, my judgments)?

- In a way this situation challenged my beliefs about animals rights and conviction that all animals deserve to live (and especially wild animals) in their natural habitats. It made think about this issue again and analyze it in a different, specific situation. I was able to gather my thoughts in a different context and view my beliefs from a different angle, which re-shaped and added to them.

Below is another example (excerpted) of a student's use of the DEAL model to critically reflect on a service-learning experience. Included here is only the ARTICULATE LEARNING step and only in one category (Academic Learning). Consider what questions from the Critical Thinking Standards Table you might pose to help this student deepen her learning.

ARTICULATE LEARNING – ACADEMIC LEARNING

One main attribute we have discussed that a servant-leader should have is foresight, or the ability to anticipate what will happen based on patterns observed from the past In "The Servant as Leader," Robert Greenleaf says that foresight is "the 'lead' that the leader has" and that "once he loses this lead and events start to force his hand...he is not leading (18)." However, ***I have learned that*** although our group has lacked foresight in some aspects of this project and that to a certain extent events are limiting our choices as servant-leaders, we have not totally "lost our lead" ... and we still have the choice of how we will respond to the current status of the project.

I learned this when we discussed the challenges we were experiencing with the project ... We talked about how we were discouraged that our lack of foresight had caused us to waste a lot of time trying to fix technological problems at the sites when we should be working on sustainability for the project. ... We realized that we may not be able to firmly establish a new and permanent "home" program to take on the responsibility of the computer project or fix all the technological problems that still exist at the sites. We felt that we had no choice but to simply give up these objectives—that is, that our lack of foresight had taken away our "lead"—since the pressure we were experiencing from time seemed to be forcing our hand and leaving us no options. However, [our instructor] asked us if not being able to completely fulfill an objective meant that we could not progress towards it at all. This question helped us to realize that while we may not be able to fully complete everything we wanted to with this project, we still can make interim steps towards those goals. We can establish preliminary contact with possible "home" programs for the project and compile a report of these options. We can locate a source of technological support ... for future participants in the project who will be able to take care of the technological problems we cannot fix. In short, our choice of actions at this point may be limited by our lack of foresight earlier on in the project, but we still ... can direct the progress of this project before our involvement with it ends.

This learning matters because it has reinforced both to me and to my group members the importance of foresight when trying to achieve goals and also caused us to find alternate ways of working towards those goals when our lack of foresight brings us into situations of limited options. ... My group and I discovered that we do not agree that lacking foresight causes a leader to "lose [his or her] lead" as Greenleaf states. ... Even though our efforts ... have been compromised by our lack of foresight ... we can utilize other leadership skills to retain our "lead" in this project. We can ... be flexible and learn to work within the limitations that our lack of foresight has resulted in.

In light of this learning I will spend some time after our meeting with the [organization's] manager to foresee what situations may come up in the last five weeks of this project, write these ideas down, and share them with my group members ... Since there are so many challenges and changes that may yet arise in this project, it will be hard to predict them. ... As Greenleaf states, foresight often requires a leader to have a "feel for patterns (15)," and one important way for me to recognize and sense patterns in the progress of this project is by reflecting on my past experiences and current involvement with this project. Also, I can be thinking of what choices still remain for us as we seek to come as close to completing our objectives for this project as possible, and how we can act upon these choices.