

Reflection, Civic Engagement, and Learning Communities

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“In community-based education, reflection *is* learning, everything else is just doing.”¹

Over the past two decades, the reform of undergraduate education has focused on engaging students in their own learning and empowering them to become self-motivated and self-evaluative. While the initial ideas behind this reform, including the use of learning communities, active learning strategies, service- or community-based learning, and new forms of assessment, grew out of a concern about student learning, that interest is now shifting to embrace the notion of civic engagement as well. We have begun to ask the question: Enhanced student learning for what purpose? For many, the response is, for a more engaged citizenry and just society.

Other chapters in this monograph explore how the intersection between learning communities and service- or community-based learning can provide some answers to the concerns about our current model of education and the way it prepares students. According to education reformer, John Abbott, the old structure of education (sequential classes, lectures, note-taking, and multiple-choice testing) was designed to engender an ability to restate, rather than create new learning. This kind of education may have been well suited to the development of graduates to work in manufacturing and assembly line jobs, but these attitudes and behaviors are at odds with the skills and predispositions needed for a knowledge-based society. John Abbott lists “creativity, enterprise, purposefulness, a good sense of community responsibility and collaborative work” as skills, attitudes, and expertise that students currently need (Marchese 1996). He agrees that some of the basics of education continue to be needed—literacy, an understanding and use of quantitative material and an ability to communicate. Nevertheless, students need also “the ability to conceptualize and solve problems that entails *abstraction* (the manipulation of thoughts and patterns), *systems thinking* (interrelated thinking), *experimentation*, and *collaboration*.” (Marchese 1996). Statistics (Eyler and Giles 1999) showing a steady decline of involvement of students in the democratic process support Abbott’s concerns in that those same attitudes and behaviors are necessary in preparing students for participation in a democratic society. The authors in this monograph agree that reflective practices are a central feature in the success of learning communities that infuse service-learning. Reflective work is essential to building the connections among the community of learners, the material from the classroom, and the larger community concerns. Nevertheless, even beyond those considerations, reflection becomes an even more critical component if we hope students will make the larger connection to engagement in democracy. Reflection at the meta-level offers the opportunity for faculty to link the skills, understandings, and experiences of the learning community course to understandings about the power and responsibilities of membership in a democratic society.

Portland State University (PSU) is a comprehensive, urban public institution. The university has more than 22,000 enrolled students and serves a population of more than 40,000 individuals in credit and noncredit classes each year, including nearly one third of the Oregon University System’s enrolled graduate students. The location of the university in its urban setting provides the impetus for engaging with the community as part of the curriculum. University Studies is the general education program required for the majority of students. It is a four-year learning communities program. Its interdisciplinary curriculum is based on four goals: inquiry and critical thinking, communication, the diversity of human experience, and social responsibility and ethical issues. Each year the learning community is shaped differently to achieve the program goals at that level. The foundational course, Freshman Inquiry, is yearlong and designed by an interdisciplinary team of faculty with peer mentors. It introduces students to all four goals of the program through thematic content. The middle portion of the program consists of twenty-seven different upper-division theme-based clusters that are introduced through term-long learning communities called Sophomore Inquiry. Students choose three different Sophomore Inquiry courses to expand their range of knowledge and then specialize in one area by taking three upper-division cluster courses in the chosen cluster. The final course is a Senior Capstone. The Capstones are courses in which interdisciplinary groups of students work with a faculty facilitator and a community partner to address

needs and issues in the metropolitan region or beyond. At this level the learning communities can be composed of one six-credit, two three-credit or three two-credit terms, each encompassing a community-based learning project that contains a large reflective component to connect the theoretical material with the community experience. Each Capstone course is required to conclude with a final product that may be a report, presentation, technological product, or performance. For more information about the institution visit www.pdx.edu or www.ous.pdx.edu for additional information about University Studies. Judy Patton is the director of PSU's University Studies, and in that capacity she guides the associated faculty development program, which emphasizes the value of reflective practices in student learning.

Fairhaven College at Western Washington University is an interdisciplinary undergraduate college of about 400 students within a larger comprehensive regional university that serves more than 12,000 students. Fairhaven, begun in 1967 as an experimental college within Western Washington University, exists today as an undergraduate learning community defined by five attributes: (1) interdisciplinary study, (2) student-designed studies and evaluation of learning, (3) examination of issues arising from a diverse society, (4) development of leadership and a sense of social responsibility, and (5) curricular, instructional, and evaluative innovation. Fairhaven has a national reputation for student involvement in learning, and was

Given the desire to improve student learning and to prepare students who will be engaged citizens, pedagogies that appear to be most effective in developing those attributes and skills in students become increasingly important. As others have demonstrated in this monograph, connecting the pedagogies of learning communities and service-learning can create powerful learning environments for both students and faculty. But in order to capitalize on the power of this interaction, thoughtful reflection is an essential part of the dynamic.

What is Reflection?

Reflection, as described by educational philosopher Max Van Manen, (1987) is a practice that constructs understanding through dialectic between theory and our personal experience. Reflection invites the learner to move back and forth between the texts being studied and the application in the community; a practice that approaches knowledge as emergent and transactional, with the learner engaged in a continual reframing, recasting, and reconstruction of past understanding. This kind of pedagogy values personal experiences in applied settings as an avenue to develop fresh appreciation for tensions between ideas and theories and as a tool to help rethink the assumptions on which our initial understandings of a problem are based. If that problem has wider social application, the next level of reflection around democratic participation is even more potent. Students can be brought into a consideration of their place as citizens, but more important, be given a chance to experience making change at a personal level. Often, students do not participate in civic life because they have a sense of powerlessness. Inherent in learning community and service-learning, with their reflective components, is the ability to help students examine the ways in which their own actions and voices do matter and to empower them to make change, in their own lives, in their education, and politically.

Educational theorists have been writing about the importance of reflection as part of the learning process for decades. David Kolb's learning cycle (Kolb 1981) included "reflective observation" as an essential part of a four-stage process. John Dewey reminded us that "Reflective thinking . . . involves a state of doubt, hesitation, perplexity, mental difficulty . . . [Reflective] persons . . . weigh, ponder [and] deliberate . . . a process of evaluating what occurs to them in order to decide upon its force and weight for their problem." (Dewey 1933, 120) Jack Mezirow (Mezirow and Associates 2000) reminds us that reflective discourse involves both critical assessment of our assumptions and an examination of collective or common experiences to either affirm or shift and transform our previously held judgments. And as we move into the world of work, Chris Argyris (1991) speculates that effective employees and managers must move beyond problem-solving to reflection about *how* they go about defining and solving problems.

According to service-learning leaders Janet Eyler and Dwight Giles, "It is not enough to think abstractly; adults also need to be able to draw well-reasoned inferences from complex material, and this depends to some extent on their understanding of the nature of knowledge and authority." (1999, 109) Reflective

practice leads toward this complexity of understanding, and is essential for synthesis and integration. Reflection is more than telling a personal story and is distinctly different than the acquisition of the objective, factual content of a course or the observations made in a field setting. Reflection builds bridges between personal experience and theory and helps learners become more skilled at assessing their own work.

Most faculty agree that effective adults are those who are able to assess accurately their own efforts and use the assessment to improve future attempts and share Pat Hutchings' view of the goal of a college education.

The object here is graduates who know their own strengths and weaknesses, can set and pursue goals, who monitor their own progress and learn from experience. There's considerable evidence now that students who are self-conscious about their processes as learners are better learners, that they learn more easily and deeply, and that their learning lasts. The fashionable label for the skills in question here is 'metacognitive,' but whatever you call them they represent a kind of learning that speaks to a belief that learning is personally liberating, self-empowering, and for *all* students. (1990, 7)

Reflection, Learning Communities and Service-Learning

We believe that a skilled use of reflective practices is an important aspect of any good learning community, and that when these practices are tied to civic competencies in service-learning experiences, powerful opportunities are created to actively practice those skills. Reflective activities help students build the connections between their community work and the theories and ideas they study in their academic programs. Learning communities create a context to put this reflection into a *social* context. When reflective activities involve sharing perspectives with other students and negotiating the differences among their experiences, the reflection moves from an individual activity to collective meaning-making. Although learning communities programs often include reflective practices, it is the combination of all three interventions—learning communities, reflection, and service-learning—that PSU and Fairhaven, as well as many of the other programs described in this monograph, rely on to take students to the next level of thinking and of action.

Reflection also is necessary to transform field experiences from simple volunteer activities into deeper learning. Community-based or service-learning often appeals to our students; as aspiring activists, they want to “help” or “do.” There are some dangers inherent in this kind of service activity if it does not include reflective engagement. If their experiences and perspectives remained unexamined, students can simply reinforce and reify all their stereotypes. “I was there and I know.” As Elizabeth Minnich laments, “An epistemological chasm remains, making the relation between what is done in class, or intellectually, and what is done in the world, or experientially, difficult to comprehend and, so also, to justify.” (1999, 8)

featured as an exemplary learning environment in the 1994 edition of Art Chickering and Linda Reisser's *Education and Identity*. Fairhaven College maintains an emphasis on student self-assessment and narrative evaluations from faculty, the student-designed major, small classes with close contact between faculty and students, and possibilities for students to take responsibility for the direction of their learning. For more information visit Fairhaven College's website at www.ac.www.edu/~fhc. Marie Eaton is a faculty member at Fairhaven College, Western Washington University, and spent her recent sabbatical year studying the uses of reflective and contemplative practice in academic settings.

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When students come upon a new experience or idea that conflicts with their own ideas or ways of doing things, they often do not examine these tensions. Instead, they just assume, “I’m right and they’re wrong,” or “I must have been wrong.” Part of the role of reflection is to help students explore the tensions between their own experiences and the field experience, to examine how they might have come to different ideas or different practices, and to slow them down enough to think about how theory relates to their actions. Reflection also helps students view their own experiences as important enough not to be taken for granted, to recognize that examined experience is as important an instance of learning as text, and that not all learning happens in an abstract environment distant from their lives in the world.

Reflective writing can also be a diagnostic tool for the faculty member. Often the intended outcomes of a field experience may be missed by a student, or other kinds of unintended learning may happen that surface in a reflective exercise. As one faculty member remarked:

Reflective writing is also a place where I can identify gaps in their learning. Without that kind of reflection, I can only assume where the gaps are. Without it, it’s hard to meet their needs beyond what the syllabus requires. Reflection allows me to tailor the teaching to meet their real needs.²

We have learned that reflection rarely happens without some kind of structure to support it; the “reflective stance” must be learned and planned for in our programs. Our own institutions, Portland State University (PSU) and Western Washington University’s Fairhaven College, have built reflective writing, and conversations about that writing, into the curriculum at a number of important points in the students’ programs.

At PSU all students are required to take a Senior Capstone as part of their Core requirements. These are intentionally shaped learning communities that build on prior experience in the University Studies curriculum. Although this course contains a significant community-based learning experience, students begin the development of reflective practice and service-learning in the first year required, general education course, Freshman Inquiry. Students use free-writes, dialogue journals, project logs, and other informal writing to learn strategies to discover the usefulness and strength of reflective activity and to gain expertise in that skill. Those classroom practices form the pathway to more formal reflective essay assignments that are part of portfolios that all students create during that first year. By the time they are working in field settings, reflective writing is part of their toolbox for understanding their experiences and readings. The early-level community-based learning projects take place over a shorter time span and are less complex in nature than the capstone projects. Students begin at an appropriate level of challenge and build increasingly sophisticated skills and understand-

ing by encountering other community-based learning courses as they move through the curriculum. The entry-level courses and their community-based learning projects begin to identify experiences, skills, and abilities necessary for participation as a responsible citizen. But, the opportunity of participating in a learning community allows students to move beyond passive and rote learning to engaged learning. Service-learning alone, without the supporting structure of the learning community may not be as effective or powerful. The trust and care built in the learning community itself accounts for the ability of students to reflect, to share their real concerns and self-evaluate their place in the classroom society and in the larger community.

Fairhaven College also helps students develop a reflective voice throughout their undergraduate program. Narrative student self-assessment is a primary mode of evaluation; to receive credit for any Fairhaven class, students must write narrative self-assessments of their progress and accomplishments in the class. The faculty member responsible for the class responds to these evaluations in writing. Shorter in-class reflective writing exercises help students develop their abilities to reflect on their experiences in class and in the field and to write these final narrative self-assessment documents.

The “reflective stance” can be nurtured in a variety of ways. Some of the following examples may illustrate how practitioners in learning communities that include a significant community-based component are using reflective practice.

Strategies to Promote Reflection **In-class Writing Exercises**

Freewrites. Many service-learning courses feature an on-campus seminar as a means of monitoring student performance and learning. A short (three to five minutes) in-class writing exercise on a focused question, posed by the faculty member or by a student leader can be an effective strategy to help students reflect on their field experiences. These writing pieces can be used to begin a discussion, either in small groups or with the whole class. Shifting back and forth between talking and writing may occur numerous times during the discussion to help students find the questions that matter as they explore the connections between theory and their community experiences. Stopping the discussion to do a reflective writing exercise helps them slow down enough to be reflective and encourages them to talk about the flow of meaning in the discussion instead of simply debating each other. Directed freewrites may allow students to uncover those aspects of their thinking and experience that bring out their progress as engaged learners. Open-ended freewrites are useful in many classrooms; directed freewrites in service-learning communities help make explicit that students are learning towards a specific use of their skills.

Colleen Dyrud, a field supervisor in Portland State’s Teacher Education program uses metaphors and similes as a vehicle to surface deeper reflection. “I get good reflection when I ask the students to use a metaphor or simile to start a reflective writing. For example, I give them a sentence stem, ‘This stage of my practicum is like . . . because . . . I ask them do a brief two-minute write with

Reflection is at the center of the learning in final projects that bring interdisciplinary groups of students together to work on projects in the community. Capstone courses must include some kind of final product—presentations, reports, or even websites. In most capstone courses, the concluding class meeting includes a group, summary reflection on the learning and experience of the course.

their first idea, and then share their writing in small groups. Metaphor and simile seem to pull out more reflective language and insight.” She then asks the class to explore patterns and common themes of these similes and metaphors, and follows this exercise with a journal entry. A relationship between an intended outcome in the class and its implication for participation in policy-making, decision-making, or voting choices takes the reflection to that next level in specificity.

Drawings or mind-maps. Not all successful exercises involve narrative writing or even language as an opening into reflection. Varying the form of reflection can often surface some different ideas about the community experience and connections to the course content and to democratic process. Some faculty use quick in-class drawings or mind-maps to explore reflections about community experiences. In a learning community at Fairhaven College connected with community service in schools, a series of quick drawings, done without words and based on students’ experiences in the field, were used effectively to frame a discussion of positive and challenging learning environments and the differences between them.

In-depth Reflective Assignments

Although these short exercises can help begin the reflective process, the opportunity to build the reflective stance through a longer or more in-depth assignment can enrich the quality of reflection. Like the in-class exercises, these assignments can take many forms.

Artifacts. Jennifer Samison, who teaches in an Early Childhood Education, cohort-based program at Macquarie University in Sydney, Australia, encourages students to select a three-dimensional artifact that symbolizes something important in their philosophy of practice and explain the links between the artifact, their thinking, and their experiences in the field. Through the artifact they explore the following reflective question, “What have you learned from your practicum, from guided experience that has helped you further develop your philosophy, and to what extent do you think your current thinking will assist or hinder you in becoming the kind of teacher you want to become?” The students’ report talking from the artifact helps shape the reflection and makes them think more deeply than a simple writing exercise.

Journals or logs. Many faculty use students’ observational logs or journal descriptions of actual events as the base to build toward deeper reflection about the community-based experience. Writing in a journal is not necessarily a reflective activity, however. Journal writing should be carefully considered and constructed to enhance the desired reflection and shifts in learning. Initial journal entries are often organized around logistical obstacles (finding day care, supervisor not there, transportation, community partner not prepared for them, couldn’t find the place, clients didn’t come). To promote reflection, journal or log exercises should ask students to move beyond these logistical challenges. Prompting questions can guide the student to deeper reflection. “What does this experience tell us about the role you play here? What does this say about this particular community?”

For example, at Portland State University, very computer-savvy students had a service-learning component connected to a learning community capstone course about technology. Their community partners were senior citizen volunteers in schools who had asked for a computer tutorial (getting e-mail, using the Internet, surfing the web). The faculty member's goal was to help students understand the concept of a "digital divide." When some seniors did not show up for the tutorials at the field site, the students were disgruntled. Through questioning and reflective writing, the faculty member helped the students move beyond the logistical problem of non-attendance as they examined this experience as a core example of the digital divide. Through reflection, students began to understand that the issue for seniors was not just access, but the development of an understanding about why technology might be helpful. Because there was an already established learning community, students felt more free to discuss their frustrations with the situation and to consider reasons why the seniors did not show up and what the students could do in the future to solve this dilemma. In a larger class or less trusting environment, the discussion and understanding achieved by this class might not have happened.

Multiple-entry journals can also be effective in building a more reflective voice. In Toby Smith's three quarter learning community on activism at Fairhaven College, students respond to their community observations using multiple lenses. Using multiple column entries, they first describe, in a simple narrative, what happened in the field setting—their actions and the actions of others. In column two they respond to the "actors," using the questions: "What do you suppose they were feeling? What are your feelings? What do you think was going on?" In column three, students reread both column one and two and respond again after a day or two to reflect. "What happened? How did you feel? What now? What can you add after a little time and space? Dig a little deeper." Toby found that if students do all three steps, they tend to be more reflective as the third step addresses their assumptions and values. "How did I come to this place? Why was this incident challenging to me? What assumptions did I bring into the room? Will I make a change?"

She also adds additional writing tasks in these "course workbooks." As a final task, students are asked to reflect on the intersection between their observations in community settings and the readings and theories they have been discussing in class. This extra step transforms and translates the service work, inviting students to bring their skills of critical analysis to their field experience.

Student peers can also provide critical feedback for each other about journal entries. Some faculty ask students to swap journals either during or between classes and write probing questions or reflective responses to encourage deeper connections between the experiences and the course content.

Summary Exercises for Deeper Reflection

Too often undergraduate learning experiences are like being in the supermarket, getting all the right packages from their list to the checkout stand, but not really thinking about if it is a meal. Students do all the assignments and make all the required community visits, but do not always step back to view the whole

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experience nor think about broader implications. Summary reflective exercises ask students to go back to look at their work over time, make meaning, and use their new understandings to consider the future. “What does it add up to? How have your perspectives changed? What will you take forward from this experience?” Self-assessment and reflection can affirm that there has been change, even if a grade may not reflect this aspect of their work. Summary reflective narratives invite students to go back to their first assignments or early writings with new lenses to build another layer of reflection. They examine how these experiences might be understood differently now that they know more about the content, the issues, and the context. Colleen Dyrud from PSU said: “There are times when I have been frustrated with the journal entries. It seems that they are done in haste, just touching the surface, yet I know that the student is capable of more. When I ask them to go back and do a summary narrative, they often turn out to be very good. Perhaps they are more familiar with the summary than commenting on the ongoing process?”

Summative exercises can also help faculty use journals or logs more effectively. Two challenges for teachers using any kind of observational logs or journals are the time required to read them and give careful critical feedback and the difficulty of “grading” such personal work. Catherine Patterson, in the Early Childhood Education Program at Macquarie University in Sydney, Australia, collects field journals from the students in her cohort group periodically, but she also asks them to write and submit an analysis of their journals. In this summary, they highlight themes that recur in their observations and connections to the course, identifying both key issues and the things they *did not* write about. She skims the whole journal, but carefully reads and marks only the analysis. Jodi Levine at Temple University uses a similar strategy. In the teacher education master’s program, she asks students to select passages from their journals that reflect their growth as teachers and write short essays that comment on this growth. In using this strategy, faculty should focus students’ attention on the ways that the summaries do not substitute for the important daily/weekly observations, but to deepen understanding and make connections.

In longer programs, these summary reflective tasks can be transformative. At Fairhaven College, all students take a capstone seminar at the end of their programs. As part of this seminar, the students write reflective “Summary and Evaluation” (S&E) papers. In these papers students describe and critically evaluate their experiences in their concentrations, paying attention both to ways in which the institution helped or hindered their progress and to their own developing knowledge of their subject matter and themselves as learners. For example, in Fairhaven’s Law and Diversity Program, the S&E exercise guides students to take a self-evaluative stance as they reflect back on their experience in the six-quarter-long learning community and in their field settings doing community-based legal work. The students have an opportunity to examine how the concepts developed through the academic work in the program intersect with their own lives and with the communities they represent. Issues of how diverse populations are impacted by both government and legal systems are foregrounded through writing and reading assignments and seminar discussions and then re-examined in light of students’

experiences in their field settings. As one graduate reflected in an alumnae interview:

The Integrative Seminar and S&E were very positive. I think it would be so valuable in law school to have something like that. It was an opportunity to tie up all the ends, to bring everything together, in the sense that we were studying in different classes, and to synthesize, to hear feedback on it, to talk about it. That's one thing that I feel is missing for me in law school. I'm studying a whole bunch of different topics that are only related by virtue of the fact that they're law. It would be really nice to sit in a class and talk about how these classes relate to each other and to my work. My understanding of what I was studying would be much more enhanced than is the case now, and as I recollect, that was the case in the Law and Diversity Program. (Eaton 1997)

As mentioned earlier, the general education requirements at PSU end in a community-based Senior Capstone. These learning communities are made of up no more than fifteen students. Because of the class size, prior experience of most of the students in the University Studies program and faculty development around community building, the ability of the students to reflect deeply and to trust the community enhances the learning and understanding of the program goals considerably. Reflection is at the center of the learning in final projects that bring interdisciplinary groups of students together to work on projects in the community. Capstone courses must include some kind of final product—presentations, reports, or even websites. In most capstone courses, the concluding class meeting includes a group, summary reflection on the learning and experience of the course. Informal journaling, project logs, or reflection essays that prompt students to think about their community experience and connect it with theoretical readings, are also important aspects of the course. The final group reflection allows students to engage in conversations about their initial perceptions and their understanding of the changes in their thinking that have occurred because of the experience of the course. Many times the community partner is present and takes part in that discussion as well. The faculty and community partner ask questions about the process and how to improve future projects, but more important, students talk about what was essential to their learning and what they will take away for their future work. The depth of the discussion is often determined by the talent of the faculty as facilitators. Since these are culminating experiences and six-credit classes, sharing insights and stories provides closure to what has been throughout, a group process. The discussions are celebrations of work done, projects finished, and frank talk about difficulties and solutions. Because the courses are based on group projects, the public, group reflective activity is an appropriate ending, a final opportunity to communicate important moments and lessons learned.

Other learning community courses use final portfolios as a means of summative reflective activity. Students reflect on the goals for the learning community and the service-learning and select work that illustrates their learn-

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ing. They interpret each goal, connect it to their own work, and write a reflective piece describing which elements provide evidence of the goals. Portfolios can provide the opportunity for serious reflection. Students re-examine their work and ask how their actions and perceptions have changed. How do they see themselves as both actor and agent? If these portfolios are shared, the reflections from varied students can allow patterns and common experiences to surface that enhance and deepen the individual learning experience and the group understanding.

What's Important in Reflection?

Primacy of student work. All these different strategies can help students build reflective thinking; however, most successful reflective activities ask students to view their own work or experience as “text” and to bring to this text the same critical analysis skills that they are developing in order to understand other people’s work. Students rarely are invited to use their own work as text, or lay their own work against some other template or theory or mode of practice and ask these questions. When they go back to their observational logs, to response papers, to notes on community-experience, and revisit these writings and experiences using their textual analysis skills on their own work, they begin to recognize that their ideas develop and are not only something they know or do not know. The process of learning takes place through inquiry, practice, reflection, and back around through the circle again. These exercises can lead to extremely powerful and empowering learning as the students begin to understand that their thoughts and learning have meaning and worth alongside all the experts they study.

Building from personal experiences. One of the avenues into deeper reflection is to have the students explore their own preconceived ideas, assumptions, and experiences and the relation of these to the theory or context of the course. When Meg Merrick at Portland State University first seeks to engage her Capstone students in community-building activities, she assigns reflective pieces with prompts that ask students to examine their own early memories of community and neighborhood. These memories surface contrasts between their childhood and their current experience of disconnection between themselves and the community.

They don’t always make the connections unless I get them to talk about their own place. It works much better now when I start there. I used to start by having them focus on the community they’re going to be working in. Now I focus on ‘your place’ to get them to reflect on what ‘place’ means. I ask what construct each student brings to the learning. This activity helps them see the difference between their suburban childhood and the high-density housing areas they currently live in.

Opportunity to reflect about problems. In addition to exploring the ways community-based experiences connect with the academic content of a course, reflective exercises can provide an opportunity to work through some other kinds of problems that may arise in these kinds of educational experiments. Community-based learning situations often put students in teams for projects. In addition to the

challenges the field setting itself may bring, teamwork can often present another set of problems. Some faculty use reflective exercises to explore the ideas and challenges of community. In his Capstone course at PSU, Eric Mankowski explores with students the tension between individualism and life stresses, community partner needs, and needs of the community as a whole. Many students do not welcome group work because they have not had many positive experiences of working in groups. They come from environments in which autonomous work is reinforced, and most don't like to be "responsible" for working in community. They would rather be assigned individual projects. Eric extracts questions from their own journal work to explore these ideas, asking "Can you dictate a community? Can it be intentionally built?" His students reflect on violations and disappointments in previous group work to examine how they can change these interactions in their current community project.

Vicki Reitenauer poses questions for journal responses about what makes a healthy team, asking students to reflect on ways they have been in teams before. How have they participated? What do they want to do differently? If a student replies, "I always pick up the slack for the team," she challenges them to reframe their response by posing counter-questions. "In what ways have you willingly picked up the slack? How has that created a negative impact? How might it prevent someone else from contributing? What would happen if you didn't do all the work?" These questions lead to good conversations in the class. Out of these reflective exercises, students write group agreements, creating and articulating the kind of environment in which they wish to work.

Focused strategic questioning. All the faculty who use journals or other summative writing as part of their reflective pedagogy stressed that critical feedback is essential if these writing exercises are going to help students move to deeper reflection. Skilled practitioners use focused questions to build reflective thinking, questions that foster deeper connections between the text, the experiences, and their lives. Naïve students may begin a community-based experience with the idea that a particular truth exists and their job is to know it. Strategic questioning at "that moment" can push students to think beyond their first reactions to community-based experiences and introduce them to the idea that we construct "truth." Toby Smith at Fairhaven College models consistent questions about students' experiences in community settings: "What is the problem? How do you know it is a problem? For whom is it a problem? What has been tried before? What has worked? What hasn't worked? What do you need to know in order to begin to ask questions of the community practitioners?" Eventually students begin to ask these same questions of themselves and each other.

Building these questioning skills can help students learn to handle the complex interactions in the community sites more effectively, and potentially carry these skills into their future employment settings. As one graduate of the Law and Diversity Program at Fairhaven College remarked in an alumnae interview:

One of the skills that I learned [in the Law and Diversity Program] was to be analytical instead of always emotional. I'm passionate about a lot of things, but I need to step back from the passion of the emotion,

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particularly in the kind of work that I do working with battered women and children. Working within a system that isn't always supportive of battered women and children, I need to be analytical often . . . I think that the program, through helping me build these skills, helped me build confidence. (Eaton 1997)

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practitioners ourselves, only
a stance of questioning.*

Ellen Broido at PSU provides a set of standard questions for students to use if they find themselves at a loss about what to say in their journal-writing requirement, of at least two pages each week, about their community experiences. "How do the readings connect to one another and to your field experience? Where do your experiences parallel or differ from the perspectives we've read this week? Tell me more. What are other perspectives? How did you come to think that way? What readings or experiences led you to this idea? How do you think someone else might have come to another idea from his or her background or experience?" Vicki Reitenauer, who teaches the Senior Capstone course at PSU, gives extensive feedback on students' reflective journals, asking follow-up questions in "dialogue" with students. "If there are places they can make a connection, I ask questions about that in my written feedback. For example, I might ask, "I'm wondering what that might mean for you?" and ask them to write about it again the next week."

Last Thoughts

Even though we have provided examples in this chapter, there is no formula for encouraging reflective practice in our students and of becoming reflective practitioners ourselves, only a stance of questioning. When we create the spaces in our classrooms in which our students can reflect on and build from their experiences, the learning will be deeper and richer. When we question each other's assumptions, and work back and forth to mediate all meanings against the collective experiences represented in the classroom, we open the door to the doubting, wondering, questioning space that John Dewey says is essential for reflection. Moving back and forth between text and story, between outer thought and inner life, invites students to review and reflect on their own work and experience and bring them into the classroom space. This practice asks them to give their experience and stories the same careful attention and the analytical review as they give to the texts. These processes are central features of learning communities and when combined with service-learning experiences, the power of the learning is amplified.

Students must be active participants in the process of reflection. When, as teachers, we assume the task of "reflecting" for students, we decide what their strengths and their weaknesses are. As long as our own conceptions alone shape the course, through our lectures, exams, grades, and black books, we hold the power. The object of student learning then becomes finding out and giving us what we as teachers want. There is no democracy in that educational model and education needs to foster democracy. Reflection is one key strategy for practicing and beginning to realize that vision. The reflective stance challenges us, both

students and faculty members, to entertain and articulate multiple perspectives including our own, against the backdrop of experiences and ourselves as situated beings. Reflection calls us to engaged, active, and persistent consideration and reconsideration of our experiences, beliefs and values through the lenses not only of experience, but also gender, race, ethnicity, heritage, sexual orientation, and class structure. Reflection can build bridges between personal perspective, community experience, and theory, leading the way toward more critical analyses. The transactional nature of this practice, building a live circuit between the student, the text, and the community experience can be profound. In this model, the student's role is active, bringing prior life and field experiences to the text, while the text offers new insights and ideas; both change in the transaction. The reader grows and the text is (re)written in the reader's mind. (Rosenblatt 1978, 46-47)

Reflection, then, must be a critical element of community-based learning. The intersection of learning communities and service-learning creates what Maxine Greene calls "an opening into what has not been before." (Greene 1978, 122) The reflective stance will help our students deepen their learning from the complex experiences in the field, and enable them, and us as faculty, to imagine both the possibilities and the challenges of what could be. Helping students develop these perspectives is harder to accomplish than simply transmitting knowledge, but ultimately far more empowering.

Notes

1. Toby Smith, Faculty Member at Fairhaven College, Western Washington University.
2. Yves Labissiere, University Studies faculty member, Portland State University, from interview with Marie Eaton, spring 2001.

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