Division of Learning and Teaching Support and Innovation

Activities that Support Reflection in CEL

August, 2020

Reflection is a critical component of Community-Engaged Learning (CEL). CEL is facilitated by “reflection whereby experience enhances understanding [and] understanding leads to more effective action” (Eyler & Giles, 1999). This document is based on a literature review and environmental scan of activities that support reflection in CEL. Contact the CEL Office to find out more.

Prepared by the Community-Engaged Learning Office
Reflection Map – ideas for facilitating reflection

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Before Service</th>
<th>During Service</th>
<th>After Service</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Reflect Alone</strong></td>
<td>Letter to self*</td>
<td>Reflective journal*</td>
<td>Individual paper*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Goal statement*</td>
<td></td>
<td>Film, artwork*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Reflect with Classmates</strong></td>
<td>Explore “hopes and fears”*</td>
<td>List serve discussions*</td>
<td>Team presentation*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Contrast expert views*</td>
<td>Critical incident analysis*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Assumption statements</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Reflect with Community Partners</strong></td>
<td>Create learning contract*</td>
<td>“Lessons learned”—on-site debriefing*</td>
<td>Presentation to community partner*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Needs assessment*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table adapted from Eyler, 2002—ideas from Eyler’s original work are marked with *.

**Assumption Statements** (Eyler, 2001)
Using assumption statements can help students recognize their positionality and what their own biases are before going into a CEL experience. Eyler proposes offering statements that voice specific assumptions (often invoking stereotypes) about the population or the topic of the CEL project; for example, “Students who fail in school usually have parents who don’t care much about their progress” (Eyler, 2001, p. 38). These assumption statements are evaluated by students using a living Likert scale model, where Likert anchors ranging from Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree are posted across the classroom. As assumption statements are read out, students can physically move to where they are on the Likert scale. Assumption statements could also be used in written form for an individual reflection (or online for group reflection) for a less intimidating version of this activity.

For more information:

**Role Play** (Eyler, 2001)
Using theatre exercises for reflection can help students to reflect with their peers. Eyler (2001) suggests that students pick critical moments from their CEL experience and recreate these using role play. Other students in the class can observe the scenario, “apply insights from their study, and suggest a resolution to the critical incident or draw lessons from it” (Eyler, 2001, p. 40).

For more information:
http://www.uvm.edu/~dewey/reflection_manual/activities.html#Role-Plays
Faculty-Led Discussion (Eyler, 2010)
Faculty-led discussion in the classroom remains an effective way to help students reflect on their CEL experiences (Eyler, 2010)—so long as the right structure is in place to help focus the discussion. Harris (2005) suggests a ‘scaffolding’ approach, wherein instructors provide enough guidance when needed in order for students to feel supported, but withholding some information and helping to nudge students out of engrained patterns of thinking. By striking a balance between supporting and challenging students, instructors can assist students in developing their critical thinking and emotional intelligence.

For more information:

Keyword Journals (Hatcher, Bringle, & Muthiah, 2004)
In order to help students integrate the academic/theoretical aspect of a CEL course into their reflections, adding structure to reflective journals may be helpful. Hatcher, Bringle and Muthiah (2004) suggest using key-word journals, in which a list of text- and lecture-based terms is provided and students must integrate a select number into their journal entries.

For more information:

Minute Papers (inspired by Kaighin, 2015)
Sometimes reflective writing does not need to be formal. Using minute papers at the beginning or end of a class can help students reflect on what has occurred since the last class or been discussed that day. The instructor may choose to assign a specific topic for students to reflect on that is germane to the lecture/discussion or leave it open for students to pick their own direction. A timer of one to five minutes is set, and students can write for the duration. This strategy may be useful for collecting completion marks rather than needing a formal assessment rubric and corresponding numeric grades.

For more information:

**Note: Kaighin uses minute papers for gathering feedback from students on a different approach to reflection. The idea here is inspired by her work.**
**CEL Field Notes** (Correia & Bleicher, 2008)
Encourage students to keep their own field notes whilst in the community or working on their CEL project. Correia and Belicher (2008) suggest a useful method—inspired by ethnographic filed note procedures—for helping students to go beyond descriptive notes to include reflections. While journaling, anecdotal/descriptive notes are written on the right-hand side of the page, and reflections, questions, methodological issues, and theoretical notes are written on the left-hand side. Students may also choose to include emotional responses in the left-hand column, if appropriate. Drawing attention to the differences between descriptive and reflective writing may be helpful to students who are unfamiliar with reflective writing in an academic context.

For more information:

**Small Moments** (Bleicher & Correia, 2011)
“Small moments” are short vignettes of situations that happened whilst the student was in the community or working on their CEL project. These small moments are described in detail by the student, which then becomes the focus for reflection. This framework can be helpful for identifying lessons within specific moments during their CEL experience. Small moments are initially completed individually, but are easily shared with the class for group discussion. Although Bleicher and Correia base their framework on written small moments, this activity lends itself well to other creative methods, such as: role play, comic books, multimedia projects, etc.

For more information:

**Narrative Storytelling** (Chin, 2004)
Narrative storytelling is an exercise that can help students to reflect on scenarios in CEL experiences that deal with sensitive topics. Students are asked to narrate stories based on their own CEL experiences, which act as the basis for reflection from the student whose experience it was originally, but also can be reflected on as a group with the class and instructor. Using students’ own experiences rather than topics introduced by the instructor ensures that the subject matter is relevant to the students. By identifying a moment in the community that may have been difficult, triumphant, problematic, or eye-opening, students can reflect on those pivotal moments in CEL; these narratives help to provide triggers which cause students to critically reflect on their experiences. Narratives don’t have to be only in written format; they may be presented as a video, skit, or other creative means.

For more information:
Fishbowl Reflection Framework (Bursaw, Limber, Mercer, & Carrington, 2015)
The fishbowl reflection technique is a method for structuring group discussions. The basic fishbowl technique involves one student sitting with the instructor in the middle of the classroom (the ‘inner ring’), with the rest of the students sitting in a circle surrounding them (the ‘outer ring’). The student in the middle responds to the instructor’s questions about their CEL experience while the outer ring students observe the discussion and takes notes. The discussion is then opened up for the other students to voice their observations and reflections on the questions and answers of the inner ring. There are several variations of the fishbowl, which can be read about in Bursaw, Limber, Mercer, and Carrington (2015). The fishbowl reflection technique could also be transitioned into an online format using technologies such as Blackboard, Zoom, or discussion boards.

For more information:

Online Discussion Boards (Mills, 2001)
Journaling is a common assignment in CEL courses due to the naturally reflective nature of this type of writing. However, Mills (2001) proposes using online discussion boards for journaling—rather than the traditional pen and paper style—due to its ability to be easily accessed and portable (for both students and instructors). Students are able to be given feedback on an ongoing basis, rather than waiting for a submission deadline, as instructors can access the discussion boards anytime. Students in Mills’ study also reported appreciating the ability to see and comment on other students’ posts, helping each other to reflect more deeply on their CEL experiences (without taking up valuable class time as group discussions would do). This component also helped to facilitate students getting to know one another better, resulting in a sense of community being built within the cohort. Discussion boards can be grouped by service site, project, or topic, or else left more open for the students to take the reins.

For more information:

Graffiti Wall (Rice, n.d.)
Tape posters up on the walls of the classroom with statements like “I’d like to see more of…”, “I’d like to see less of…”, and other relevant prompts. Provide students with sticky notes and invite them to post their ideas under the prompts. The instructor can then read students’ thoughts aloud and use them to begin a group discussion.

For more information:
Critical Moments (Ferreira, n.d.)
Critical moments in CEL are those particular instances in which learning occurs or greater understanding of a situation is achieved. Based on the Critical Moments Reflection Methodology (McDowell et al., 2005), this activity is intended for classes which have collectively worked on the same project, but may be adapted for individual projects as well. Invite students to record their critical moments on sticky notes and work together as a class to then place them on the blackboard in a pattern that represents the phases of the CEL experience/course in a timeline. Students can then explore the relationships between the critical moments identified by themselves and their peers, reflecting on their experiences in the process. Critical moments could also be categorized by ‘inquiry questions’; for example, “What value added have we brought to our main partners with our participation in the project?” (Ferreira, n.d., p. 11).

For more information:

Free-Association Brainstorming (from Loyola University)
This activity can be used once the CEL experience is well underway and is a way to approach group reflection in a non-threatening way. Give each student 10-20 sticky notes and ask them to record their feelings from when they first learned about or decided to enroll in the CEL course (each feeling on a separate sticky note). Second, ask the students to write down their feelings when they had their ‘first encounter’ with the community. Third, ask them to record all their feelings they are having currently in their CEL experience. At each stage, encourage the students to brainstorm as many thoughts and feelings as possible and record each on a separate sticky note. The instructor then places posters around the room, each with a different emotive face (i.e., happy, sad, confused, unsure, etc.—however many the instructor feels is necessary). The students are then invited to put their sticky notes next to the poster that corresponds to their emotions. When every sticky note has been placed, each student stands next to the poster where they placed the greatest number of their sticky notes. This can then be the basis for a group discussion.

For more information (and many other reflection ideas):
Celebration (from Loyola University)
It is sometimes forgotten that CEL experiences are worth celebrating and that this can be a good opportunity to reflect as well. Celebrating students’ accomplishments at the end of a CEL course or project is a prime time to encourage students to reflect on the work they have done in and with the community. A celebration may have informal reflection, or may include more structured reflection activities.

For more information:

Interviews for Reflection (from Brock University)
Students can interview each other at the beginning of a CEL course in order to both reflect on their own experiences leading up to the course and try and understand others’ experiences and how they are different or similar to one’s own. Brock University professor Dr. Tim Fletcher offers an example of how he uses this technique for his course, Reflective Practice in Physical Education. In his course, students interview each other about their previous experiences of physical education, what they and their peers liked and disliked, and what their teachers did to make the experience of physical education and sport meaningful.

For more information:

Body Part Debrief (adapted from Brock University)
Ask students to answer reflection prompts based on parts of the body. This can either be individually written down or discussed in small groups. For example,

- Eyes: Reflect on something you saw in yourself or someone else (a peer, a community organization employee or user).
- Stomach: Reflect on something that took guts for you to do.
- Brain: Reflect on something you learned about yourself, a peer, or the group.
- Heart: Reflect on a feeling you experienced.
- Hands: Reflect on the way(s) in which your group or community partner ‘gave you a hand’/supported you.
- Ear: Reflect on feedback you received from the community.

For more information:
The Reflective Practice Writing Bicycle (Pries, 2019)
As a tool for structuring reflective writing, the Reflective Practice Writing (RPW) Bicycle is a way to enhance the ‘learning’ or reflective journal exercise commonly found in CEL courses. The front wheel of the bicycle represents self-assessment via RPW, which includes 8 ‘spokes’: observation, reaction, internal/personal reflection, external reflection, interpretive analysis, learning integration, personal transformation, and transformed/informed action (Pries, 2019, pp. 133-134). The bike’s rear wheel represents organization/placement analysis, which includes seven spokes: observation, three phases of interpretive observation and analysis, theoretical reflection, contra-doctrinal observations, and the goals-of-life harness (Pries, 2019, p. 135). The crankshaft and pedals of the RPW Bicycle include those ways in which students receive feedback on their reflections from the instructor and their peers. Both resources below offer more detail on what each component entails.

For more information:
https://doi.org/10.1558/rsth.38261
[Corresponding reference: https://www.uottawa.ca/shape-your-experience/sites/www.uottawa.ca.shape-your-experience/files/the_reflective_practice_writing_bicycle_eng_fa.pdf]

Reflection Stations (Rice, n.d.)
Students don’t all flex their reflection muscles in the same way, and what promotes effective reflection in one student may not trigger reflection in another. Indeed, some students may reflect ‘better’ through creative, multimedia methods, whereas others may find writing their thoughts out to be more effective. By setting up several reflection stations around the classroom, students can move from station to station and try different activities that promote reflection in different ways. Rice has several ideas of different activities that can be set up, including: a creative assets station; a movies, books, music station; a metaphors of change station; a post card station; a learning flow chart station; and a graffiti wall station, among others. For descriptions of each of these stations and how to set them up, please see the link below (pp. 15-16).

For more information: