Service Learning in Undergraduate Nursing Education: Strategies to Facilitate Meaningful Reflection

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Service learning is recognized as a valuable pedagogy involving experiential learning, reflection, and reciprocal learning. Students develop critical thinking and social awareness by using the crucial activity of reflecting upon their experiential learning with community partners. The purpose of this paper is to demystify the process of reflection by identifying best practices to enhance reflection and offering suggestions for grading. By understanding "the what" and "the how" of reflection, educators can implement service learning experiences designed to include the essential component of reflection. Strategies for facilitating meaningful reflection are described including descriptions of what students should reflect upon and how to initiate reflection through writing, reading, doing, and telling. Grading rubrics are suggested to facilitate evaluation of student reflection. When properly implemented, service learning encourages students to be good citizens of the world. By using best practices associated with reflection, students can be challenged to think critically about the world and how their service can achieve community goals. (Index words: Service learning; Reflection; Undergraduate; Nursing education) J Prof Nurs 32:100–106, 2016. © 2016 Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

NURSE EDUCATORS ARE charged with creating strategies that engage undergraduate nursing students in critical thinking and service to achieve community goals. One approach often used by educators to meet this charge is service learning. Service learning is defined as, "a structured learning experience that combines community service with explicit learning objectives, preparation, and reflection" (Seifer, 1998, p. 274). Reflection, a critical component of service learning, is used to "enrich the learning experience, teach civic responsibility, and strengthen communities" (National Service-Learning Clearinghouse, 2011, p. 1).

Originating in the early 1900s, Dewey (1938) proposed three essential elements distinguishing service learning from other learning experiences: (a) experiential learning, (b) reflection, and (c) reciprocal learning. According to Dewey, it is critical that educational strategies include experiential learning that connects students to the realities of society. To address social concerns, he advocated active engagement rather than traditional teaching strategies, such as lectures, that tend to promote passivity on the part of students. Through service learning, students come to understand the world around them by reflecting about social justice and one's responsibility to others. Educators design service learning experiences by linking educational objectives with service designed to meet community needs. This results in reciprocal learning for both students and community members through collaborative partnerships (Champagne, 2006; The International Partnership for Service-Learning and Leadership; National Service-Learning Clearinghouse, 2011).

Evidence shows that student learning is enhanced through service learning (Seifer, 1998; Stallwood & Groh, 2011) and that students demonstrate enhanced critical thinking and problem solving abilities (Nokes, Nickitas, Keida, & Neville, 2005; Simoni & McKinney, 1998) following a service learning experience. They also can achieve a heightened sense of civic responsibility (Casey & Murphy, 2008; Groh, Stallwood, & Daniels, 2011; Hunt, 2007; Simoni & McKinney, 1998) and an increased willingness to volunteer in the future (Astin, Vogelgesang, Ikeda, & Yee, 2000; Champagne, 2006). Student attitudes and perceptions have been positively altered by increasing

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caring, leadership, and professionalism (Foli, Braswell, Kirkpatrick, & Lim, 2014; Hwang, Wang, Tu, Chen, & Chang, 2014; Jarosinski & Heinrich, 2010), reducing stigma associated with mental health and substance abuse (Brown, 2009), and heightening sensitivity to cultural diversity (Amerson, 2010; Casey & Murphy, 2008; Curtin, Martins, Schwartz-Barcott, DiMaria, & Ogando, 2013; Jarosinski & Heinrich, 2010). For example, in a community clinic, Chen, McAdams-Jones, Tay, and Packer (2012) compared cultural competence of nursing students who participated in a service learning project, which included reflection, to students who did not. They found that students in the experimental group improved their cultural competence "from cultural awareness" to "being culturally competent" throughout the service learning project (p. 8). Service learning has been shown to positively affect the interpersonal, spiritual, and moral development of students (Bassi, 2011; Hester, Daniels, & Adonis, 2005) as well as professional values (Fowler, 2013). Harris (2005) showed that reflection, through the use of journaling, empowered students and promoted self-direction.

Faculty, academic institutions, community organizations, and community members also benefit from service learning (Seifer, 1998). When service learning strategies are used, faculty reported stronger relationships among students and faculty and increased satisfaction with the quality of student learning (Champagne, 2006). The visibility and reputation of academic institutions are enhanced and collaboration opportunities are enriched (Champagne; Seifer). For example, a service learning opportunity involving an elementary school resulted in the school being given a recognition award from the state, and subsequently the faculty member became an advisory board member (Bassi, Cray, & Caldrello, 2008). Service learning projects help community organizations reach more people and offer more services (Bassi et al.; Brown, 2009; Champagne, 2006; Hwang et al., 2014; Jarosinski & Heinrich, 2010). Service learning has the potential to improve clients' perceptions of quality of care. For example, Hwang et al. found that patients perceived students to be more caring when they were involved in a service learning project. In addition, research shows that community members benefit from behavior changes, encouraged during a service learning project, that resulted in improved health outcomes (Reising, Allen, & Hall, 2006).

Despite the abundance of literature about service learning in undergraduate nursing, Brown and Schmidt (2015) note that not all descriptions are consistent with the pedagogy of service learning because details about reflection are often omitted. There are several possible explanations for the lack of attention to reflection. One possible explanation is that authors choose to focus on other aspects of the service learning experience. Journal page limitations could also discourage authors from providing adequate descriptions of reflection. Another explanation is that reflection was not required as part of the service learning experience because educators may not value or recognize the reflective component as a criterion of authentic service learning. Educators may avoid incorporating reflection because they are unfamiliar with effective reflection strategies or hold the misperception that grading reflection results is an unreasonable faculty workload. The purpose of this paper is to demystify the process of reflection by identifying best practices to enhance reflection and offering suggestions for grading. By understanding "the what" and "the how" of reflection, educators can implement service learning experiences designed to include the essential component of reflection.

Facilitating Meaningful Reflection by Students

"Reflection is the hyphen that links service to learning" (Eyler, 2002, p. 453). The experiential learning cycle (Kolb, 1984) is often cited as the theoretical basis for reflection (Ahmed, Hutter, & Plaut, 2008). Concrete activities must facilitate reflection about experiences to help students make connections to previous learning so that they can subsequently apply their ideas to new situations.

Eyler, Giles, and Schmiede (1996) propose critical factors known as the 4 Cs, noting that reflection is most

Table 1. Questions to Guide What? So What? What Now?

Category	Taxonomy	Sample questions
What?	Remembering	What did I observe during my first visit?
	Understanding	What is the community partner's mission or goal?
		Describe the people you worked with at the community site.
		What do I expect to get out of this experience?
So what?	Analyzing	What am I learning about others and myself?
	Applying	What did I do that was effective?
		Why was it effective?
		How was I different/similar than other people?
		What values, opinions, decisions have been made or changed?
What now?	Evaluating	Is it important to me to stay involved in the community?
	Creating	How will my efforts contribute to social change?
		Will I continue to do this?
		How can society better deal with this problem?
		What social and economic policy changes will resolve the problem?
		Where do we go from here?
		What is the next step in the process?

Adapted from Anderson and Krathwohl (2001) and Reed and Koliba (2003).