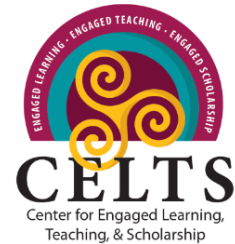




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## Reflection Skills for Service-Learning: Part II

### *Developing Self-Awareness and Critical Thinking*

Reflection in Jesuit service-learning is not just a tool for academic integration—it is a pathway toward holistic transformation. To foster the kind of growth that aligns with *cura personalis* (care for the whole person) and the promotion of justice, students need more than journaling prompts: they need intentional skill development.

This second part of our guide focuses on two deeper-level habits of reflection: **Self-Awareness** and **Critical Thinking**. These skills guide students in understanding how their inner responses shape and are shaped by their community engagement.

### **Skill 3: Self-Awareness**

*“The Examen teaches us to trust our feelings as signposts of grace and growth.”*  
— Jesuit Schools Network (2015)

#### **What It Is:**

Self-Awareness is the reflective practice of noticing, naming, and interpreting one's internal responses—including emotions, bodily sensations, intuitions, and value-driven reactions. Rooted in Ignatian pedagogy, it acknowledges that what happens within us is as meaningful as what happens around us. Feelings are not ancillary to learning; they are essential.

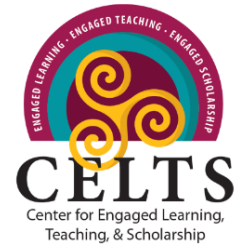
Developing self-awareness helps students become attuned to how their identities, experiences, and values intersect with their community engagement. It cultivates the ability to ask not just "What did I feel?" but "What does this reaction reveal about who I am and how I make meaning in the world?" Rather than ignoring or fixing discomfort, introspection invites students to be curious about it, allowing it to deepen their ethical and spiritual discernment.

In service-learning, students often encounter emotional terrain that is unfamiliar and intense: frustration, guilt, inspiration, anger, helplessness. Rather than pushing past these feelings or interpreting them solely as discomfort to be solved, emotional awareness asks: *What are these feelings teaching me?*

*Document authored by Susan Haarman, PhD for CELTS. CELTS is an educational teaching, learning, and research center that sits at the intersection of innovative experiential learning pedagogy, community-engaged learning, research, and the scholarship of engagement. [www.luc.edu/CELTS](http://www.luc.edu/CELTS)*



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### Why It Matters:

- Emotional responses offer insight into students' ethical values, identity development, and relational dynamics (Ash & Clayton, 2009; Van Winkle et al., 2022)
- Supports resilience and capacity to engage with complex or unjust systems (Boler, 1999)
- Aligns with Ignatian emphasis on reflection of the heart, not just the head

### Ways to Teach Self-awareness

- **Emotion-to-Insight Journaling:** Ask students to describe an emotional moment and explore what it revealed about their assumptions, values, or the system they're working within.
- **Guided Examen for Service-Learning:**

The daily Examen, a meditation from the Jesuit tradition, encourages one to pay attention to interior movements: gratitude, restlessness, joy, resistance, or consolation. Take no more than 5 minutes and encourage students to reflect on the following questions silently to themselves in class.

1. What am I grateful for in today's experience?
2. When did I feel emotionally alive or connected?
3. When did I feel disconnected or resistant?
4. What might these feelings reveal?
5. How am I being invited to respond or grow?



### Mini Activity: “One Feeling, One Thread”

**Objective:** Help students slow down and engage deeply with a single emotional moment.

1. **Prompt:** Ask students to choose one strong emotion from their most recent service experience (e.g., confusion, pride, anger, hope).
2. **Write:** Instruct them to write a short reflection exploring:
  - What exactly happened?
  - What sparked this emotion?
  - What does this emotion say about their values, expectations, or discomfort?
3. **Share:** Invite volunteers to share their emotional “thread” and how it connects to class themes (e.g., justice, privilege, care).

*“There is no critical thinking without emotional honesty.” — Boler (1999)*

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### Skill 4: Critical Thinking

*“Critical reflection is the process by which service-learning moves from charity to justice.”*

— Kawai (2020)

#### What It Is:

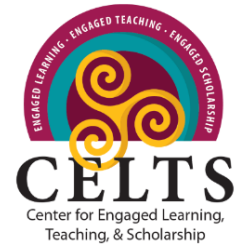
Critical thinking in reflection is the practice of moving beyond personal experience to analyze the systems, assumptions, and power dynamics that shape that experience. It turns “what happened?” into “why did this happen the way it did—and what does that say about the world we live in?”

Jesuit pedagogy emphasizes context and justice. Critical reflection is the tool that helps students connect what they saw to what is, and what could be.

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### Why It Matters:

- Transforms reflection from self-focused insight to social analysis
- Encourages students to identify their positionality and complicity in unjust systems
- Aligns with *critical* service-learning's goals of redistribution of power, civic agency, and systemic change (Saavedra, Ruiz, & Alcalá, 2022)

### Ways to Teach Critical Thinking:

- **Assumption Audit:** Have students list assumptions they brought into the community and reflect on how those were challenged.
- **Contradiction Journals:** Ask students to describe a contradiction or tension (e.g., feeling helpful but also intrusive) and analyze where it comes from.

### Mini Activity: Zoom Out or Why Webs

**Objective:** Help students connect their personal experiences to systemic dynamics.

1. **Prompt:** After a service visit, ask students to describe one thing that didn't sit right or seemed "off."
2. **Zoom Out:** In pairs, have students ask each other:
  - What larger system might be influencing this?
  - Who benefits from it staying this way?
  - How does this relate to something we've read/discussed?
3. **Debrief:** Share insights in a large group to surface patterns and complicate narratives of "helping."

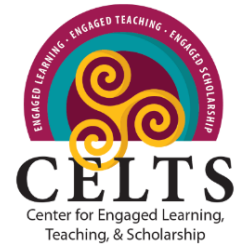
*"Reflection becomes transformative when students consider how their experience is shaped by—and shapes—systems of power."*

— Saavedra, Ruiz, & Alcalá (2022)

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