



Reflection Skills for Service-Learning: Part III

Living the Questions: Sustained Commitments and Ongoing Reflection

In Jesuit education, reflection is a lifelong habit—not a one-time exercise. This final part of the Critical Reflection Series encourages students to engage reflection as an ongoing, future-oriented process that blends discernment, civic imagination, and ethical responsibility. It asks: How do I carry what I’ve learned into the world I help create?

Skill 5: Discernment

“Discernment is not just a moment; it’s a movement toward greater wholeness.” —Ignatian Pedagogical Paradigm

Discernment is a central habit in Jesuit education that invites students to consider the questions

- “Who am I becoming through this experience?”
- “What values are emerging?”
- “What direction do they suggest for my future?”

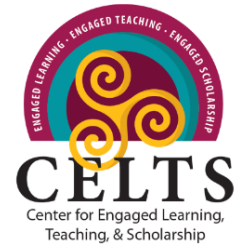
Discernment is the intentional practice of noticing feelings of joy, resistance, clarity, or confusion and interpreting them within the broader context of vocation, justice, and responsibility. It invites students to listen inwardly and act outwardly. This process is both spiritual and practical, asking not only *what I feel*, but *what that feeling calls me to do*.

Why Discernment Matters:

- Helps students link reflection to future choices around their academic, professional, civic, and personal life.
- Encourages alignment between values and action.
- Frames service-learning as part of a larger journey of identity, purpose, and contribution.



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Ways to Teach Discernment:

- Examen Practice: Lead a short Examen inviting students to identify a moment during service when they felt most alive or most disengaged. What do these moments suggest about their values and direction?
- Values Mapping: Students list five core values and map them onto their service experience. Where do they align? Where is there dissonance? What might that tension reveal?

Skill 6: Sustained Civic Imagination

“Hope is a discipline.” —Mariame Kaba

This skill moves students from analysis to aspiration. It builds on earlier reflection habits to help students envision how they want to show up in the world—not just what they want to do, but how they want to live. Civic imagination combines critical hope (Freire) with commitment to community to help students dream, strategize, and commit to long-term social transformation.

This is not only a personal question but also a profoundly public one. Reflection that emerges from Jesuit and Catholic traditions is not merely about internal clarity; it is about social transformation. That’s where **Catholic Social Teaching (CST)** becomes vital. CST calls us to shape the world according to values like **human dignity, solidarity, the common good**, and the **preferential option for the poor**. These are not just private convictions, they are civic commitments.

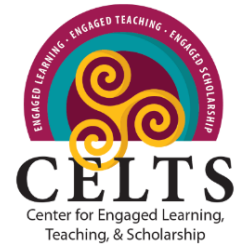
Why It Matters:

- Encourages students to stay engaged with systemic issues even after the course ends.
- Connects service to broader justice-oriented commitments.
- Offers a hopeful, generative frame for future engagement.

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



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Ways to Teach Civic Imagination:

- **Future Self Letter:** Have students write a letter to themselves one year from now asking: What values do I still live by? How am I staying engaged? What am I doing when the work gets hard?
- **Community Commitments Map:** Invite students to identify 1–2 local or global communities they feel accountable to and brainstorm possible long-term engagements.
- **Prophetic Imagination Circle:** Use scriptural or CST passages (e.g., from Fratelli Tutti or Laudato Si’) to spark discussion on what a more just world could look like. Invite students to dream collectively—and practically—about how education, policy, economics, and daily habits could be transformed.

Skill 7 : Accountability and Reciprocity

“Service is not a gift we give. It’s a relationship we enter.” —Tania D. Mitchell

Sustained engagement must be rooted in accountability to the communities students encounter. This skill emphasizes the importance of reciprocity, humility, and sustained responsibility.

CST reinforces this through its commitment to **subsidiarity** (acting with and for local communities), **participation**, and the idea that all social action should uplift the dignity of those most affected. It asks us not only to act—but to act *with*, not *for*.

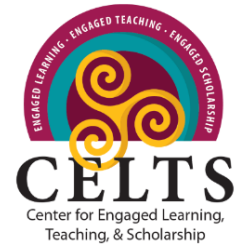
Why It Matters:

- Prevents extractive or performative models of service.
- Cultivates ethical responsibility to others.
- Reinforces the importance of long-term relational engagement.

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Ways to Teach Accountability:

- Partner Feedback: If possible, invite feedback from community partners about students' contributions, attitudes, and impact.
- Justice vs. Charity Reflection: Ask students to distinguish between acts of charity and acts of justice. Which were more present in their service? Why?

In-Class Micro-Activity: “Commitment Constellations”

Step 1: Identify: Ask students to write down five people, values, or communities that they feel accountable to after their service-learning experience. These may include individuals they met, social issues they encountered, or personal commitments that were strengthened.

Step 2: Connect: Using a blank sheet of paper or drawing software, students draw themselves at the center and connect outward in a starburst pattern to each of the five elements. For each connection, they annotate with one concrete action or future intention (e.g., "stay informed about housing policy," "volunteer bi-monthly at the shelter," "talk to my family about justice").

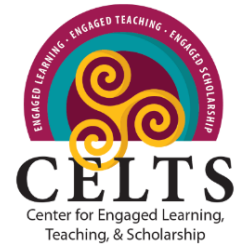
Step 3: Reflect Have students journal or share in pairs:

- Which connections feel strong and sustainable?
- Which ones feel aspirational or uncertain?
- What support or structure do you need to remain connected?

This visual and relational approach aligns with the idea that commitments are lived within a network of values and relationships, not isolated choices. It invites students to recognize the relational fabric of their engagement, emphasizing sustainability, reciprocity, and integrity over time.



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Suggested Readings:

- Freire, P. (1997). *Pedagogy of Hope*.
- Massaro, T. (2016). *Living justice: Catholic social teaching in action* (3rd ed.). Rowman & Littlefield.
- Mitchell, T. D. (2008). "Traditional vs. Critical Service-Learning." *MJCSL*, 14(2).
- Palmer, P. (2000). *Let Your Life Speak*.
- Morton, K. (1995). "The Irony of Service." *MJCSL*, 2(1).
- Chavez & Mitchell (2020). "Exploring Criticality." *New Directions for Higher Education*, 190.