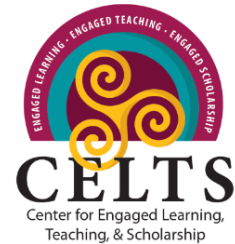




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## Reflection Skills for Service-Learning: Part I

### *Developing Observation and Curiosity in Service-Learning*

In service-learning at a Jesuit school, reflection is not just an add-on to experience—it's a rigorous and intentional process rooted in the *Ignatian Pedagogical Paradigm* (IPP). But meaningful reflection does not happen automatically. It is a learned skill built upon other skills, and students need to build certain **foundational habits** that make reflection possible.

This worksheet focuses on two essential—and often overlooked—skills: **Observation** and **Curiosity**. These are not only cognitive skills, but habits and dispositions that help form our students into thoughtful changemakers who care deeply about the world.

### **Skill 1: Observation**

*“Experience needs to be prepared for, recognized, and recalled.”*  
— Ignatian Pedagogical Paradigm (Jesuit Schools Network, 2015)

Before students can reflect critically, they must first learn to *see* with care. Observation is the practice of sustained attention—noticing the particular people, environments, gestures, moments of silence, and systemic patterns present in their community engagement. Recent research emphasizes that focusing on specific experiences, rather than abstract impressions, allows students to confront personal dissonance and engage in meaningful reflection.

Many students initially report that “nothing happened” during their service—often because they are looking only for dramatic events rather than subtler, meaningful dynamics. Teaching observation involves helping students slow down, widen their focus, and attune themselves to context.

### **Why It Matters:**

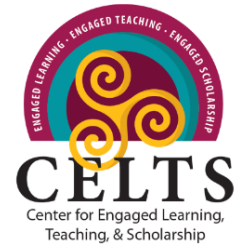
- Observation lays the groundwork for **critical thinking**, **empathy**, and **ethical discernment** (Kawai, 2020).
- It fosters **contextual intelligence**—a hallmark of Ignatian pedagogy, which insists that learning is always embedded in place, history, and relationships (Kolvenbach, 2000).
- **Empathy development** can be fostered by observation when students begin to place issues, communities, and individuals in a broader context.

### **Ways to Teach Observation:**

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- **Sensory Mapping:** Ask students to record 3–5 sensory details from each visit—what they saw, heard, smelled, touched, or even felt emotionally. Doing this for the first few visits can help students get into the habit of noticing.
- **In-Class Moment-to-Meaning Journaling:** Instruct students to write a paragraph describing a single moment or interaction during service in *purely observational* terms at the beginning of class. Then, at the end of class, ask them to return to that same paragraph and reflect on what that moment might mean. This helps prime students to both recollect and reflect on their experiences and may help them connect their experiences to course material.

*“Observation is a skill that must be taught and practiced—not assumed.”*  
(Eyler & Giles, 1999)

## **Skill 2: Curiosity**

*“Wonder is the beginning of wisdom.”* —Socrates

Curiosity is the driving engine of reflection. It allows students to approach their service experiences not with judgment or assumption, but with a posture of inquiry. In service-learning, curiosity opens students up to complexity, ambiguity, and learning from perspectives different from their own. Additionally, Ignatian spirituality, which undergirds Jesuit education, invites us to ask not only ‘What happened?’ but ‘What am I being invited to see anew?’

Jesuit pedagogy views curiosity as a **form of spiritual attentiveness**—a way of seeking God or goodness or deeper meaning in unfamiliar people and situations. This contrasts with passive or transactional modes of learning and encourages students to explore their own questions, assumptions, and reactions.

### **Why It Matters:**

- Encourages **epistemic humility**—recognizing the limits of one’s knowledge and being open to learning from others (Boler, 1999).
- Curiosity fosters the **ability to entertain multiple perspectives**, tolerate ambiguity, and shift one’s thinking in response to new information—an especially vital skill in service-learning, where students may encounter unfamiliar social contexts or deeply rooted systemic issues.
- Supports **deep learning** by inviting students to move beyond surface-level reactions or easy conclusions.

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- **Curiosity Questions:** After a service activity, ask students to generate 3 questions beginning with “Why...?”, “What if...?”, or “How might...?” These can become prompts for journals or class discussions later.
- **Disorientation Logs:** Students note any moment that felt confusing, surprising, or emotionally charged. These moments become starting points for inquiry rather than closure.

*“Curiosity signals readiness to reflect. The best reflections often begin not with answers but with honest, difficult questions.”*  
(Ash & Clayton, 2009)

### **In-Class Micro-Activity: "What & Why?"**

#### **1. Step 1: What**

Ask students to write down *five things they noticed* at their service site that they hadn't paid attention to before. Encourage them to avoid generalizations (e.g., “people were busy”) and look for specifics (e.g., “one person restocked the food shelf three times but never spoke to anyone”).

#### **2. Step 2: Why**

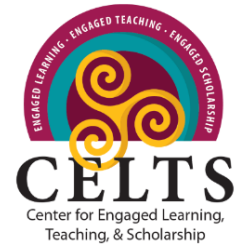
Students then write down *two why questions* inspired by what they noticed. These might be about the environment, community needs, interpersonal dynamics, or their own reactions.

#### **3. Step 3: Share**

In pairs or small groups, students discuss their observations and questions. Have them then turn these questions in anonymously. This can be a powerful way to surface hidden assumptions, illustrate a concept you may want to explicate, and promote deeper engagement.



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