**Welch’s ABCs of Reflection**

Evaluating reflection can sometimes be a subjective process, and it is not uncommon for faculty to find themselves evaluating reflective responses that are less than penetrating, or that attempt to provide the faculty member with “what they want to hear”. Effective framing of reflection prompts and assignments can minimize the occurrence of such perfunctory responses by students.

**Model**

Though there is a variety of tried and true reflection methods (see the “What? So What? Now What?” Model described within the CSL faculty reflection resources on the Willamette Web site), Welch’s (1999) ABC123 model of reflection provides one example of a structured approach to open-ended reflection questions that encourage students to “go deeper” with their reflection.

**Behavior**

Students’ past, current, and future behaviors.

**Affect**

What students are feeling.

**Cognition**

Building connections to course content.

The model emphasizes response in three main components:

**The components in detail:**

***Affect***

The first component of the ABCs of reflection is *affect*, which involves the exploration of feelings and emotions. Students must examine their comfort level with the information and experience they have encountered in the class and service setting. They must identify what they are feeling, as well as why they are feeling the way they do. It is important to note that an instructor must emphasize that no judgments are made regarding what students feel. Instead, this aspect of the reflection process is an *acknowledgement* of feelings. This could include anger, frustration, confusion, joy, or gratification.

***Behavior***

The second dimension of reflection is behavior, which is conceptualized as action. In this respect, students are asked to go beyond merely reporting the chronological events of their service-learning experience. Instead, they are also instructed to reflect on how they behaved in the past given similar circumstances. Likewise, students are asked to speculate how they might behave in the future as a result of their experience. This component is especially relevant to professional disciplines in which pre-professionals are applying skills during their service-learning experience.

***Cognition or Content***

**Examples of prompts that probe *behavior*:**

* Demonstrate your understanding of the course concept in addition to acknowledging that it relates to your service site.
* Include discussion of the significance of the relation of the course concept to your service site.
* Think about how the course concept is related, why it is related, why the relation is significant, and what it means for and the others affected by and involved in the service site.

The final component of the ABCs of reflection is the feature instructors are typically the most comfortable and familiar with. *Cognition* or *content* is conceptualized as the information, concepts, skill, or terms examined in the course .An instructor must consider instructional objectives from the course and identify specific topics or procedures to include in the reflection question. Students must provide an indication of their understanding and mastery of the concept in their reflection responses. In this way, students are making the cognitive connection between the service-learning experience and what is taught in the class. Students are required to think about and apply what they have learned.

**Examples of questions that probe *behavior*:**

* Did you act according o the way you hoped/thought you would or did your behavior surprise you?
* Why did you act the way you did and was your action effective?
* Are there things about your actions, thoughts, beliefs that will be different/remain the same because of what you are experiencing?

**Sample Prompts**

Drawing out detailed responses in all three components can require more than one question to be asked. Do not be afraid of asking multiple questions or having your prompt take a paragraph form! Below are two examples of ABC prompts that may guide faculty in the development of questions for their own course.

Welch (1999):

After receiving permission and arranging logistical coordination with your case study individual, arrange a social event (i.e., go to a movie, get an ice cream cone) that requires the use of the mass transit system. Be sure to go with another class member and his/her partner. Observe and note any characteristics of mental retardation discussed in the text and class [cognition and content]. Provide specific examples. Were you surprised? Did you see and experience what you expected? Why or why not? Likewise, observe how the community reacts to and with the person with special needs. How did you respond [behavior] to the reactions to received or how did you respond to what your case study individual did during the activity? How would you have acted prior to learning these characteristics in class and how do you think you will act in the future? What were your feelings during this experience [affect] and why did you feel this way?

Welch (2007):

Review the list and description of key cultural concepts in Chapter 2 of the text. Identify as many examples of those concepts you have encountered or observed in your service-learning experience. Give a brief description of the situation/context and include WHY you think this situation reflects the key cultural concepts presented in class/text [cognition]. Address how you feel about these experiences [affect]. Fearful? Resentful? Confused? Judgmental? How do you anticipate behaving in the future in a similar situation? Will you change? Why? How? [behavior].

**Evaluation**

Reflection prompts are designed to draw responses from students in the above three categories. Responses are then evaluated in each category to assign a grade. For a 10-point assignment, for example, students could be awarded three points for affect, three pints for behavior, and four points for content.

It is necessary to clearly explain reflection expectations to students before they approach the assignment. Faculty may also wish to provide a “test run” for students in which the first assignment is not graded, or in which students can approach the assignment again to improve their grade. These detailed descriptions found above can be used to describe the expectations of them as they complete their written reflection assignment.

**For a deeper description of the ABC model, please review Welch’s 1999 article, which can be found on the Faculty Tools and Resources Section of the CSL Web Page.**

*Sources:*

Welch, M (1999). The ABCs of reflection: A template for students and instructors to implement written reflection in service-learning. *NSEE Quarterly, 25*(2), 123–25.

Welch, M (2007). Shedding light on the shadow-side of reflection in service-learning. *Journal of College and Character, (11)*3, 1–6.