

Reflection

A STUDENT LEADER'S
GUIDE TO LEARNING FROM EXPERIENCE

ONE

REFLECTION TAPS INTO THE COLLECTIVE INSIGHT OF YOUR MEMBERS. NO TWO PEOPLE EXPERIENCE THE SAME EVENT IN THE SAME WAY. STRUCTURED REFLECTION ALLOWS MEMBERS TO SHARE THEIR DIVERSE PERSPECTIVES, ASK QUESTIONS IN ORDER TO BETTER UNDERSTAND THEIR PEERS, AND THEN CAPITALIZE ON THESE INSIGHTS TO STRENGTHEN THE GROUP AS A WHOLE

2

VERY GOOD REASONS
TO REFLECT WITH
YOUR GROUP

Whitman student groups are notoriously active, capitalizing on the college experience by organizing events, hosting speakers, presenting workshops, and educating the community about their mission. If a group gets caught up in the momentum for too long however, it risks missing valuable insights that can be taken from reflecting on the process of the shared experience. One way to make sure your group is getting the most from these experiences is to practice regular reflection. Reflection allows members of a group to examine what they saw, thought, and felt about an event with the intention of learning from the experience and improving the next one. Gathering and sharing this information will make your group stronger in two ways:

TWO

REFLECTION CREATES TRANSPARENCY. MEMBERS CAN WORK TOGETHER TO PINPOINT RECCURING MISTAKES, RECOGNIZE PATTERNS AND ANOMALIES, AND THEN ACT ON THIS SHARED KNOWLEDGE. CREATING A SPACE WHERE THESE REFLECTIONS ARE WELCOME WILL HELP YOUR GROUP CONTINUOUSLY IMPROVE ITS INTERNAL DYNAMICS, RELATIONSHIPS, AND THE QUALITY OF ITS EVENTS.

“ Everything that happens to you is your teacher. The secret is to sit at the feet of your own life and be taught by it. ”

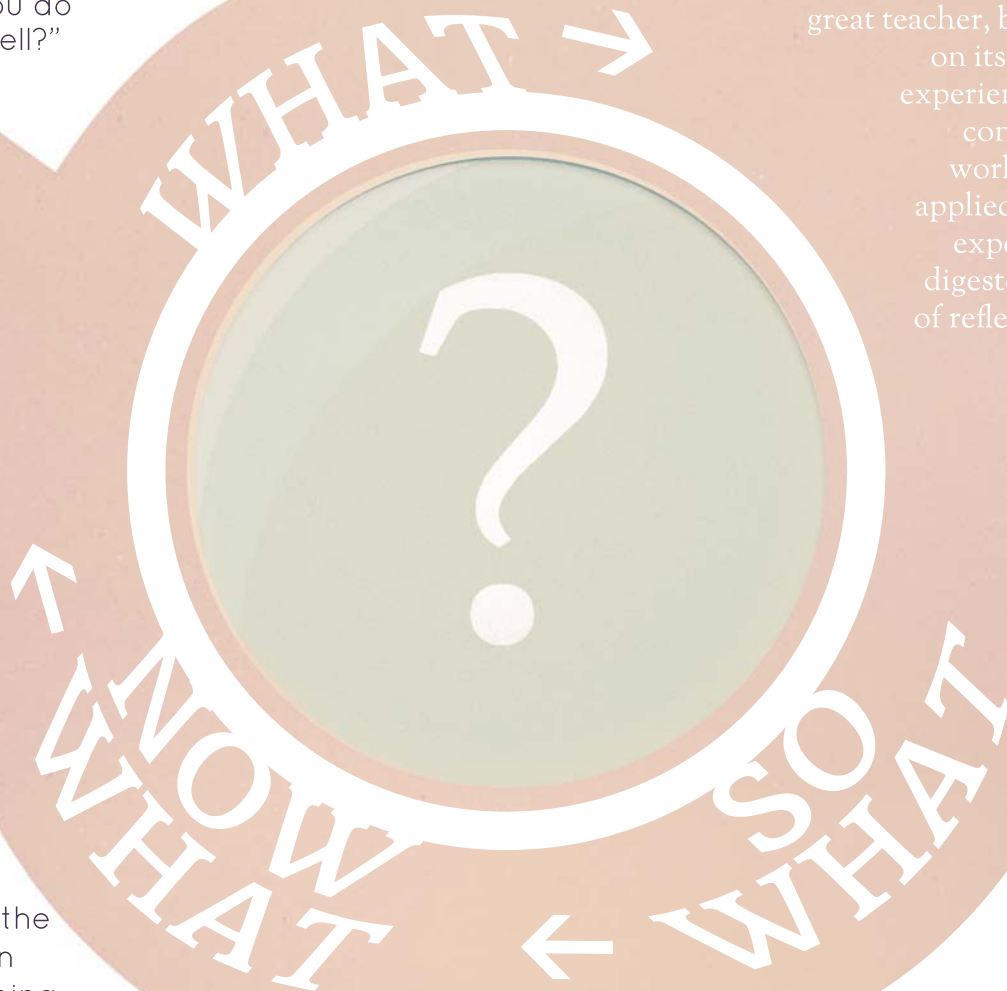
Polly Berends

ONE OF THE SIMPLEST MODELS FOR FACILITATING REFLECTION IS KOLB'S EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING CYCLE, WHICH ASKS THREE QUESTIONS: "WHAT?", "SO WHAT?", AND "NOW WHAT?" TO HELP YOU LEARN THE MOST FROM YOUR EXPERIENCE.

Reflecting on **what** happened in an experience gives group members time to process their own thoughts, feelings, and reactions. Questions in this step typically target personal introspection, such as "At what point in the event planning did you notice that communication fell apart?" or "What did you do well?"

Kolb's Experiential Learning Cycle

Experience has the potential to be a great teacher, but rarely can it stand on its own. In order for an experience to be turned into concepts, absorbed into working knowledge, and applied in new settings, the experience must be fully digested through a process of reflection. The reflection process makes the experience stand out from the rush of events - similar to a highlighted line in a book - so it can be thoughtfully considered.



"Now what" questions move the reflection session into action-planning for the future by asking how the group will apply the lessons of the experience. An example includes "Based on this experience, what three things can we commit to do this month to improve our communication?"

Asking **"so what"** relates the experience to common patterns, drawing inferences between the particular experience and what tends to happen in everyday life. For example, a question in this category would be "What excuses do we make to justify our lack of meaningful communication about big issues, in general?"

“ Learning without reflection is a waste, reflection without learning is dangerous ”

Confucius

3 SIMPLE WAYS TO INCLUDE REFLECTION *in your group process*

1

The simplest way to build reflection into your group process is to set the standard at the beginning of the year, or upon formation of the group. This is when new habits and norms are created.

Establishing a reflective culture can be done by using the experiential cycle model: Run a purposeful reflective exercise with your group (without prefacing it with too much explanation), and when the activity is complete, reflect on the process of reflecting, too. Ask, “what did we learn by reflecting on [insert theme here], instead of having the leaders talk about it?” What did we learn about the members of our group? About our shared goals? About the way we work together?”

In this way, you can show your group members the purpose and benefits of reflection. From here, talk about the “so what?” question, asking how reflection will benefit your group over the year and exploring how reflection can be prioritized. Answering the “now what?” question will help your group project their learning into the future by discussing where the continued use of reflection fits in to your group process as a learning tool.

Following through on the commitment to use reflection is key to establishing the reflective culture. Since your members are familiar with the experience of reflection, they should be open to participating when it’s incorporated into your meetings.

2

If consistent reflection isn’t an option for your group, you can devote one or two meetings to reflection instead. Since this may be unfamiliar territory for members, explain the purpose of reflection, what the process is like, and useful outcomes to expect. This round-work is necessary for getting full participation from your members.

3

Regularly open and/or close your meetings with a short reflection activity. This is a simple way to include reflection, and it also creates a consistent beginning and ending for your group’s meeting time.

3 Fun and Adaptable ways to Reflect with your group

one

STEP INSIDE THE FISHBOWL

When there are two (or more!) strong points of view in your group, using a fish bowl is a creative way for members to reflect on each one without turning the conversation into a debate or “us vs. them” situation. Each group is given an uninterrupted chance to respond to prompts inside the fishbowl, encouraging the members outside the fishbowl to listen closely and develop their understanding of other perspectives.

FISHBOWL REFLECTIONS CAN BE USED TO:

start conversations about sensitive issues. If the fishbowl is well-facilitated, the organized structure can create a safe environment for all views to be expressed.

develop understanding between different points of view and of the personal experiences of group members which shape their points of view.



How is our failure to communicate impacting other areas of our work together?



Should we implement a non-hierarchical leadership model, or keep our organizational structure as-is?



What would change if everyone were pulling their own weight?



What should our top priority be this semester: recruiting new members, developing the leadership of the members we already have, or educating the community about our cause?

HOW TO RUN A

FISHBOWL



ONE

Divide the group based on a criterion that relates to the fishbowl conversation topic. This could include the “side” of an issue a person takes, leadership position within the group, sex, or any other common variable uniting those members. If the conversation topic does not lend itself to obvious groups, number off into groups of equal size.

Prompt the group inside the fishbowl with several conversation starters related to the reflection theme. Begin with a prompt that is low in intensity or entirely unrelated to the topic to let people settle in. As comfort increases, progress to prompts requiring more honesty, reflection, and vulnerability.

TWO

Select one group to enter the fishbowl first. This group sits in a close circle at the center of the space, facing each other. The remaining members make a larger circle outside them (giving the fishbowl members a comfortable distance).

Give the group inside the fishbowl sufficient time to respond to the prompts. It may take a few moments for members to respond as they consider their answers, so expect a few moments of silence. Conversely, you may need to move on to the next prompt before each person has had a chance to speak, in the interest of time. Consider shortening your list of prompts if you hit on a hot conversation starter.

THREE

Establish that only members inside the fishbowl will respond to the prompt; everyone outside will listen. After a predetermined time, positions will switch.

When the prompts have been exhausted (or time has run out), ask the members to trade positions without speaking. If there are more than two groups taking turns in the fishbowl, be sure to state which group will go next. This group responds to the same prompts, in the same order.

FOUR

FIVE

SIX

VARIATIONS ON THE THEME

Group-generated prompts: Before beginning the fishbowl, ask the group what questions they have for members related to the theme. This can be done anonymously to encourage honesty. Preview these questions and turn common themes and questions into prompts. Groups can also generate prompts on the spot after the facilitator explains the structure and purpose of the activity. Give sufficient time for members to generate thoughtful prompts, and explain the process by which prompts will be selected for use.

Example Application *of a fishbowl*

A campus group is struggling with the way power is distributed between the male and female membership. Members are talking in small cliques about their discomfort with the current situation, but the issues have not been addressed as a group.

Several members suggest a fishbowl exercise to begin openly reflecting on this issue as a group. They choose the question, “How do the men and women experience and interpret the power dynamics of our group?” and generate the following prompts for a fishbowl divided by male and female members:

- Who has power in our group?
- How is this established and conveyed?
- What happens when this dynamic is challenged? When have you seen this happen?
- How well are we doing talking about this openly?
- What is it like for you to be discussing these issues publicly? Is there anything you're afraid of?
- How are you, personally, contributing to these power dynamics?
- If you could change one thing about the power and influence dynamics of our group, what would it be?
- If things don't change, what repercussions do you see?

Partnering reflections can be used to:



ASSESS A SPECIFIC ASPECT OF YOUR GROUP PROCESS

How are we working well as a team? What specific attitudes, habits, or lack of skill are keeping us from being more effective?



GATHER MULTIPLE VIEWS ON A SPECIFIC QUESTION

How should we use our budget surplus? Which of our goals should we prioritize for the upcoming semester? Why?



PROCESS A SIGNIFICANT EVENT WITHIN THE GROUP

How are you reacting to his decision to step down? In what ways do you see this event changing our “usual” ways of communicating?



REFLECT ON THE CONTRIBUTING FACTORS OF SUCCESS OR FAILURE OF AN EVENT

What contributed to this event being so stressful for us to organize? What one thing would you change about the way we ran this event, if we could do it again?

two



PARTNER UP

When working with a large group, the insights and observations of quieter or less assertive members can be lost in the crowd. Partnering reflections allow every member to contribute to a discussion or decision by creating small reflective groups which make sharing thoughts and ideas comfortable. After reflecting in a small group, each team summarizes their conversation and “reports out” to the larger community.

To Run A Partnering Reflection:

- 1 Divide group members into small teams; two to four members is the ideal size.
- 2 Give each team a list of reflection questions, either as a handout if the groups will be in different spaces or written in a central location.
- 3 Explain how much time the teams will have to reflect on the questions and establish how the reflections will be shared (e.g. someone reporting out to the large group, handing in a list of responses, presenting a poster, etc.).

VARIATIONS ON THE THEME

Get creative: Give teams a creative prompt related to the reflection theme: sketch a flier for a “lost” item highlighting a factor contributing to lost momentum towards the group’s goals; color a “wanted” poster showing a trait of effective teamwork the group would like to work toward; perform a short skit of the “best” example of poor group communication from the previous year, etc. Reflections with creative outputs typically require a larger time commitment. However, when well set-up, the conversations and interest they generate are worth the investment of time.

Reflective Experts: Deepen reflection by gathering insights in two steps. First, form teams comprised of the individuals with direct experience in one area of a large project (budgeting, promotion, planning, etc) to reflect on their performance or on other key topics. Second, form new teams comprised of at least one “expert” from each category, to reflect on a broader subject, such as performance as a whole or significant lessons to apply to the next event. In this way, key reflections from each team are disseminated throughout the larger group. This structure is particularly useful for large groups.

EXAMPLE APPLICATION

A new club is hosting their second pancake-breakfast fundraiser and recruitment event of the year. The first event was such a success that they had to send someone to Safeway for more pancake mix and beg the dining hall to loan them 50 forks and an additional grill. The event quickly outgrew the original space, and most of the attendees didn’t leave their contact info since the sign-up sheet had room for only 25 names. While the guests had fun, the morning was chaotic and stressful for everyone who planned it.

In preparation for hosting the spring semester breakfast, the group members meet for an hour-long planning session. To make sure they’ve learned everything possible from their experience, the president decides to devote half the session to reflection on the first breakfast using the activity and prompts described on the next page.

Small groups of three members find a space in the room, and reflect on the following questions:

- 1 What were the sources of the five biggest stress-inducers at the last pancake breakfast?
- 2 Based on those five points, what can we do this semester to plan an event we can all enjoy?




After fifteen minutes, each team presents their answers to the larger group for the remainder of the half-hour. With this shared information as a foundation, the group breaks into their event planning committees and creates a timeline for the new and improved pancake breakfast.

three Round Robins

When time is tight, round robins are a simple and effective way to gather in-the-moment reflection on a shared event. These short reflections give group leaders a view into the “temperature” of a room, or what people are thinking, feeling, or experiencing in relation to a given situation.

Round robin reflections can be used to:

To run a round robin reflection:

-  Make a quick assessment or plan of action
 - On a scale of one to ten, how did we do with not going off on tangents today?
 - In one word, how would you describe the energy in the room during our meeting?
 - In one sentence, what do we need to differently today to make that happen?
-  Gather feedback or collect input
 - What are we doing that’s making getting this proposal completed so hard?
 - In one sentence, what is the most pressing issue to be addressed in the way we handle this?
-  Clarify a concern
 - What information are we missing that we really need in order to make this decision intelligently?

- 1 Pose your question to the group. Prefacing the question with the manner in which you would like the response (one word, sentence, short answer, number from one to ten, etc.) will help respondents moderate their answers and use time efficiently.
- 2 Ask every person in the group to respond to the question, going around a circle to ensure each voice is heard.
- 3 Depending on the questions, you may give members a choice to “pass.”

Example Application

It's ten pm on a Friday, and the members of a campus club are cleaning up after a recruitment event, ready to get on with their weekends. So that the details of the event are not forgotten in the ten days until their next meeting, the leader asks everyone to join a standing circle, and quickly respond to two prompts.

First, she asks each person to rate the success of the event on a scale of one to ten. Then, she asks everyone to say one sentence about an event-related detail that needs follow-up at the next meeting. She writes the number and detail on a list, next to each person's name.

Based on the information from this in-the-moment reflection, she plans a meeting agenda to address those details and follows up with one new group member who seemed especially overwhelmed. Since the average success rating was just below average, she also includes a brainstorm session in the meeting, focused on improving the next recruitment event.

Variations on the theme

Concentric Circle
Round Robin:

Count off into two equal groups and form two circles facing each other, one inside the other. Each person should be facing a partner in the other circle. The facilitator prompts the group with a reflection question and partners take turns responding. When done, the interior circle moves one place to the left and the facilitator prompts the new teams with another reflection question. This can be done multiple times, having one of the circles rotate for each new question.

Bonus Section

With a Few More **CREATIVE** Methods of Reflection

- 1** Interviews: Each group member interviews another member, guided by an interview theme or set of questions. This is a useful tool for reflecting with someone who holds a different opinion of an experience.
- 2** Private reflection time: Give group members a set amount of time to reflect individually before sharing their thoughts with another group member or the group as a whole.
- 3** Continuum exercises: One way to begin a reflective conversation about a risky subject, or one involving a higher degree of personal vulnerability, is a continuum.

In this activity, group members are asked to silently position themselves in a line, based on how much they agree or disagree with a prompt, or based on a scale of one to ten. Establish the location and values of the line with tape on the floor, or between two visual markers. Questions that lend themselves to a continuum exercise include:

Were we proactive or reactive?
As a group, did we show good teamwork, or were we out for number one?
Personally, did you show good teamwork, or were you out for number one?
Were we energetic or lethargic?
Were you set up to succeed or fail?

A Concise List of Resources

FOR YOUR CONTINUED

Personal and Professional

DEVELOPMENT AS A GROUP

leader and facilitator

RESIDENT EXPERTS

Brien Sheedy, Director of Outdoor Programs
sheedybr@whitman.edu

Brien's outdoor leadership courses are taught using Kolb's model and reflection plays a significant part of each lesson. Contact him with questions on using reflection or to observe his class.

Stuart Chapin
Assistant Director of Outdoor Programs
norgaas@whitman.edu

Contact Stuart with questions on using reflection in a group setting, to set up a class observation, or to access his extensive collection of resources related to reflective facilitation.

Leann Adams, Assistant Director of Student Activities
adamsle@whitman.edu

Leann is happy to assist students with crafting reflection questions and exercises, and to help leaders facilitate meaningful reflection in their groups.

Susan Buchanan, Director of Student Engagement Center
buchansm@whitman.edu

Reflection on a personal level will help you remember and identify experiences you've had that may provide transferrable skills to a career or be relevant for your resume. Susan is happy to guide this reflection process through individualized counseling sessions at the Student Engagement Center.

SPACES FOR REFLECTION

The Glover Alston Center is a space dedicated to meaningful conversation and interaction and has plenty of comfortable rooms for hosting thoughtful reflecting. It's open from 10am to 10pm on weekdays, and from 11am to 8pm on weekends. Rooms can be reserved by contacting Ben Wu at wubh@whitman.edu.

If you're searching for a quiet place for self-reflection, the Spiritual Activities Room is available as a quiet, meditative space. It's open from 8am to 8:30pm, and located in room 10 of the Prentiss Hall basement.

LINKS

Facilitating Reflection:
A Manual for
Leaders and Educators

http://www.uvm.edu/~dewey/reflection_manual