

*Growing Reflective Practices:  
A Harvest of Action from the 2017-18 Community of Practice*

Facilitators: Karin Trail-Johnson & Tina Kruse, Macalester College

Reflective practices—asking big questions, listening well and making meaning from experience—are skills of a life-long learner and attributes of engaged citizens in a diverse democracy. Our 2017-18 Minnesota Campus Compact Community of Practice addressed effective approaches for reflective practice to enhance student immersive learning experiences. Participants actively worked on their own reflective capacities, learned about reflective pedagogy with and from one another, and, together, considered systemic change towards more reflective institutional cultures. This can be understood as exploring and expanding reflective practice on a personal, professional and institutional level.

The “harvest” of this intentional community of practice includes lived examples of new and/or enhanced actions on the Reflective Practice topics described here. We hope other community engagement professionals might learn from our work, so some key points and resources are shared here:

**Approach #1: Reflecting on Values**

Effective community engagement requires a clear sense of personal, professional, and institutional values. Reflective practices can help clarify those values for educators, students, and others in higher education. This community of practice tried an exercise using visual images as aids to discern and define the core values of their work.

\*Suggested resource for trying this approach: Millis, Diane (2015) *Deepening Engagement*.

**Approach #2: Reflective Questions**

Meaningful reflection hinges on deep questions that allow an individual to make new and/or more significant connections. We often are not skilled at asking big enough questions of each other that move others to a deeper response.

This community of practice experimented by trying a couple of new questioning strategies with a friend, in their professional role or with a family member and reporting to one another about the outcomes. They also practiced asking each other “good questions” and simultaneously practiced deep listening with a partner. Learning to ask effective reflective questions requires careful attention and practice to implement across contexts.

\*Suggested resource: Johnson, Chris (2006) “Deep Learning and the Big Questions” in *The Spirit of Service*.

### Approach #3: **Reflective Writing**

Various forms of writing are often used in reflective practices. These include journaling, list-making, and free writing. When done well, reflective writing can extend an individual's reflective capacity beyond oral expression.

This community of practice experimented with multiple forms of reflective writing and examined opportunities to improve their use of reflective writing in personal and professional spaces.

\*Suggested resources: Bolton, Gillie. (2014) *Reflective Practice: Writing and Professional Development*; "[500 prompts for Reflective Writing](#)," *New York Times* (2014)

### Approach #4: **Reflective Movements and Spaces**

Reflection has physical aspects that are often misunderstood. Physical movements and use of spaces can enhance or inhibit reflection. When done well, they help set the stage for meaningful reflection.

This community of practice experimented with how layout of a space and physical movement or stillness can affect reflective capacity. Key techniques included intentional breathing, stretching, perspective taking, walking outdoors and circle process.

\*Suggested resources: Baldwin, Christina (2010) *The Circle Way: A Leader in Every Chair*

\*\*\*\*\*

In conclusion, reflective practices can grow in any or all of these four defined approaches when given intentional effort. The approach can be grown alone, but evolve most effectively within a supported group of committed individuals. In this way, the community of practice model is an ideal way to facilitate growth in reflective capacity. As one participant said, "While I believe personal reflection is valuable in and of itself, its potential is hardly realized when it remains siloed in the individual." Learning with and from one another is paramount to professional development and especially significant in fostering reflective practices.

In the Campus Compact 2017-18 Community of Practice, we saw that harvesting happens in seemingly small ways that together build changes in practice. For example, several people tried many of the reflection exercises with students and colleagues, saying that the variety of types of exercises really opened up options for them to be effective. Some of the specific practices we tried together have been or are being considered for meetings as well as in retreats with student leaders to add a more reflective element. Even one-on-one conversations among colleagues have been imbued with ore reflective use of questions that "might just lead to thinking about how we could learn and evolve as a reflective organization."