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Mirror, Mirror on the Wall: Taking time to reflect.

Afterschool programs are increasingly considered partners in supporting youth academic achievement by providing enriching school-related learning opportunities during the out-of-school time hours. In fact, many afterschool programs offer directed homework support, tutoring, science and math-based exploratory activities and standardized test prep. Another pedagogical strategy which supports learning and is naturally suited to youth development and afterschool programs is planned reflection time.

In the field of service-learning, planned reflection time is widely used to promote personal development and learning. Through oral and written reflection, participants give attention to the types of personal changes taking place through the activities and linking actions and effects (Leming, 2001). Too few afterschool and youth development programs include planned reflection as a standard component of everyday activities.

Planned reflection time as a component of program activities can have multiple benefits. On a personal level youth can become more aware of the value of their own participation in an activity, i.e., *I learned how to sketch a figure for the first time*. Youth can also make the connection between goal-setting and goal-achievement, i.e., *Our two-week goal is to build a terrarium and we completed the first three steps today*. Planned reflection can help youth practice self-assessment skills and identify and advocate for their own needs, i.e., *My hook shot was working today, but I need help developing my jump shot*. By participating in group reflection activities, youth may become more aware and understanding of other participants' feelings and opinions. Many youth are surprised to learn that participants in the same activity often have very different experiences! Planned reflection is a vehicle to prompt and promote empathy. By fostering opportunities to grow and refine these broader youth development skills, planned reflection can make positive contributions to the learning process.

Additionally, planned group reflection can present an arena for assessing program dynamics, problem-solving, and processing group conflict. If conflicts occurred during the activity, having a planned time and space to discuss those concerns is often easier than adjusting schedules and provides an already comfortable and familiar framework in which to raise such issues. While many youth receive multiple accolades and affirmations for their accomplishments other youth experience little sense of accomplishment during their school day and out-of-school hours. Planned reflection time

offers valuable moments to acknowledge youth accomplishments, particularly for those who are low achievers or socially less engaged, in very visible and public ways.

Planned reflection time can take several forms including group discussion, journal writing, and question/response writing. Reflection can typically include discussion or questions that: (a) return the participants to the experience (talk about what happened); (b) describe the feelings of participants; (c) associate the experience with other experiences or; (d) integrates the experience with past or future events (Boud, Keogh, & Walker, 1985).

Staff training and practice are critical elements to facilitating effective reflection activities with youth. Program Directors can model effective use of reflection activities by instituting a planned staff reflection time each week. The opportunity to share in reflection time with youth and with other staff represents unique windows for genuine communication between youth and adults or adults and their staff peers. By stimulating such skills as critical thinking, problem-solving, analyzing, and self-assessment, planned reflection becomes a vital tool to support learning for both program youth and staff.

Boud, D., Keogh, R., & Walker, D. (1985). In D. Boud, R. Keogh, & D. Walker (Eds.), Reflection: Turning experience into learning (pp. 26-36). New York, NY: Nichols Publishing Company.

Leming, J. S. (2001). Integrating a structured ethical reflection curriculum into high school community service experiences: Impact on students' sociomoral development. Adolescence, 36(141), 33-45.