



Chapter 3

Reflective Journaling

In this chapter you will find:

- Introduction to reflective journaling
- Framework of each journaling session explained
- Guided discussion and resources for journaling sessions 1-8
- Appendices including Prescribed Learning Objectives for Grade 8 and workbook of post-visit reflection questions for both students and teachers

Introduction to Reflective Journaling

Involvement of adolescents and pre-adolescents in the Reading Bear is one of the key aspects of the program. The time they spend reading with the kindergarten children has a clear and resounding impact on the academic and social well-being of their younger buddies. The impact doesn't stop there. Giving the gift of literature and time in turn has a significant impact on the adolescent. At a basic level, community service promotes heart health and helps to prevent cardiovascular disease (Schreier, Schonert-Reichl, and Chen, 2013). In a broader sense, promoting engagement in the community in adolescence encourages a virtuous cycle of further community involvement and a sense of social responsibility as these youth grow into adulthood (Hart, Matsuba and Atkins, 2008). This is especially important in a city like Vancouver that is composed of a patchwork of different communities. The Middle-Years Development Instrument (MDI), a research initiative based in the University of British Columbia, has recently noted a lack of community connectedness among pre-adolescents in the Lower Mainland (Schonert-Reichl, 2011) which likely extends to adolescents as well. The Reading Bear therefore encourages community outreach between different parts of the city in an effort to build upon the Healthy City Strategy framework.

At a more personal level, adolescence can be a time of turbulence and vulnerability, with significant prevalence of academic-related stress, anxiety, depression, and substance use (Guhn, Schonert-Reichl, Gadermann, Hymel, and Hertzman, 2012). Concurrently, adolescence is a time of transition when engaging in community service activities– such as the Reading Bear – can promote happiness, meaningful relationships, and an improved sense of self (Schonert-Reichl, 2011; Kuperminc, Holditch, and Allen, 2001; Layous, Nelson, Oberle, Schonert-Reichl, and Lyubomirsky, 2012). Each of these outcomes helps lay the foundation for a healthy, happy, and productive life for both teens and kindergartners.

“The only ones among you who will be really happy are those who have sought and found how to serve.”

- Albert Schweitzer

Achieving Social Responsibility

The objectives of the reflective journaling component of the Reading Bear are based on the BC Performance Standards for social responsibility for grades 8 to 10 (see Appendix 3-A) and Shared Learnings. Integrating BC Aboriginal Content K-10 (see Appendix 3-C). At this educational level, students are expected to demonstrate social responsibility in an increasing variety of situations, such as described below.

- Small-group activities:
- Brainstorming and generating ideas
- Discussing various issues or questions
- Creating products such as posters, collages, and charts
- Coming to consensus on various topics

Students also participate in specific activities designed by their teachers to enhance social responsibility, both within the classroom and school and in the larger community.

Activities at this level often include:

- Analyzing case studies related to environmental or bioethical issues; developing criteria for activities as a group; evaluating their own progress; considering scenarios about realistic situations; and working independently or in groups to propose solutions or courses of actions
- Identifying ways to improve the classroom or school; making and carrying out a plan; and evaluating the results
- Analyzing controversial issues and proposing strategies or solutions



- Volunteering and participating in various service activities in the school and community
- Identifying and responding to current issues reported in various media

All of the above activities are incorporated into the proposed modules, in particular, theme-specific discussion and reflective journaling exercises led by teachers, projects within the Reading Bear School Clubs, and opportunities to work with an ambassador. As adolescents participate in activities designed to enhance social responsibility, they learn how to analyze issues, think critically, ask questions, and identify potential solutions. The Reading Bear gives students a chance to participate in volunteerism, serve their community, gain awareness of current issues, and reflect on their feelings about the experience and the effects it might have on others.

Students will be asked to write a reflective journal entry shortly after each buddy visit (Appendix 3-B pre-adolescents and Appendix 3-C adolescents). This will help students keep track of how their ideas have shifted, or remained consistent, throughout the peer-buddy reading program. Finally, at the end of the program, students will write reflections in which they:

- Explain their beliefs and feelings about service in the context of the RBS
- Identify the part of the RBS they considered most worthwhile
- Describe how others in the community felt about the project
- Explain how they felt about helping others
- Identify how their projects made a difference to the community
- Explain some of the obstacles they encountered
- Make recommendations for improving the program

What Is Reflective Journaling?

Maintaining a reflective journal is an important skill for adolescent development. Documented reflections can capture different ideas, feelings, and questions. A reflective journal is where one can begin thinking more deeply about issues related to personal identity, expectations, biases, assumptions, hopes, and dreams for this service learning project. Furthermore, journaling can help to tease out real-world observations, the complexity of relationships, unspoken ideas, frustrations, and reasons to celebrate (van Goethem, van Hoof, Orobio de Castro, van Aken and Hart, 2014).

After each peer-buddy reading session, the adolescents will be asked to create a journal entry within 48 hours. It is essential that the entries are dated and properly organized so the creator can keep track of how his or her ideas have shifted, or remained consistent, throughout the program. There is no need to worry about proper spelling, grammar, or sentence structure. The flow of ideas is what is important. In fact, students are encouraged to allow thoughts and feelings to flow freely without self-editing. In addition, students will be prompted to ask their own questions regarding the topic of the visit in order to promote critical thinking skills and inquiry.