The DEAL Model for Critical Reflection – Describe, Examine, and Articulate Learning

Describe Experience(s) Objectively

Part I: Overview of "big picture" – what have I done since the last reflection session?

Part II: Home in on 2 or 3 key experiences to focus the reflection on - What were the most significant or reflection-worthy experiences?

- ❑ Where was I?
- ❑ Who else was there?
- ❑ When did this experience take place?
- ❑ What was said?
- ❑ What did I/others do?
- ❑ Why were we there? (NOTE: Be careful here. "Why" can be an objective question, as in "we were having this conversation because the Director had scheduled a meeting of the entire group and had invited both me and Mr. Smith" but it can also open the door to interpretation, as in "we were having this conversation because the Director wanted me and Mr. Smith to advise her")

Assess Progress Since Last Reflection

- ❑ What were my goals as articulated at the end of the previous reflection session and/or in my articulated learnings from the previous reflection session? What specific conclusions did I intend to enact or test based on my previous articulated learnings?
- ❑ What specific steps did I take in order to attain these goals?
- ❑ What obstacles—internal and external—hindered me? What factors made me more effective?
- ❑ In what ways did my attempts to attain goals or to enact or test conclusions proceed as expected, based on my earlier understanding, and in what ways was I surprised?
- ❑ What do my attempts to enact or test previous conclusions tell me about the validity of those conclusions? In what specific ways is my understanding of those conclusions changing yet again?
- ❑ How can I change my behavior or mentality in order to make better progress toward my goals? What specific steps do I need to take in order to continue refining my understanding?

Examine Experience from a Personal Perspective

- ❑ How did this experience make me *feel* (positively and/or negatively)? How did I handle my emotional reactions? Do I believe I should have felt differently than I did?
- ❑ What *assumptions or expectations* did I bring to the situation (including my assumptions about other persons involved) and how did they affect my actions? To what extent did they prove true? If they did not prove true, why was there a discrepancy?
- ❑ How have *past experiences* influenced the manner in which I acted or responded to this situation? Am I comfortable with the influence past experiences has on me?
- ❑ What personal *strengths / weaknesses* of mine did the situation reveal? In what ways did they affect the situation, positively and negatively? What might I do to build on strengths/ overcome weaknesses?
- ❑ Why did I, or did I not, experience *difficulty working/interacting with other people*? What might I do differently next time to minimize such difficulties?
- ❑ What personal *skills* did I draw on in handling this situation? What personal skills would I like to have had in order to have handled it better and how might I develop them?
- ❑ How did this situation reveal my own *attitudes or biases*, toward other people, toward the organization in question, etc.? Do I need to make any changes?

The DEAL Model for Critical Reflection – Describe, Examine, and Articulate Learning

Examine Experience from a Civic Perspective

- What was I / someone else *trying to accomplish*? In taking the actions I / they did, was the focus on *symptoms* of problems or *causes* of problems? Was the focus (symptom or cause) appropriate to the situation? How might I / they focus more on underlying causes in the future?
- What *roles* did each person / group / organization involved in the situation play and why? What alternative roles could each have played?
- Did I / other individuals act *unilaterally* or *collaboratively* and why? Should I / they have worked with others in a different way?
- Did I *reinforce* or *challenge* an assumption or social system by the way I acted? How does this experience highlight the relationship between and larger systems?
- How else could I have handled the situation? Identify both *the paths of least resistance and the paths of greater resistance*. Why did I / others follow the path I / they did?
- What *agendas* did I and others bring to the situation? Are these agendas appropriate? Are they understandable? Are they shared? How are these agendas related to larger social or cultural issues?
- In what ways did *power differentials* emerge in this experience? What are the sources of power in this situation and who benefits and is harmed? In what ways might any dependencies be eliminated?
- What *privilege* did I/others bring to this situation? What are the sources of such privilege? How am I, or others, disempowered by lack of privilege?
- How did *leadership* emerge in this situation, on my part and/or on the part of others?
- What is in the interest of the *common good* in this situation? In what ways is the *individual good* (mine or that of other people) linked to and/or contrary to the common good? What tradeoffs between them are involved?
- In what way did any other *tradeoffs* (long-term / short-term; justice / efficiency; etc.) emerge in this situation? Were the trade-offs made appropriate or inappropriate and why?
- What *changes* does this experience suggest are needed: within my group, within the organization, within our society more generally? How can these changes be accomplished: with individual action or collective action / working within the system or challenging the system / etc.?
- How does this experience help me to better understand the *organization's vision, mission, and goals*? What does it reveal to me about the relationship between the organization and those it serves? What does it suggest about how this relationship might be improved?

Examine Experience from an Academic Perspective

- What specific *elements of our course materials* relate to this experience?
- How was I able to *apply* a skill, perspective, or concept related to our academic material?
- What *similarities and differences* are there between the perspective on the situation offered by our academic material, and the situation as it in fact unfolded?
- How does this experience *enhance my knowledge* of a specific reading, theory, or concept? Does it *challenge* or *reinforce* my prior understanding?
- Based on analysis of the experience in light of course material, is the *material (or my prior understanding of it) adequate*? What reasons might there be for any differences or inadequacies? What questions should I ask to put myself in a better position to judge the adequacy of the material?
- Instructor's specific course-related questions.

Articulate Learning

1) What did I learn?
2) How, specifically, did I learn it?
3) Why does this learning matter, why is it important?

In what ways will I use this learning, what goals shall I set in accordance with what I have learned in order to improve myself and / or the quality of my learning and / or the quality of my future?