



# The Five Stages of Service Learning

By Cathryn Berger Kaye, M.A.

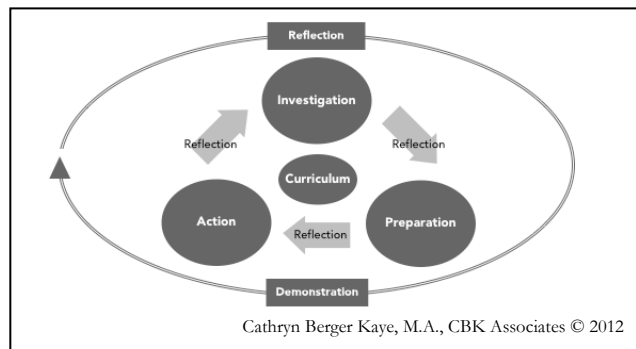
What motivates us to our work as educators? While raising test scores and achieving accountability may be critical to our everyday tasks, most of us entered education to make a difference in the lives of children, families and communities---to provide children with optimum learning experiences transferable to their lives outside of school, that guide them to adulthood with a solid sense of personal efficacy, and the ability to make choices and decisions healthy for themselves and our society.

For this to actually occur, students benefit from real world applications of their academic learning while they are still in school, with a research-based approach called *Service Learning*. This allows them a laboratory to practice, review, reassess, and reflect, all with the guidance and support of knowledgeable teachers. They see the viability and purpose of their study. This process actually adds rigor to academics as students are depended upon, builds interdisciplinary understandings, and deepens learning.

Fortunately, the concept of service learning has been developed, so we have a reliable process to follow. The **Five Stages of Service Learning** provides an exceptional and somewhat familiar template. In the development of many learning experiences, we follow these stages albeit primarily for *learning*. When we add the critical and valued element of *service*, we elevate the learning with purposeful application.

## The Five Stages of Service Learning

If you imagine that the skills and knowledge that you aim to impart to your students as the ingredients, the Five Stages of Service Learning are the recipe. This framework constitutes a process that is key to students' effectiveness and critical to their learning transferable skills and content. Even though each stage is referenced separately, keep in mind that they are linked together and often experienced simultaneously. Visualize how overlays are used in an anatomy book to reveal what is occurring in the human body system by system. Each stage of service learning is like one of these overlays, revealing one part of a dynamic interdependent whole.



**Investigation:** Includes both the *inventory* of student interest, skills, and talents, and the *social analysis* of the issue being addressed. This analysis requires gathering information about the identified need through action research that includes use of varied approaches: media, interviews of experts, survey of varied populations, and direct observation/personal experiences.

**Preparation:** Includes the *continued acquisition of knowledge* that addresses any resultant questions from investigation along with academic content, identification of groups already working towards solutions, *organization of a plan* with clarification of roles, responsibilities and time lines, and ongoing development of any *skills* needed to successfully carry the plan to fruition.

**Action:** Includes the implementation of the plan that usually takes the form of *direct service, indirect service, advocacy, or research*. Action is always planned with mutual agreement and respect with partners so this builds understanding and perspective of issues and how other people live.

**Reflection:** Reflection is the *connector between each stage of service* and also *summative*. Through reflection students consider their thoughts and feelings (cognition and affect) regarding any overarching essential question or inquiry that is a driving force of the total experience. Reflection informs how the process develops, increases self-awareness, assists in developing future plans, and employs varied multiple intelligences.

**Demonstration:** Student demonstration *captures* or *contains the totality of the experience* including what has been learned, the process of the learning, and the service or contribution accomplished. Beginning with investigation, students document all parts of the process, resulting in a complete and comprehensive ability to tell the story of what took place during each stage that includes key informative reflection. Students draw upon their skills and talents in the manner of demonstration, often integrating technology.

At what grade levels can service learning be effective? From kindergarten through grade twelve, we have tremendous evidence in public, independent and international schools of service learning being highly valued by teachers and students. Students have increased their empathy and understanding of history by interviewing veterans and providing memoirs now treasured by the families of these men and women who have served. Studies of botany have expanded to experimentation in gardening that provided produce in “food deserts” for a most welcoming community. Young children have taught yoga to Russian immigrants moving beyond language differences to shared experiences. Imagine transforming a traditional canned food collection, often organized as a competition between classes, into an exploration of poverty and hunger in the community leading to a partnership with a food bank to hold a collection in April when the need is greatest. And what if a computer class revamped the food bank’s website to include how other schools can connect a food drive to academic content? The possibilities are present, simply waiting to be shaped by willing teachers and students eager to have a meaningful voice in how they learn and participate in their community.

Can we integrate service learning in our schools today? Absolutely. Service learning is already deemed a valuable educational approach in schools across the globe. With service learning, student ideas become a reality; the excitement genuine. Contributions made are significant with students and their community as beneficiaries of the process. By discovering and applying their interests and talents along with academic content, skills and knowledge, students bring ideas to life. Service establishes a purpose for learning. Students and the exceptional educators who engage them prove to be valued contributors for our collective well-being, now and in the future.

**Cathryn Berger Kaye, M.A.**, president of CBK Associates, International Education Consultants, provides program development, and highly engaging professional development and keynote addresses on service learning, 21<sup>st</sup> century competencies, literacy, engaged teaching, school climate and culture, and integrating Common Core State Standards. Cathryn is the author of *The Complete Guide to Service Learning: Proven, Practical Ways to Engage Students in Civic Responsibility, Academic Curriculum, & Social Action* (Free Spirit Publishing, 2010), and two books with Philippe Cousteau and EarthEcho International: *Going Blue: A Teen Guide to Protecting Our Oceans and Waterways* (Free Spirit Publishing, 2010), and *Make a Splash: A Kid’s Guide to Protecting Our Oceans and Waterways* (Free Spirit Publishing, 2012). Cathryn can be reached at [cbkaye@aol.com](mailto:cbkaye@aol.com) and beginning July 1 on her new website [www.cbkassociates.com](http://www.cbkassociates.com).

Originally printed on the Education Week web site for a Global Learning blog hosted by the Asia Society, June 26, 2013

**For information and permission to post on a website or for publication, please contact [cbkaye@cbkassociates.com](mailto:cbkaye@cbkassociates.com).**