



**Cathryn Berger
Kaye, M.A., CBK
Associates**

Relationships that Matter – Supported and Strengthened by Service Learning

Relationships matter. We know this.

Service learning builds relationships in unique and significant ways. Adding this approach to teaching and learning strengthens students' understanding, builds confidence, widens perspective about the world both near and far, and provides a reliable framework that can be applied to a myriad of situations. The framework for service learning are these five stages: investigation, preparation, action, reflection (ongoing), and demonstration. This model supports best teaching practice in any classroom. They allow for authentic curricular opportunities that increases curiosity and inquiry, and strengthens knowledge and skills, as students explore their attitudes and beliefs, with one aim being to replace

assumptions and bias with accurate information. You can learn more about the process of service learning through one of many articles found on my website noted at the end of this article.

Now, what about relationships? Does service learning enhance relationships? With a resounding **yes!** this article breaks down specific ways this can happen for you and your students. (The last category of "relationships" may surprise you!)

Student-to-Student Relationships

The stage of investigation begins with your students identifying their interests, skills and talents. Why? Because that's how people get things done! And that's also how a collaborative, mutually respectful classroom is formed. Consider that when adults join a committee,

they first aim to find out who can do what; in this way, we build upon our strengths and areas for growth moving forward. Same with our students. *Service learning begins with students interviewing each other to identify their interests, skills and talents* while building the skills of active listening, asking questions, and taking notes (they scribe responses for each other). The teacher then asks for responses and compiles a master list posted in the classroom. Continually, teachers and students draw from and add to the list as they become increasingly observant of self and others. A teacher recently told me a third grader in her class wanted her to do something differently than she had planned. She describes, "I wasn't listening to his request. He said: 'You aren't being principled! You aren't letting us use our interest, skills and talents! You promised us you would and you aren't honoring that!'" (She also admired how the student was holding her accountable and using language they had discussed – "principled, defined as just as doing the right thing, even when no one is watching, and helping others to do the right thing, too.") Conducting a "personal inventory" means we then reference it to honor and engage the students!

Throughout the service learning process of investigation, preparation, action, reflection, and demonstration, students

THE FIVE STAGES OF SERVICE LEARNING: An Abbreviated Guide

- 1. Investigation:** Includes the inventory of student interest, skills, and talents, and social analysis and verification of an identified need often through action research that includes use of media, interviews of experts, survey of varied populations, and direct observation/ personal experiences.
- 2. Preparation:** Students continue to acquire content knowledge as they deepen understanding, identify partners, organize a plan of action, clarify roles, build time lines, and continue developing skills.
- 3. Action:** Students implement their plan in the form of direct service, indirect service, advocacy, or research. Action is planned with partners based on mutual understandings and perspectives.
- 4. Reflection:** Reflection is ongoing and occurs as a considered summation of thoughts and feelings regarding essential questions and varied experiences to inform content knowledge, increase self-awareness, and assist in ongoing planning.
- 5. Demonstration:** Students capture the total experience including what has been learned, the process of the learning, and the service or contribution accomplished and share to an audience; telling their story often integrates technology and further educates and informs others.

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apply and add to their interests, skills and talents (this phrase becomes a classroom mantra!)

If you are like most educators, you want to motivate your students. Years ago, when leading a workshop, a teacher asked, "How do you keep students motivated?" With a sudden revelation, I responded, "You can't motivate anyone: motivation comes from within. What you can do is engage someone and then

or social students project. "You have your groups, get to work." WAIT! Think of how often you set this up and one student or more is an outlier, and doesn't really join in. Instead, begin with "Okay students, for the first few minutes, interview each other to be sure you know your group's interests, skills and talents. Then it's each of your responsibility to harness these as you work effectively together." Once this becomes routine, students expect this dynamic and become more adapt

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once engaged they will likely choose to be motivated." By establishing a culture in a classroom where every student is valued by knowing their interests, skills and talents and referencing these as we move through our learning together, I – as a teacher – can more readily engage my students and they internally become motivated. This works!

How can you use this idea tomorrow? Initiate a Personal Inventory as described above with paired student interviews. Then, this idea can also be applied to group work. Typically, when students are in a group, you expect them to get right to task. "Okay students," we say as they sit in groups of four to work on a science

at sharing and engaging every group member as a person of value.

The Challenge! Some students when being interviewed as part of the Personal Inventory process and asked, "What are you interested in?" or "What are you good at?" will respond "I don't know," or "Nothing." This is common. Why? Is it possible we don't have a school culture (or societal culture) where sharing what you are good at is a norm? Indeed, in some cultures it may be seen as been self-aggrandizing or bragging. However, to effectively work together, we all benefit from knowing about each other in real and purposeful ways. I once asked a 6th grader following the paired interviews

if this was bragging, and she said, “No! Bragging is when you just want to hear yourself talk.” Self-knowledge is just that – self-knowledge, and knowing how to express this exudes a responsible form of self-advocacy.

Also, I believe that confidence and competence go hand in hand.

All during the service learning experience, students learn more

about themselves and each other. This continues to enhance classroom connections and mutual respect.

As a note, the process of Personal Inventory that I developed goes beyond interests, skills and talents to also identifying areas for growth (an important idea to recognize), and “a time you have helped someone and a time you have been helped by someone” to begin establishing the concept of reciprocity which is key in service learning. To learn more about the Personal Inventory Process and to download resources, see the links at the end of the article.

Student-to-Parent Relationships

Why stop with students doing a personal inventory with their peers?



Once they have the practice with each other, let them take this home and “inventory” their parents or other adults in their household who have parental roles. This same set of

questions about interests, skills and talents, and areas for growth along with helping others and being helped by others can lead to a rich, worthwhile conversation.

Many children/teens are not aware of what their parents do or think about. They may not know about how they help others or are helped.

Consider how valuable this information would be to any classroom – simply by knowing what skills and talents and interests you can draw upon in your parent community! Along the way your students are developing interview abilities and this always helps learning and is key to college and career readiness.

Parent-to-School Relationships

Service learning builds positive relationships with parents, in part by having a good story to tell. One middle school principal in Texas was astonished by a series of phone calls he received

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from parents. He explained that calls almost always referenced a problem or an upset with a teen. However, when the students were involved in a school-wide study and service learning experience related to World War II veterans, his phone was ringing off the hook with parents eager to know more. He described parents explaining how their kids, previously reluctant to talk about school, were chatting nonstop about what they learned and how they were interviewing people and setting up displays. They wanted their parents to visit school!

course, the PTSA could conduct a data collection of parents' abilities (interests, skills and talents), but that would be a huge miss. Having students interview their parents is personal, meaningful and builds relationships.

In my daughters' elementary school, we set up parent liaisons for service learning, similar to a room parent. However, this designation meant they had attended a 1-2 hour workshop on service learning so they were familiar with the process. They were eager to participate in ways that supported classroom learning including assisting with contacts outside of school.

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Parents can also take on supportive roles, assisting teachers with service learning as needed. This can be by making calls or picking up or making needed supplies (always limited to what the students can't do or teachers don't have time to do). This is in addition to sharing their expertise and contacts, as discovered when their students interview the parents (see above) and bring in the wealth of knowledge to the school. Of

Emphasis was made on outreach to parents who may not have the time during the weekday but may have information or community resources, so an expanded population of parents were involved and valued.

Student-Teacher Relationships

The process of service learning avails upon students and teachers to see each other in new roles, with greater mutual respect and appreciation. However,

service learning requires teachers to let go of control. At least some control. This can appear as a challenge, when it is truly an opportunity. The more we “let go” of the controls, the more room we make for student learning. We didn’t want to be controlled when we were in school and neither do students nowadays. The emphasis on classroom control and management is the wrong emphasis. If instead we replace “control and manage” with “engage and inspire” we open to new strategies and connections.

How to begin? Simple! ***Under-direct.*** Trust the students more, and micro-manage less. I have asked students what do teachers take away when they “over-direct” you, and they are quite clear on this: resourcefulness, creativity, curiosity, and thinking.

What does this look like? Consider that most of the time after giving directions students raise their hands and ask, “What do you want me to do?” What they are really asking is, “What do you want me to do to please you?” Instead of this interchange, provide clear and brief directions. For example, at a high school in Hawaii, I had given out cards with different quotes on them to a group of 60 grade 9 students I had for an hour. They moved around the room and read them aloud to each other, and then settled at tables in groups of four. Each

table had an easel paper and markers and all I said was “Draw a quote.” A hand shot up with the predictable, “What do you want me to do?” I repeated “Draw a quote.” Students persisted and asked the question seven different ways and each time I replied, “Draw a quote.” If I thought students were really perplexed I would have elaborated. They weren’t. They were challenged and I knew they could meet this challenge. They had to look at each other (instead of me), and in five minutes the quote art was amazing. They were excited to put this up around the school and challenge other students to add quote art until it covered the majority of hallways. Of course, they could extend the idea of quote art to meet a community need as students did in Alaska when they made ceiling tile quote art for a local clinic. And in Cincinnati, students thought to transfer my quote cards onto fabric and sew them in coats they donated to a shelter.

As we under-direct, we provide space for student ingenuity. This is what true learning requires – ingenuity and the ability to connect ideas. For more on Engaging Teaching, see the links at the end of the article.

Student-to-Community Relationships

Keep in mind that service learning is built on reciprocity, a mutual exchange with benefits for all involved. This becomes

a centerpiece for service learning and is achieved through ongoing dialogue with all partners. With an understanding of the term reciprocity and awareness that service learning is done with others, this removes the onus that service learning further delineates the “haves” and the “have-nots.” Instead, this establishes the recognition that all participants have value and all contribute to the learning and the service. For example, when high school students visited a shelter—a residential facility for unemployed

Key in service learning is finding an authentic need to respond to. Rather than “Googling” a need, students engage in action research so students can learn from and with the community. With this “MISO Method of Action Research,” students use Media (newspapers, books, maps, television/videos, and yes, internet), Interviews and Surveys to information and make community connections, and Observation to draw upon what is present – both the assets and the concerns. In addition to

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men—the residents were all out for the day seeking employment. The students noticed an extensive library and asked why there were so many books. The program director explained that the men tire of watching television and instead spend many nights reading. A student asked if they could start a book club with residents who would be willing to participate. The young male students scheduled monthly discussions about mutually agreed upon books with eager self-selected participants living at the shelter. With this example, it is difficult to say who benefited the most. Keep reciprocity in mind.

augmenting learning, students build community knowledge and relationships in the process.

Developmentally, students benefit by coming to know the people in the community—including within their school community. Years ago, when leading a service learning initiative in Los Angeles schools, I realized that for many high school students the only adults they know well are parents and teachers, and then suddenly they graduate and are supposed to be an adult. While brain research has helped us to understand that adolescence extends to about age 25, the idea remains the same. All

through school, youth benefit from coming to know community and the people who make up their community.

This begins with the people who work in varied roles at school. When elementary students in Colorado were aiming to reduce energy usage in school, they worked closely with the administration and custodial staff. As high school students were planning a Meatless Monday Campaign in Brussels, they collaborated with food services and learned names of the people in the cafeteria who had been previously nameless. Plus, they came to know the various roles of the administration and support staff and became more cognizant of the roles in school. This improves the culture and connectivity as mutual respect was the norm.



As students extend service learning outside the building, they come to know the roles of people who work in clinics (to collaborate on ceiling tile quote art) or

the recent immigrants who are regulars in the community gardens and know a great deal of how to make plants flourish. College and career readiness cannot just happen in the school building. It occurs by being in community centers and city hall, being proactive for change and involved in diverse service actions:

- Direct service
- Indirect service
- Advocacy service
- Research service

Service learning brings community – and learning—to life by growing contributors to an active citizenry who understand roles and responsibilities and choose to participate in sustaining our communities.

Students and Books: a wonderful relationship!

Since 1986, I have been identifying books that connect learning and service. What has happened throughout this ongoing journey into reading fabulous books and even interviewing forty authors about their writing process, is this understanding: students will discover the joy of reading when a book of meaning and purpose is placed in their hands. Service learning improves reading!

Here are five books that are exemplars

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of how books can inspire youth to both read, understand compelling current issues, and move towards taking action.

The Bitter Side of Sweet by Tara Sullivan (Putnam, 2016) Amadou had no idea he and his younger brother, Seydou, were being tricked into forced labor within the cacao plantations on the Ivory Coast. And escape was always futile. Until a girl arrived. And together they take risks to regain freedom. However, they remain in jeopardy due to the greed and corruption that keeps children in their untenable and dangerous situations today. Novel, includes organizations working to rescue youth in this situation and more about fair trade.

Eyes Wide Open: Going Beyond the Environmental Headlines by Paul Fleischman (Candlewick, 2014) An essential read, this book calls students to action by informing students how to evaluate environmental issues through science, politics, history, economics, and media. His website, www.eyeswideopenupdates.com keeps adding ideas and resources. Nonfiction

Maddi's Fridge by Lois Brandt (Flashlight Press, 2014). Sofia and Maddi are fast friends and all seems well until they play at Maddi's house, and the refrigerator is nearly empty. Sworn to secrecy, Sofia tries to solve her friend's challenging

problem all by herself and simply can't. With the resolve of friends, we learn that helping each other always makes sense. Picture book

Rad Women Worldwide: Artists and Athletes, Pirates and Punks, and Other Revolutionaries Who Shaped History by Kate Schatz (Ten Speed Press, 2016) These forty profiles from 31 countries span the centuries and show that women have been rad for a very long time. Nonfiction

Stepping Stones: A Refugee Family's Journey by Margriet Ruurs and Nizar Badra (Orca Book Publishers, 2016). The moving in this book is complemented by art made with stones, together showing the daily life before a family must leave their treasured Syrian home and community, moving step by step to safety. In English and Arabic. Picture book format for all ages

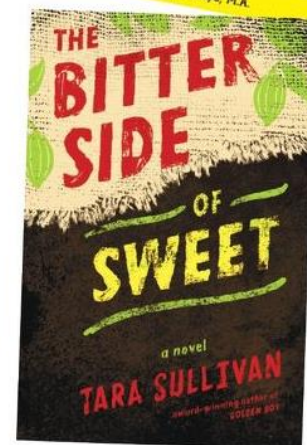
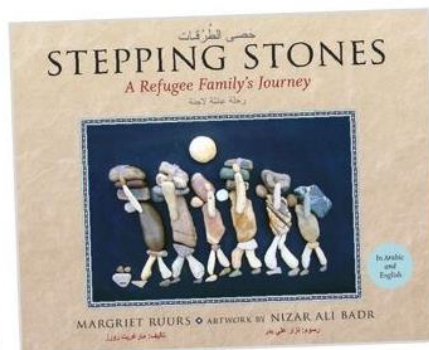
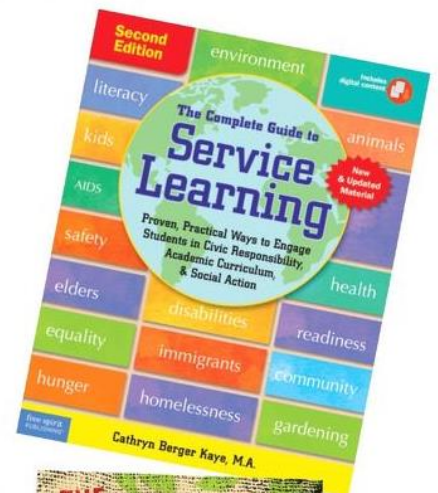
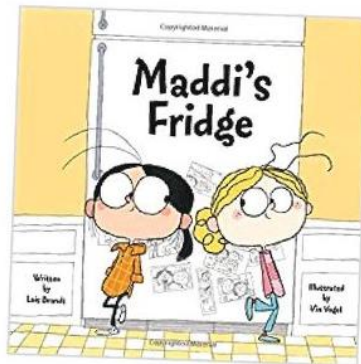
Relationships Thrive with Service Learning

Life and learning are about the people you meet. Service learning brings people together for a common purpose: to benefit the common good. The process is rich with connections and with the discovery that inspires us all as lifelong learners and contributors to a thriving society. Enjoy the journey!

For articles on Service Learning and Engaging Teaching, visit www.cbkassociates.com/resources

For more on Personal Inventory and downloadable resources, visit www.cbkassociates.com/abcd-books/curriculum/personal-inventory/

*Cathryn Berger Kaye, M.A. president of CBK Associates, provides professional development around the world to advance education through diverse topics including service learning. Cathryn is the author of eight books including **The Complete Guide to Service Learning: Proven, Practical Ways to Engage Students in Civic Responsibility, Academic Curriculum, & Social Action**. Find more including articles, blogs and Institutes at www.cbkassociates.com, or email cathy@cbkassociates.com.*



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