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Service Learning in the PreK-3 Classroom



The What, Why, and How-To Guide for Every Teacher



Vickie E. Lake, Ph.D., and Ithel Jones, Ed.D.

Praise for *Service Learning in the PreK–3 Classroom*:

“Young children get excited and deeply engaged when they have opportunities to do real work, solve meaningful and interesting problems, and, in the process, gain expertise about the world around them. *Service Learning in the PreK–3 Classroom* is a wonderfully comprehensive and incredibly practical resource that offers teachers guidance about how to create these opportunities in their classrooms. The book includes everything teachers will need to implement projects—from the theoretical underpinnings, to the standards addressed, to the reproducible forms. I am excited to share this rich and innovative new resource with the educators with whom I work.”

—**Judy Jablon, educational consultant and author of *Powerful Interactions: How to Connect with Children to Extend Their Learning* (NAEYC)**

“At last there is a practical resource specifically designed to help preK–3 teachers integrate service learning into their pedagogy! Lake and Jones have crafted a wonderfully useful guide that includes service learning definitions, national standards, examples, planning tools, lesson plans, and a gold mine of grab-and-go forms and reproducibles. Grounded in learning and developmental theory yet focused on practice, this new how-to guide belongs on the shelf of every preK–3 teacher interested in bringing learning to life through service.”

—**Joe Follman, founding director, Florida Learn & Serve**

“Young children have an inherent concern for their world. Teachers can respond by engaging them in meaningful acts through service learning. *Service Learning in the PreK–3 Classroom* is a helpful guide for educators who want to ensure that our youngest participants have opportunities to contribute to society.”

—**Cathryn Berger Kaye, M.A., author of *The Complete Guide to Service Learning***

“Caring starts early and, if we are fortunate, continues throughout our lives. This book is a great resource for educators to embrace their critical role in shaping the mindset of young students and teaching them that *others matter*. Lake and Jones have created a detailed map to a wonderful destination.”

—**Clifton L. Taulbert, K–12 education consultant and author of *Eight Habits of the Heart for Educators***

“This book is a vital resource for early childhood educators—including classroom teachers, preservice teachers, and teacher educators. The comprehensiveness combined with the remarkably clear way of communicating how to use service learning as a methodology make this book a required resource for anyone who wants to link experiential learning with the development of social responsibility. This book is filled with real-life examples, organizational resources, and theoretical support that will provide valuable assistance and time-saving tools, which are teachers’ best friends.”

—**Elizabeth A. Ethridge, Ed.D., associate professor of early childhood education, University of Oklahoma**

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The What, Why, and How-To Guide for Every Teacher



Vickie E. Lake, Ph.D., and Ithel Jones, Ed.D.



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Dedication

I dedicate this book to Fairye, my mother and friend.
Vickie Lake

I dedicate this book to my wife Gill, and my two children, Megan and Dylan,
for their support and unconditional love. I also dedicate this book to the memory of my mother,
who provided the early inspiration to continue learning.
Ithel Jones



Acknowledgments

Many people have influenced our thinking and understanding about service learning in early childhood education. This book is the product of almost four years of research, product development, and writing. During this time we've worked with hundreds of preservice and in-service teachers to provide them with the knowledge, skills, and dispositions to successfully implement service learning projects with young children. Each of these individuals has helped shape our ideas about service learning in early childhood education. The preservice teachers in particular have allowed us to field-test our ideas, and have collaborated with us to design exciting new projects for students. We are extremely grateful to each and every one of the preservice teachers we have worked with, many of whom are quoted in the sample lessons throughout this book.

We are also fortunate to have the ongoing cooperation and support of a large group of early childhood teachers. Some of these teachers have collaborated with our early childhood program for more than two decades. The work and examples described in this text would not have been possible without the support of these teachers. Thanks also to the administrators, staff, and parents at the following Leon County elementary schools: Woodville, Springwood, Kate Sullivan, Hawks Rise, DeSoto Trails, Buck Lake, and Canopy Oaks.

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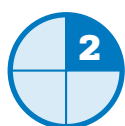


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CD-ROM Contents

- All reproducible forms from the book (as customizable PDFs)
- *Service Learning in the PreK–3 Classroom* PowerPoint presentation

Introduction

Following is the story of a service learning project titled “Sunshine in a Pot,” completed by a group of students in preschool, kindergarten, and first grade. With the help of two teachers, the children grew flowers from seeds, planted them in pots they decorated, made greeting cards, and delivered the cards and flower pots to patients in a local hospital. In the process, the students learned about a plant’s parts and life cycle, about human illness and injuries, and about empathy. Following are the words of one of the teachers reflecting back on the project.

Sunshine in a Pot

“Before we began the activity, I explained to the students that we would be helping others by spreading a little sunshine through the gift of a potted flower. We discussed the local hospital and the reasons why people had to stay there: sickness, injuries, cancer, pregnancy, etc. We also talked about how sad it can be at the hospital because you aren’t at home with your family and usually you aren’t feeling well. The students were able to participate in the conversation and many discussed situations where their own family members had been in the hospital.

“After our lengthy discussion, I told the students that they would be painting a pot and planting a flower in it for someone in the hospital who was ill or injured. The students asked if they would be taking the pots to the hospital themselves, and I explained that I would be taking the pots there after school. I asked the students, ‘Do you think the patients will like getting a gift like this in the hospital?’ All the students said yes, and one student said, ‘We sent flowers to my grandmother when she was in the hospital, and she liked them.’

“The students seemed very interested in the activity and everyone did a wonderful job painting their pots very colorfully. We planted pretty purple flowers called Hawaii Blues. The activity took the entire day to complete because we worked in small groups. They painted the pots in the morning and planted the flowers in the afternoon. I was very surprised that no one asked to take theirs home; this showed they understood the reason for the activity, which was helping others.”

—*Ashley and Dawn, preservice teachers of preschool through first grade, Tallahassee, Florida*

In their own reflections on the project, here are examples of what the students had to say:

- “We need to be nice to people who are sick.”
- “Giving someone a present can make them feel better.”
- “We made people feel better by giving them the pot and flower.”
- “We made cards for them, too. My card said, ‘Happy Spring and Get Well Soon.’”
- “We had fun making a present for someone who is sick.”
- “It made sick people smile, because someone cared about them.”

It is clear from this example that service learning can be a powerful tool in reaching, teaching, and inspiring young children. In this modern, rapidly changing world, quality early education is essential for our students’ future success. This success is defined not only in academic terms but also from a social, civic, and moral perspective. Thus, teachers need opportunities to enrich children’s learning that support high academic standards and, at the same time, foster children’s social

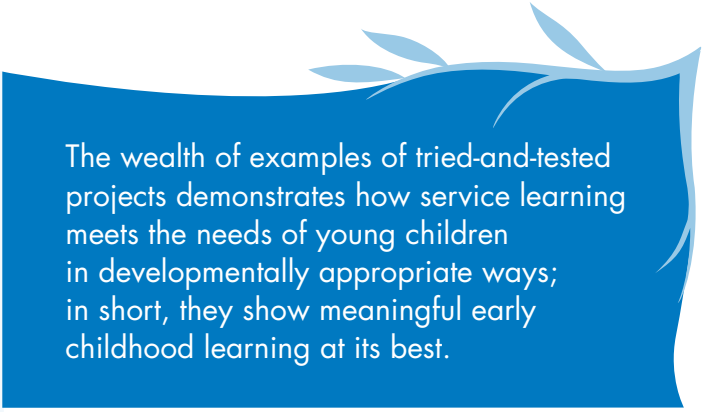
development by teaching them to be good citizens. The methodology of service learning offers teachers these opportunities.

In recent years, service learning has gained a strong foothold in middle grade and secondary classrooms, and it is time to employ its many rich benefits at the early childhood level. Our goal in writing this book is to provide you, as a preK or primary grade educator, with a solid understanding of how service learning can be effectively used with young children. We also aim to help you see the connections between the philosophical basis of service learning and the practice of service learning. To this end, we have included a theoretical rationale for service learning in early childhood, as well as stories from a variety of classrooms in which 215 preservice teachers in our Florida State University program conducted field trials with over 3,500 students in preschool through grade three. These stories serve to highlight how teachers and programs can integrate service learning into applied practice, aligning with academic learning standards in all content areas while providing developmentally appropriate experiences for young children. The wealth of examples of tried-and-tested projects demonstrates how service learning meets the needs of young children in developmentally appropriate ways; in short, they show meaningful early childhood learning at its best.

Service Learning in the PreK–3 Classroom is also intended for those who work with you on all levels—administrators, counselors, parents, members of a professional learning community, preservice teachers, college faculty, and others. Simply put, it is for education professionals and students everywhere who seek a better understanding of service learning and its role in the early childhood classroom. The book is subtitled *The What, Why, and How-To Guide* because its practical approach develops the background knowledge and skills you need to effectively use service learning as pedagogy in programs for young children.

About This Book

The text is organized into four parts: the first part explains what service learning is and can accomplish; the second part provides tools and templates for implementing service learning in the classroom;



The wealth of examples of tried-and-tested projects demonstrates how service learning meets the needs of young children in developmentally appropriate ways; in short, they show meaningful early childhood learning at its best.

the third part shows examples of service learning projects that have been carried out with all ages of young children; and the final part describes how service learning is rooted in solid academic theory and can be used as part of a teacher education or professional development program.

Part One: Service Learning in Early Childhood—A Primer addresses the background and purpose (the “what” and “why”) of service learning in early childhood education. It provides you with a context in which to learn about the reasons for doing service with young children and guidelines for implementation.

Chapter 1 defines service learning and outlines the principles and standards upon which it is based. In **Chapter 2**, you will read an overview of the theoretical rationale for using service learning with young children, as well as how the practice supports character education, differentiated instruction, and other important classroom initiatives. **Chapter 3** outlines how service learning in the early grades can support high academic standards as outlined in national and state policies and documents. In **Chapter 4**, we recommend how to effectively design service learning for early childhood programs, no matter what your prior knowledge of or experience with the practice.

In **Part Two: Project Forms and Templates**, we address more specifically the “how” of service learning by providing tools for designing and evaluating service learning projects with young children. **Chapter 5** includes forms and templates for introducing, brainstorming, planning, preparing, and organizing projects. **Chapter 6** provides the necessary documents to use when working with community partners. Ideas and activities for reflecting on and documenting a service learning experience are found in **Chapter 7**. And **Chapter**

8 offers several important assessment and evaluation forms to use with all project participants, both children and adults.

Part Three: Sample Lesson Plans and Resources is filled with memorable snapshots of service learning in practice. Here you will read about richly varied examples of projects that the preservice teachers in our university program have successfully completed in hundreds of early childhood classrooms throughout the Tallahassee, Florida, region. This section is organized around four themes that we have found to be particularly useful in the early grades: **Chapter 9: Letter Writing**, **Chapter 10: Gardening**, **Chapter 11: Helping Others**, and **Chapter 12: Environmental Issues**. These examples of artifacts from a range of actual projects help provide a complete ground-level view of service learning for early childhood educators. Page 162 includes a matrix listing all sample lesson plans by topic, grade level, and subject area, along with additional project ideas. Pages 205–207 include children’s book and website recommendations that correspond to the lesson plans.

Finally, **Part Four: Supporting Research and Teacher Education** discusses in more detail the theoretical support for service learning with young children (**Chapter 13**). Finally, and importantly, it discusses how to incorporate service learning into early childhood teachers’ professional development and teacher education programs (**Chapter 14**), because successful implementation of service learning projects ultimately depends on the teacher.

In addition, the **CD-ROM** includes a PowerPoint presentation that gives a comprehensive overview of the service learning process and highlights the benefits and rationales for using service learning in early childhood classrooms. It also contains all the forms and templates from the book as downloadable, customizable, and printable PDF files.

How to Use This Book

We hope this book will serve as a catalyst for you to begin using service learning. If you are a classroom teacher who is new to service learning, you may wish to read the book straight through, selecting advice, guidelines, and project examples to follow based on your individual needs. If you

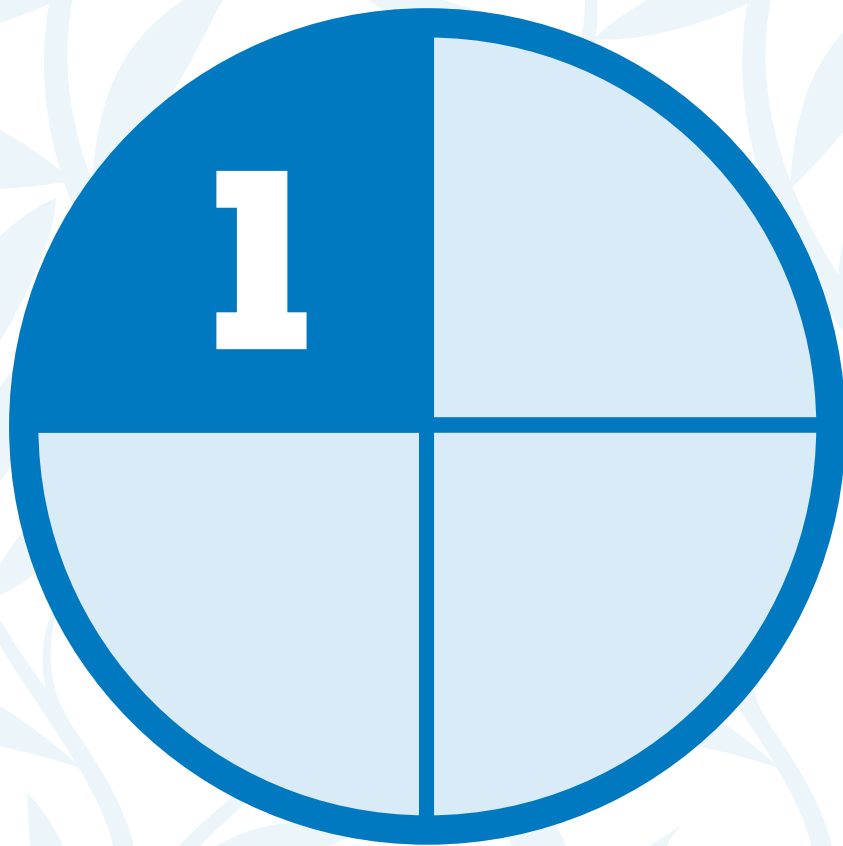
have some prior experience with the practice, you can pick and choose those sections relevant to your early childhood program and make a list of new methods, ideas, and forms to try. You may also wish to share the book or specific sections of it with members of your professional learning community, if you participate in one. If you’re a teacher educator, you might want your students or participants to read selected chapters that correspond with your course or training goals and objectives. This book can serve as an additional scaffold for your students as you work with them in the area of service learning.

At a minimum, by studying the practical examples the book provides, you will see how service learning builds on children’s interests, motivation, and learning in all subject areas. These highly effective projects were all designed and implemented by novice teachers. Thus, even if you have limited experience in using a service learning approach, you can draw on a wide range of resources, including those in this book, to provide a curriculum enriched with service learning. As you begin designing your own projects, use the book’s practical, concrete suggestions for evaluating their effectiveness. Whether you are a new or an experienced teacher of young children, this guide will help you reconceptualize your curriculum to include truly meaningful learning.

Ultimately, we created this book to share our successes in developing and implementing service learning projects in early childhood classrooms. The work of the committed teachers and school leaders with whom we have partnered deserves to be recognized and celebrated. We share their stories and projects to help support educators like you who want to enrich the learning experiences of their young students. These pages are full of ideas to think about—including teachers’ stories to draw inspiration from, lesson plans and activities to implement, lists of invaluable websites and books, and other resources to turn to for information and assistance. We hope you will use this book to create and fulfill your own vision of how service learning can be used to make a difference in the lives of your students and community members alike.

Vickie E. Lake, Ph.D.,
and Ithel Jones, Ed.D.





PART ONE

Service Learning in Early Childhood— A Primer

What Is Service Learning?

Kindergarten students design posters to encourage others not to litter. A class of second-grade students arranges a fund-raising event for victims of a hurricane. Preschool children plant flowers in their school garden to beautify their school's campus. All are examples of service learning in childhood education. Service learning, with its emphasis on connecting school curriculum with service projects that address real needs, is widely recognized as a meaningful and effective approach for teaching children.

This chapter defines service learning and discusses the principles upon which it is based. It also presents the current standards and indicators for quality practice and examines the various approaches to and formal stages of service learning.

Service Learning Defined

Service learning can be viewed as both an instructional approach and a philosophy of learning.

An Instructional Approach

According to the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS), a federally funded U.S. agency has supported service learning combines service to the community with student learning in a way that improves both the student and the community. More specifically, service learning:

- is a method whereby students learn and develop through active participation in thoughtfully organized service that is conducted in and meets the needs of communities

- is coordinated with a preschool, elementary school, secondary school, institution of higher education, or community service program and the community
- helps foster civic responsibility
- is integrated into and enhances the academic curriculum of the students, or the education components of the community service program in which the participants are enrolled
- provides structured time for students or participants to reflect on the service experience

During the past two decades, service learning has increased in popularity in the United States. It is estimated, for example, that in the 2007–2008 academic year more than 4.2 million students were involved in some type of service learning or service activity.¹ Given the large number of students involved, it is inevitable that not everyone will use the same definition of service learning. Yet, despite the wide range of interpretations, Learn and Serve America has succeeded in capturing its essence:

Service learning combines service objectives with learning objectives with the intent that the activity changes both the recipient and the provider of the service. This is accomplished by combining service tasks with structured opportunities that link the task to self-reflection, self-discovery, and the acquisition and comprehension of values, skills, and knowledge content.²

¹ Spring, K., Grimm, R., & Dietz, N. (2009)

² Learn and Serve America (2007)

This definition of service learning represents the core concept upon which the approach is based. The educational value of service learning stems from the fact that, in the words of author and expert Cathryn Berger Kaye, “it connects school-based curriculum with the inherent caring and concern young people have for their world.”³ It is through this integration of service and classroom content that students develop a deeper understanding of content, leading to improved academic learning. Simply put, a service learning approach makes learning meaningful for children.

Federal Support

Recently, federal support for service learning has increased in the United States, under the National and Community Service Trust Act of 1993 and the revised Serve America Act of 2009. Among the stated purposes of the Serve America Act are the following:

- meet the unmet human, educational, environmental, and public safety needs of the United States, without displacing workers
- renew the ethic of civic responsibility and the spirit of community throughout the United States
- expand educational opportunity by rewarding individuals who participate in national service with an increased ability to pursue higher education or job training
- encourage citizens of the United States, regardless of age, income, or disability, to engage in full-time or part-time national service
- provide tangible benefits to the communities in which national service is performed
- expand and strengthen service learning programs through year-round opportunities to improve the education of children and teens and to maximize the benefits of national and community service
- focus national service on the areas of national need such service has the capacity to address, such as improving education, increasing energy conservation, improving the health status of economically disadvantaged individuals, and

improving economic opportunity for economically disadvantaged individuals⁴

Additionally, support for service learning is evident in the No Child Left Behind Act (2001). This legislation offers federal funding for character education programs, which can include service learning. These programs include educating children about caring, citizenship, fairness, respect, and responsibility, which mirror the six pillars of character according to Character Counts, a national program of Josephson Institute, a non-profit organization.

Unfortunately, on April 8, 2011, the U.S. Congress made substantial funding cuts for the Corporation for National and Community Service and eliminated funding altogether for its program Learn and Serve America, which provides research, training, technical support, and grant money to schools and community organizations involved in service learning. However, many people are campaigning to reinstate, and even increase, funding for the CNCS and Learn and Serve America.⁵ In addition, service learning continues to grow at a rapid pace in schools and districts throughout the United States, as more than half of the states have adopted policies that both support and regulate its practice.

Those who promote a service learning approach believe that education should include the development of social responsibility.

A Philosophy of Learning

In addition to being an increasingly popular instructional approach, service learning can be described as a philosophy of learning. Those who promote a service learning approach believe that education should include the development of social responsibility, and that the most effective learning is active and connected to experience in some way. Service learning programs are explicitly structured so that students learn

³ Kaye (2010), p. 8

⁴ Serve America Act (2009), Public Law 111-113, p. 6–8.

⁵ You can join the campaign “Save Service in America” here: saveservice.org.



about the larger social issues behind the problems they are addressing through service, including the historical, economic, cultural, and political contexts involved.

Service Learning Standards

Because of the emphasis on student learning, it is hardly surprising that educators, researchers, and others have consistently called for high quality in service learning. Quality is important in order to ensure that service learning lives up to its promise of positive outcomes. Until recently, determining quality in service learning was difficult because of the lack of consensus on what constitutes quality practice. With the publication of official standards in 2008, quality in service learning can now be easily determined.

The 10 principles listed below influenced these standards, which were developed through an extensive national consultation process involving students, teachers, school and district administrators, community members, staff from community-based organizations, policy makers, and others interested in service learning. Drawing on extensive research and the professional judgment of key stakeholders, the eight standards and 35 indicators provide a common set of well-defined and measurable expectations for high quality practice. (See pages 202–203 for a complete list of the standards and indicators.)



The Principles of Service Learning

In May 1989, The Johnson Foundation at Wingspread, an organization committed to sustainable environmental and community solutions, hosted an advisory group meeting that developed 10 Principles of Good Practice for Combining Service and Learning. This group consolidated information from extensive consultations with more than 70 organizations interested or involved in service and learning. These principles, still used today, are summarized as follows.

Service Learning . . .

1. **Engages** people in responsible and challenging actions for the common good.
2. **Provides** structured opportunities for people to reflect critically on their service experience.
3. **Articulates** clear service and learning goals for everyone involved.
4. **Allows** for those with needs to define those needs.
5. **Clarifies** the responsibilities of each person and organization involved.
6. **Matches** service providers and service needs through a process that recognizes changing circumstances.
7. **Expects** genuine, active, and sustained organizational commitment.
8. **Includes** training, supervision, monitoring, support, recognition, and evaluation to meet service and learning goals.
9. **Insures** that the time commitment for service and learning is flexible, appropriate, and in the best interests of all involved.
10. **Commits** to program participation by and with diverse populations.

Service Learning Standards for Quality Practice⁶

- 1. Meaningful Service.** Service learning actively engages participants in meaningful and personally relevant activities.
- 2. Link to Curriculum.** Service learning is intentionally used as an instructional strategy to meet learning goals and/or content standards.
- 3. Reflection.** Service learning incorporates multiple challenging reflection activities that are ongoing and that prompt deep thinking and analysis about oneself and one's relationship to society.
- 4. Diversity.** Service learning promotes understanding of diversity and mutual respect among all participants.
- 5. Youth Voice.** Service learning provides students with a strong voice in planning, implementing, and evaluating service learning experiences with guidance from adults.
- 6. Partnerships.** Service learning partnerships are collaborative, mutually beneficial, and address community needs.
- 7. Progress Monitoring.** Service learning engages participants in an ongoing process to assess the quality of implementation and progress toward meeting specified goals, and uses results for improvement and sustainability.
- 8. Duration and Intensity.** Service learning has sufficient duration and intensity to address community needs and meet specified outcomes.

Components of Service Learning

“Through service learning, the often elusive idea of ‘community’ takes shape and has a more tangible meaning for all involved,” according to expert author Cathryn Berger Kaye.⁷ The term *community* is defined in two ways: geographically and socially. How we define community in service learning depends on the nature of the activity. For example, in the context of teacher education courses,

community could be defined as one classroom or several classrooms, a school or campus, the immediate surroundings of a school or campus, a town, a region, a state, a nation, or globally. Depending on the community and the nature of the activity, a service learning project is classified as one of four different approaches, described as follows.

The Four Approaches to Service Learning⁸

- 1. Direct Service.** Students’ service directly affects and involves the recipients face-to-face.
- 2. Indirect Service.** Students do not provide service to an individual but to the community as a whole and may not meet the recipients in person.
- 3. Advocacy.** Students’ intent is to create awareness of or promote action on an issue of public interest.
- 4. Research.** Students find, gather, and report on information in the public interest.

Based on these approaches, service learning can look similar to community service. However, while the extent to which they are similar will depend on the type of service learning project, Kaye stresses that community service and service learning are different, as you will discover in the following section.

The Five Stages of Service Learning

Service learning has five interdependent stages: investigation, preparation, action, reflection, and documentation. These stages are what makes service learning very distinct from community service, which typically begins with action and may or may not include reflection or demonstration.

Stage 1: Investigation

Every project begins with investigation. You and your students work together to investigate and learn about the issues in your community, discover your strengths and abilities, and identify a need to address. This need might emerge from books, curriculum, the Internet, personal observations and experiences, surveys, interviews, or discussions.

⁶ National Youth Leadership Council (2008), www.nylc.org. Reprinted with permission.

⁷ Kaye (2010), p. 10

⁸ *ibid.*, p. 11



Stage 2: Preparation

Once the community need is addressed, you and your students prepare for action. Preparation involves looking into the need more in-depth, finding out what others have done and are doing to address the need, seeking out partners (such as other classrooms, people with particular skills, or local or national agencies), collecting materials and resources, and creating an action plan.

Stage 3: Action

The third stage, action, is the direct result of preparation. The action plan is carried out over time—a day, a week, a semester, a year. During the action stage, you and your students continue to develop knowledge and resources. The children experience the real-world results of their plan, observe their strengths and abilities in relation to others, and develop an appreciation for collaborative effort.

It is at this point that community service and service learning part ways. The cycle for community service is investigation, preparation, and action. However, in order for an activity or project to be considered service learning, two more critical stages must be included: *reflection* and *demonstration*.

Stage 4: Reflection

Reflection is a vital and ongoing process in service learning and integrates learning and experience with personal growth and awareness. Your students consider how the experience, knowledge, and skills they are acquiring relate to their own lives. They put the experience into the larger community context, while you encourage them to be creative and use multiple intelligences in their reflections. Effective service learning teachers instigate this reflection by giving students assignments that require them to talk about, write about,

While their approaches can look similar, community service and service learning are different.

make drawings of, and evaluate their activities and impacts. Such assignments deepen students' understanding and provide avenues for teachers to assess what students have learned and accomplished.

Stage 5: Demonstration

Demonstration is the final stage and it both adds to the service and learning involved in the project and provides evidence of what your students have gained and accomplished through their experience. The children demonstrate what they have learned by teaching or otherwise sharing with others about the needs they have addressed, the activities they have conducted, and the impacts they have had. Demonstration activities (as in the reflection stage, these activities are often assignments) can be for audiences outside of the classroom and can include student presentations, talks, lessons, exhibits, drawings, writings, public art, letters, public service announcements, performances, poetry, and more.

Chapter Summary

Service learning is an approach that enables children to learn through active participation in organized service. By using service learning as a pedagogy, you help foster civic responsibility in your students. Service learning also enhances the academic curriculum by fostering a deeper understanding of the material and by making the learning more meaningful to students.