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ABSTRACT

What does it mean to teach children to be "good citizens," for example, in conflict resolution and service learning activities? This study addressed that question by examining contrasting conceptions of "good citizenship" that were enacted in several peer conflict mediation programs implemented in urban elementary schools. In 1995, the Winning against Violent Environments mediation training program was expanded into the Cleveland Public Schools Center for Conflict Resolution. In school-based peer mediation, the mediator is supposed to neither judge nor investigate facts nor counsel nor offer suggestions regarding the conflict itself. Mediators are responsible for process only for assisting peers to communicate with one another and to negotiate a solution to their problem themselves. A small group of students per school are trained to provide mediation service; these student mediators typically meet and work together as a team to deepen their skills and to promote the use of nonviolent conflict resolution in their school communities. The overall research question was "What processes of conflict resolution learning are being facilitated at each school, and what are the observable effects of these processes among peer mediators and within each whole school community?" A range of qualitative and quantitative information was collected between 1997-1999 in the 10 schools whose programs had developed the furthest. All the peer mediation programs examined embodied notions of democratic service learning principles and notions of citizenship, but only a few embodied "democratic" citizenship, by including critical reflection, decision making, and autonomous action by the young people themselves. Challenges which emerge in developing these programs are: fairness; capacity of mediation programs to serve the school's whole client population; capacity of a program to grow and develop in the context of a school timetable; and helping diverse students to learn the basics of democratic citizenship in an imperfectly democratic system. (Contains 62 references.) (BT)

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Student conflict resolution, power 'sharing' in schools, and citizenship education

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* DRAFT! *

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What does it mean to teach children to be "good citizens," for example in conflict resolution and service learning activities? Through informal socialization, including the "hidden curriculum" of regular school practice, young citizens inescapably develop some understanding of their community and its needs, and of how (or whether) they should act in relation to those needs. They learn how the people around them generally handle conflict, make decisions, and relate to diverse people, by observing and by practicing particular roles in their social worlds. Through planned programs of various kinds, educators often seek to supplement and redirect children's socialization toward our own conceptions of "good citizenship." Unfortunately, we often don't stop to clarify what we mean by these goals, and if we did we would probably find out that we don't completely agree about what is important. This study addresses that problem by examining the contrasting conceptions of "good citizenship" that were enacted in several peer conflict mediation programs that were implemented in urban elementary schools.

"Service learning" programs seek to influence young citizens' skills and values through the creation of active roles for youth: they often invoke democratic citizenship in their missions and rationales. Peer conflict mediation programs, although they have different historical roots, can be analyzed as an

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instance of citizenship education through service learning, because they involve training and empowering groups of students to offer a service to their community, and to meet for joint planning and reflection. Service learning programs involve “thoughtfully organized service experiences that:

- meet actual community needs; ...
- enhance what is taught in the school by extending student learning beyond the classroom;
- help to foster the development of a sense of caring for others.”

(Constitutional Rights Foundation, 1993, p.2)

Unlike many service learning opportunities, the “community” served by a school-based peer mediation service is primarily the school itself. The “need” addressed is to help schools to build peaceful communities and relationships, to enhance students’ skills in managing conflict, and to ameliorate problems of disruptive interpersonal conflict and violence. Furthermore, they provide extra-curricular opportunities for some students to alter their social roles, from relatively passive bystanders and learners to relatively active problem solvers and leaders. Such planned citizenship education coexists, often uneasily, with the hidden curriculum of prevailing interaction patterns in schools.

“Democratic” school contexts and service learning?

The National Council for the Social Studies of the United States, among others, advocates the practice of democracy as a “way of life” in schools (NCSS 1979). This view of democratic education has three central components: modeling, critical reasoning, and sharing authority with students. *Modeling* for democratization requires the “enactment of democratic principles” in the school community, including the inclusion and protection of minorities and equitable (safe) opportunities for all to participate, directly and through representatives, in collective decision making. *Critical reasoning* requires learning to listen respectfully to alternative viewpoints and to analyze problems and solutions. *Shared authority* requires involving students as a “part of the system of justice” in the school, rather than teaching them only to obey rules made and enforced by others. This democratic ideal continues to elude us in most public schools.

Modeling: Mary Ann Raywid disputed the modeling notion, cautioning that classrooms and schools can never and should never be directly modeled upon the political democracy practiced in the adult world (1976). Unevenly-distributed expertise plays a special role in schools: this challenges democratic notions of citizen equality. Furthermore students, unlike full democratic citizens, do not have the opportunity to choose their own leaders or to withdraw from certain activities or associations. This tension is amply evident in the schools I studied: these school communities are not organized democratically, thus the hidden-curricular socialization derived from regular modeling and practice there is (to some degree) contradictory to democratic citizenship. Nonetheless, leaders in these schools believe that they can model and teach certain *ingredients* of democratic citizenship, in part through their peer conflict mediation service programs. The different schools examined below have achieved some success in implementing peer mediation programs, but these programs model and practice remarkably different kinds of “citizen” action, by the peer mediators and by their peer communities in school.

Recently, Kahne and Westheimer examined the citizenship education values that were implicitly modeled in several service learning programs (1996). They found that many such programs avoided controversy and critique, emphasizing instead the development of altruistic values or “charity.” Sometimes these programs even advocated service as an *alternative* to political action. I prefer to frame the goal Kahne and Westheimer call “charity” (perhaps more charitably) in terms of schools’ felt need to *model and reinforce community and*

nonviolent values. It is true that peer conflict management programs may sometimes function much like monitorialism, reinforcing existing implicit (cultural dominance) and explicit (adult power) hierarchies. Clearly such uncritical community-building is not a sufficient condition for democracy. However, *some* kind of community building, and certainly a reasonably safe and nonviolent context, may still be a necessary condition for democratization, especially in postmodern urban contexts.

Critical reasoning: A few programs in Westheimer and Kahne's study emphasized what they called a "change" perspective — engaging students in well-informed critical analysis of causes and alternate solutions to social problems. They critique the simplistic notions of empowerment that underlie some service programs: increasing students' self-esteem through serving "those less fortunate," without helping them to hear and understand the reasons for these people's troubles, may reinforce students' unearned sense of superiority and bypass important learning opportunities. Student mediators avoid part of this pitfall by serving not a distant lower-status "other" but their fellow students. Still, to what degree might peer mediation serve as an unintended disseminator of culturally-loaded and unproblematized "good behavior" models to peers who "act wrong," or to what degree might they act as critical problem-solvers who come to understand and respond to the underlying causes of violent behavior in schools?

Shared authority: A third crucial element of democratic education is to foster students' development of autonomy, by allowing them to share some power with adults in the school. Community building and critical thinking are necessary conditions for democracy, but even combined they are not sufficient. By definition, democracy requires collective decision making, in which any citizen has the power to influence some of the rules by which they are governed. Critical discussion and problem-solving regarding social issues can help young people to develop citizenship-relevant capacities for autonomous thought (Battistoni 1997, Hahn 1996). However, the most difficult and potentially-powerful challenge of service and other experiential learning is to combine such critical thinking with *action*, right in the school context — to democratize authority relations in certain areas of school life, so that young people can create and carry out initiatives, can share their competence with others, and can practice roles of active citizenship on behalf of themselves and others.

After a brief discussion of the research context, definitions, questions, and method, the paper analyzes case studies of contrasting peer mediation programs,

in light of these three components of democratic education — modeling nonviolent community, critical reflection and analysis, and students sharing authority. I will address each of these three themes in turn, first conceptually in light of relevant research literature, and then in relation to the school program cases that best illustrate that element in practice. The paper concludes with a short summary and questions for further discussion.

Research context:

The paper is based on continuing research regarding a conflict resolution and peer mediation training project in one large urban school district. The Winning Against Violent Environments (WAVE) mediation program has been operating for about fifteen years in the Martin Luther King Magnet High School, in the Cleveland Public School (CPS) district in Ohio. In addition to mediating conflicts at their own school, youth from the WAVE program have been leading training sessions in local and distant schools for about twelve years. Eventually, peer mediation was added to the CPS student handbook as an alternative to traditional discipline measures for handling certain kinds of conflict, although at first the service was still unevenly available.

In the fall of 1995, WAVE's training program was finally brought in from the margins in its own district, institutionalized and expanded into the Cleveland Public Schools Center for Conflict Resolution. It is still a low-budget operation, directed by a specially-assigned social studies teacher, Carole Close, with little administrative assistance. Almost two years later, the Cleveland Teachers Union contract with the Cleveland Public School (CPS) board created a new stipend-paid conflict resolution advisor position, to be held by a certified teacher or guidance counselor in all of the district's 120 schools. The district charged the Center for Conflict Resolution with training teams of peer mediators and their advisors, and helping them to establish extra-curricular conflict mediation service programs in their schools. A local foundation, the Cleveland Summit on Education, associated with the business roundtable, helped to support the CCR's initial effort, in 1997-99, to establish new peer mediation programs (with these paid teacher-advisors) in about a quarter of the district's elementary schools. As part of that grant, the foundation sponsored this research project.

Mediation is assisted interpersonal conflict negotiation, in which a neutral third party (mediator) facilitates a process of problem identification and resolution. In school-based peer mediation, the mediator is supposed to neither

judge nor investigate facts nor counsel nor offer suggestions regarding the conflict itself. They are responsible for process only — for assisting peers to communicate with one another and to negotiate a solution to their own problem. Peer mediation assistance is voluntary, an alternative to fighting and/or to going through a formal discipline process with adult school personnel. Mediations may occur on the spot where the conflict arises, or may be postponed until a free period when tempers might have cooled. The first step is to establish each party's informed independent choice to participate and to keep the proceedings confidential. The second step is for each party to tell their own view of what happened and what the problem is. Subsequent steps involve assisting the parties to communicate together to understand the solveable parts of their problem, to invent possible solutions, and to negotiate a mutually-acceptable resolution. Mediation sessions may be formal sit-down procedures resulting in signed paper contracts, but at the elementary school level they are typically short, informal discussions ending with verbal agreements.

Like many North American school-based programs, CPS uses a 'cadre' approach to peer mediation: only a small group of students per school are trained to provide the mediation service in their own schools. Beyond the mediation service itself, these student mediators typically meet and work together as a team to deepen their own skills and to promote the use of nonviolent conflict resolution (including mediation) in their school communities. This service approach to peer mediation has spread widely in North American public schools, because of its effectiveness in meeting a range of conflict education and violence prevention objectives at low cost (Jones 1998; also e.g. Davis 1994, Day-Vines 1996, Johnson & Johnson 1996, Lam 1988, Lawton 1994, Shulman 1996, Stitz-Stomfay 1994). The CPS Center for Conflict Resolution program is quite unique, because its mediation services are becoming available district-wide at a variety of grade levels, and because it emphasizes leadership and training by the urban youth themselves (Close & Lechman 1997).

During the academic year 1997-98, the WAVE Center for Conflict Resolution (CCR) offered its standard training program to the first twenty elementary schools to appoint conflict resolution advisors, as specified in the new teachers' union contract. A team of 20 to 30 students and one or two adult advisors, from each of the 20 elementary schools, received program development assistance and an intensive three-day peer mediation training by the CPS Center for Conflict Resolution. Trainers were diverse urban youth who had recently graduated from

high school in Cleveland. Mediators, according to program guidelines, were to be children whose social leadership potential had been exhibited in “negative” as well as “positive” ways, and who are representative of the school’s entire racial, cultural, and gender populations —*not* only “good” students. The student mediators, grades 3-5, were guided to develop conflict resolution and mediation skills, and also to take initiative and to make joint decisions in developing conflict resolution programs in their own schools. Skills were presented in simple steps, yet framed as flexible and evolving, adaptable to a wide range of gender and cultural identities. The program emphasized both the creation of peer mediation services in each school and the engagement of the young student trainees as peer leaders, responsible for spreading nonviolent conflict management knowledge and practice throughout their school communities.

Because of the Center for Conflict Resolution’s emphasis on responsiveness to particular community needs and empowerment of students on a local level, the programs took different forms in the various elementary school contexts. This created, in effect, a natural experiment: the same basic training and program development package was given to a range of elementary schools in one city school district. This paper describes the contrasting ways in which that ‘same’ program was actually interpreted and implemented at each school.

The larger research project involves a range of qualitative and quantitative information, collected between 1997 and 1999. The overall research question was, “What processes of conflict resolution learning are being facilitated at each school, and what are the observable effects of these processes, among peer mediators and within each whole school community?” The analysis below is drawn from qualitative study in the 10 schools whose programs had developed the furthest by the end of the project’s first year (fall 1998). Qualitative evidence includes interviews with administrators, program advisors, other teachers, peer mediators, and other students at each school in May, June, and September of 1998, supplemented by several additional meetings with program trainers and advisors throughout 1997-98. To protect the confidentiality of individuals and schools, identifying details are masked and schools are identified only by assigned case numbers. The specific sub-questions addressed here include:

- *Modeling nonviolent community:* What is the nature and substance of conflict management education offered in the various schools? What values do the

programs espouse in relation to peacemaking, community, nonviolence, and the roles of diverse students?

- *Critical reflection and analysis:* How do diverse student mediators become involved in critical thinking and problem-solving?
- *Students sharing authority:* How do conflict resolution advisors, other school staff, and school context factors facilitate and/or impede the active involvement and self-determination of various students in conflict resolution related activities at each school?

Conflict is wrapped up in relations of social power, and conflict resolution is a crucial component of democratic participation. The profiles of how the power to manage conflict was (and wasn't) shared with diverse students in these urban school programs bring out the contrasting meanings of democratic citizenship education so that they can be analyzed and discussed. The three elements are cumulative: building peaceful community is a base upon which the more obviously-democratic elements can be anchored. Effective and inclusive reflective problem-solving would be difficult without a peaceful community context, and sharing authority with students requires both a peaceful context and reflective problem-solving. By assessing these limiting factors and analyzing the roles of various actors in each school, these case studies begin to point out the elements that would be required to support sustainable change toward relatively nonviolent and democratic school climates.

Modeling nonviolent community:

The beliefs and values that surround conflict resolution are rooted in various cultures and social class locations. Conflict resolution education is more than skill development: it is built upon real social relationships, and on values that are culturally bound. Teaching nonviolence, for example through a peer mediation program, is an attempt to change the values of a (school) community and to change the ways its members relate to one another.

It is not surprising that conflict resolution education has become increasingly popular in North America during the last few decades. It is a paradox of postmodernity that pluralist diversity is ubiquitous and makes conflict resolution essential, yet technological and economic developments have encouraged individualism and fragmented social relationships, and thus make community-building and conflict resolution more difficult. In the past,

community might have been assumed, not identified as a major goal of citizenship education. Now, in the context of social fragmentation and casual violence, urban educators often work hard at fostering community among diverse students and staff. This concern has been presented as a rationale for school-sponsored service learning, and could equally be applied to the particular case of peer conflict mediation service programs.

In the late '80s, individuals found themselves increasingly disconnected from public life and civic discourse. Partly because of the complexity of the society, partly because of the busy worklife, partly because of our 'couch potato,' TV-dominated home lifestyle, people have increasingly become detached from the community.... In recent years, policymakers and educators alike have expressed the necessity of involving young people in community service and public problem solving as a means of advancing reengagement in the community. (Hepburn 1997, p.140)

Separateness, selfishness, and narcissism, masquerading as enlightenment and liberation, should alarm those of us who are concerned with citizenship education. The health of a democracy is dependent on the capacity of its citizens to recognize their shared concerns, to consider moral complexity, to accept responsibility for the fate of others, and to be willing to confront and alter injustices.... While youth participation will not alone reverse this trend toward the denial of human reciprocity and community, it can, at the very least, serve as a first step toward counteracting the overemphasis on the self. (Conrad & Hedin 1977, p.55)

These statements persuade me that community building is an essential component of democratic citizenship education in urban schools today. Thus I investigate, in these case studies, how each peer mediation program embodies and seeks to promote important community-building values such as reengagement, responsibility, recognition of shared interests, and nonviolent management of conflicts. Service-oriented experiential learning can give meaning to students' lives, strengthening their sense of self-confidence and efficacy and freeing up their motivation to engage in school learning (Battistoni 1997, Williams 1992). It is important that meta-analysis of several previous studies shows that, contrary to

popular belief, the time spent away from regular classroom tasks for such active learning experiences has been shown to have *no* negative impact, and in some well-designed programs to have a *positive* impact, on students' academic achievement (Williams 1992, p. 38-39). Community engagement and nonviolent values can be powerful partners and even facilitators of academic learning, and thus deserve some prominence as educational goals.

At the same time, this study seeks to understand the social hierarchies underlying citizenship programs' emphasis on community-building values. *Which* populations of students generally get the opportunity, through participation in these peer mediation service programs, to see themselves as capable social actors — a diverse range of students that reflects the school's whole population, or only those whose backgrounds and values closely match those of the school's adult leadership? How do the children who participate as peer mediators come to see their fellow students, particularly those who get involved in escalating conflicts and violence? Is conflict seen as natural and relational, or are those who "get in trouble" blamed individually for their problems and marginalized as somehow bad (see Merelman 1990, Slee 1995)? Is peacemaking framed as a *joint* challenge that has structural as well as individual causes and can be solved in multiple ways, or as a response to individual malfunction that requires the application of prescribed responses? Community-building efforts could promote a narrow range of dominant values and behavior patterns. However, since beliefs and practices of nonviolence are rooted in a wide range of cultures and socio-economic strata, there is no reason that community-building couldn't involve culturally inclusive and no-blame problem solving efforts.

Four of the schools emphasized peacemaking as part of community building, without involving the student mediators in much critical thinking, problem solving, or autonomous action. Schools 10, 12, 3, and 18, had active peace and conflict education programs led by the adult conflict resolution advisors, with relatively little substantive input from the peer mediators themselves. In schools 10 and 12, the children did provide fairly active mediation services, although the approach to mediation sometimes emphasized helping adults to control other children more than empowering young people to resolve their own conflicts. In schools 3 and 18, student behavior was managed primarily by teachers and principals, and trained peer mediators really did not have opportunities to provide much service. Peace-related programming led by the adult advisors emphasized approaches to conflict management that retained traditional

authority roles — student skill development and norms of polite behavior, rather than student-centered peer mediation.

Schools 10 and 12 each had about 25 active student mediators, whose service roles were recognized by many in their school communities. Here, mediators were pulled out of regular classes to meet once or twice per month. School 12's mediators were rehearsing a play on conflict resolution to present to other students in the school. School 10's advisor coached students on their skills, invited them to report on mediations they had conducted, and led lessons on peace and conflict education. These were mainly teacher-centered sessions: for example, two mediators who were placed on duty together (during a May observation) introduced themselves to one another, because they had not interacted enough in group meetings to learn each other's names. School 10's advisor believed that her mediators did not adequately follow the step-by-step mediation process, so she had written out a simplified "script" (her word) for them to follow during mediations. It seems clear that such control by the advisor, although offered with intent to help, limited the independent initiative and the cultural/ language adaptation that could emerge from the young mediators themselves. Several of school 10's mediators —many of them white/Anglo and female— had become quite skilled and confident in carrying out the designated process, while others remained somewhat less involved and less comfortable with their responsibilities.

In schools 10 and 12, a few mediators were scheduled each day to be on duty as monitors in the school lunchroom and on the playground during lunch recess. In the lunchrooms, the mediators assisted the adult lunch supervisors by monitoring peer behavior, and also by picking up garbage and wiping tables. At school 12, the mediators were the only students allowed to be on their feet or moving freely during lunch. On the playground, school 12's mediators sometimes helped to organize the younger children, for example getting them lined up for games or for returning inside. Other children knew who these mediators are, and the mediators certainly felt important. As one of school 12's advisors said, "the children [conflict managers] are really helping to keep the peace here" (5/19/98). However, the mediators in schools 10 and 12 had little opportunity to think critically together or to take autonomous initiative, and the 'peace' they kept seemed considerably less than democratic: mediators often helped adult staff to *limit* the autonomy of their peers.

In schools 3 and 18, adult conflict resolution advisors took considerable responsibility for different kinds of conflict-related activity at their schools. The mediators, however, took on little visible leadership. Most of school 3's mediators had a scheduled meeting with their advisor, during the last 25 minutes of school once a week, but it frequently was cancelled in favor of competing activities, especially preparation for the state-mandated fourth grade proficiency test. In both of these schools, teachers were reluctant to allow mediations to occur in mediator's classrooms or during class time. School 18 had limited funding for after-school activity buses, but the principal chose to allocate that time (bus space) only to a tutoring program for proficiency test preparation. The stakes for improving scores on these tests are very high under Cleveland's new superintendent, even for school 3 whose 1997-98 pass rate was significantly above the district average and especially for school 18 whose rate was significantly below the average (CPS "Accountability Evaluation Report," Spring 1998). In spite of evidence to the contrary, such as that of Williams (above), there is a widespread perception at these (and many) schools that service activity, even conflict resolution, is an "extra" that competes with, rather than enhancing, academic achievement. When the pressure to perform on these standardized tests is strong, there is very little space for any student roles other than the standard role of obedient learner. As one principal put it, while her school was preparing for the proficiency test, "we didn't have *time* for conflict!" Conflicts involving students at schools 3 and 18 were generally perceived as "discipline" problems to be handled by adults.

School 18's advisor functioned as the all-around manager of student "misbehavior" at her school. Teachers sent resistant or angry students to the advisor's room for her to counsel, while simultaneously teaching her own primary grade class. She engaged these children in the activities she prepared for the conflict mediators, such as reading stories or watching films on conflict resolution, or making peace-related posters. Several of these students —nearly all black boys— told her that they wished they could become part of her conflict manager group. The themes in the posters the children had made, displayed on school walls, emphasized self-control and good manners more than active problem solving. For example: "Peaceful hands, peaceful feet. Let us walk the [school 18] beat."

School 3 mediators used mediation more at home than at school. When I asked them to show and tell what they did, mediators told me "we tell students not

to fight” and role-played an abbreviated process that eliminated the problem-solving steps, substituting peer pressure to apologize and shake hands (5/20/98). This advisor had a set of “assertive discipline” expectations and consequences for infractions prominently displayed on her own classroom wall. Assertive discipline’s emphasis on inflexible rules and teacher control seems quite contradictory to the spirit and practice of peer mediation, but no student, teacher, or administrator remarked on any such tension during observations or interviews: all assumed that this program’s emphasis should be on changing *children’s* behavior, not on changing adults’ behavior or authority relations.

The peer mediation programs, as interpreted at these four schools, seemed to help make the schools more peaceful, on the surface. However, they did not tap the potential of peer mediation service learning to help diverse children to develop their confidence as active contributors to democratic problem solving. Citizenship education was interpreted in these programs in much the same way it was practiced in their surrounding school contexts: it emphasized student compliance, the dominant culture’s middle class manners, and students’ acquisition of narrow skills, more than the development of democratic initiative or organizational change.

Critical analysis and problem solving:

Enactment of community-building, nonviolence, and service principles, even where culturally inclusive, is not the same as enacting democratic principles. Student participation in collective decision-making doubtless would be facilitated by a sense of community and a nonviolent environment. However, democracy also requires structured opportunities for investigating problems, airing and substantiating different viewpoints, and discussing solution options. Not all decisions can be made democratically in schools, in the narrow sense of majority rule by students: there are other stakeholders, such as parents and teachers, whose depth of knowledge legitimately influences many decisions. However, certainly children can and should practice some kinds of democratic decision making in school. Students learn democratic participation and leadership skills by using them — including guided practice in diverse contexts, feedback, self-evaluation, discussion, and problem-solving (Battistoni 1997, Constitutional Rights Foundation 1993). Action programs such as peer mediation services can provide active students with opportunities to test the consequences

of their own democratically-made decisions when these are actually implemented in their school communities.

Schools traditionally emphasize adult control more than development of students' autonomous self-control: discipline is usually managed by adults, in ways that may foster neither learning nor democracy (Schimmel 1997). In this context, one powerful instance of democratization is to give students significant input in creating codes of conduct, and in deciding how to handle infractions of group norms (Hess 1997, Penrock 1997). Cleveland's CCR encourages peer mediators to decide together (in each school team) what the consequences should be when the mediators themselves engage in violent behavior. This kind of problem solving is an opportunity to put theory into practice, and to be self-critical in applying values of nonviolence and personal responsibility to oneself. Everybody who is alive has conflicts, and none of us handle those conflicts beautifully 100% of the time. Especially where school staffs do choose mediators from the whole school population, including children whose peer influence sometimes has been more "negative" than "positive" (following program guidelines), it is inevitable that the student mediators will sometimes get into conflicts that they don't resolve nonviolently. Consulting with peer mediators regarding the consequences of their human mistakes helps them to think critically about their own actions and the complex reasons for those actions. This helps to avoid simplistic analyses of school conflict that blame and marginalize 'violent' individuals and ignore underlying social problems.

When students share responsibility for discussing and resolving community problems in a democratic context, they practice listening to and talking with persons who hold different viewpoints.

They come to recognize that conflict is part of public life. ... They consciously analyze positions, interests, and power relationships. As they develop skills in perspective-taking and data-gathering, they experience firsthand the complexities of public problem-solving (Avery 1994, p.49).

When service learning programs build in such opportunities for critical reflection, students can learn to notice, investigate, and analyze social problems (also Burns 1998, Hedin & Conrad 1992). Such skills can be developed in regular academic classes to some degree, but the underlying values and beliefs about self

and others are more readily internalized when they are embodied in tangible action.

Recall, however, the coexistence of any citizenship education program with the hidden curriculum of implicit modeling and practice, in regular school activity and in the imperfect democracies beyond. Diverse students in these programs will draw upon different personal histories and strengths, and they will see, in the communities around them, different models and different structures of opportunity for people like themselves to apply their skills in real life situations.

[A citizenship education program should cultivate] the talents, ideas, and experiences of groups that have been marginalized in the formal political structure.... A program would need to address current political inequities in an open and honest manner. The alienation and distrust often expressed by 'castelike' groups are based on the grim realities of political life. We cannot change those realities overnight, but we can provide an open and supportive forum in which students can express their views, and we can make special efforts to find opportunities for political participation that will match the needs, interests, and perspectives of those students (Avery 1994 p.51).

In a political world that has so often excluded many social groups from full participation, service learning programs have an important but paradoxical role to play. On the one hand, a program such as peer mediation can give a much wider selection of young people opportunities for skill development and reflective action. At the same time, a program cannot effectively ignore the ways gender, race, economic inequality, and other factors have influenced the visible opportunities that various individuals have to exercise their skills and to carry real citizen influence in the wider society. Genuine critical reflection involving diverse students would inevitably surface such difficult questions.

Conflict resolution programs highlight this paradox, because conflict and control in school and society are often closely associated with gender and racial identities. School discipline policies and conflict resolution programs often focus (implicitly or explicitly) on males, especially visible "minority" males, because data on (punished) school violence, vandalism, and suspension highlight the involvement of these populations (Bettman & Moore 1994, Leal 1994). Working class and minority youth are disproportionately blamed and labeled 'difficult' by

educators and even by their peers; they often suffer the most severe negative consequences of traditional discipline practices (Brantlinger 1994, Larson 1991, Noguera 1995). The less-disruptive resistance that is more commonly associated with female students, such as absence from school or nonparticipation in activities, is often disregarded in such policies (Bergsgaard 1997, Slee 1995). Less-visible violence problems that contribute to girls' exclusion, such as sexual harassment, also are often ignored by school personnel (Mahaffey 1992, Stein 1995). Peer mediation programs *can* help to overcome some of these equity and access problems — but not automatically, only through careful inclusivity and collective problem solving.

Some of the peer mediation programs in this study were able to recruit and foster positive involvement of both girls and boys from a variety of racial and economic backgrounds: in these cases, critical joint reflection had the potential to really identify and analyze the particular challenges of conflict, violence, and discipline in those school communities. Although not perfectly inclusive or constantly critical in their problem-solving work, the cases of school 5, 14, 7, & 16 demonstrate some of the challenges and the potential power of such opportunities for youth involvement in democratic discussion and decision making. In these schools, some young mediators were beginning to take some leadership initiative, in their own groups and in their schools. Advisors took a facilitative role, rather than a traditional 'teaching' stance. Mediators took time together for self-critique and peer feedback regarding their successes and difficulties in handling the particular conflicts with which they had become involved.

Compared with the schools discussed earlier, the young people in schools 5, 14, 7, & 16 had more self-directed opportunities to discuss both their own work as peacemakers and broader problems with conflict in their school communities, and to have input regarding their own service activities in relation to those problems. Schools 7 & 16 each involved some of their mediators in some critical reflective work and decision-making, but (in different ways) limited which students could participate in their programs. Schools 5 and 14's programs were more inclusive in their mediator group membership, but many of the children were prevented from exercising broad participation in their schools.

In schools 5 and 14, schools demonstrated a certain commitment to the program by allocating regular school hours for weekly "conflict classes" among mediators and program advisors. These sessions involved some critical discussion and decision-making exercises regarding school conflict and violence problems,

as well as community education activities such as making posters. School 14's mediators became particularly skilled, as a result of these sessions, in active listening and other communication strategies. They learned to project their voices authoritatively, in order to make effective presentations to a parent group and to lead lessons in their peers' classrooms. After visiting every classroom in the school, they met for joint policy discussions with the school's student council. In both of these schools, mediators shared some responsibilities with overlapping groups of "student leaders" associated with the school's guidance programs. School 5's advisor allowed some mediations to be conducted in her classroom while she did other work, during her planning periods. School 14's advisor coordinated mediation referrals via drop boxes, through which students could request peer assistance in various locations. The mediator groups in these two schools included a wide selection of diverse students, including some just learning English (and mediating in other languages) at school 5. However, only the oldest students at school 5, the fifth graders, were allowed to exercise their mediation skills outside their classrooms. Many mediators and most adults at these schools assumed that younger students were less capable, and that the positive liberty to take peer leadership roles was a privilege to which access should be limited. As one mediator at school 5 explained (5/19/98), "I think the program's perfect, except we don't get to do much."

In schools 14 and 5, several adult staff were reluctant to allow mediators time or support to offer their services, either in their own classrooms or beyond, except during lunch and recess periods. This resistance was particularly strong around the time of proficiency test preparation, causing both programs to be scaled back during the late-winter months. In common with the schools discussed earlier, several staff members here viewed peer mediation as merely an extra-curricular club or a set of student monitors. For example in school 5, the principal described peer mediation as one of the "intermediary steps on the way up to my office:" he believed that mediators would counsel their peers "that [violence] is not the cool thing to do..." (5/19/98). This shows some misunderstanding of the mediation process — assisted negotiation should be quite different from counseling. At the same time some mediators, particularly at school 5, were beginning to initiate their own involvement in helping peers to solve problems. Although the whole school staffs had not been particularly supportive, the conflict resolution advisors at schools 14 and 5 had helped these children to gain a sense of responsibility, confidence, and efficacy. One by one, a

few adults were observing these young mediators' successes and thereby becoming informed and persuaded to support their work.

In school 7, the mediator group elected student leaders such as president, vice president, secretary, and committee chairpersons. Although the advisor exerted considerable influence on the agenda, these children took responsibility for running their own meetings, involving group members in discussions, setting priorities, and organizing and carrying out tasks. Several members of this group, however, were remarkably withdrawn, taking little independent initiative compared with their peers. The program so far had exerted little influence on the school. One reason was that the advisor had selected mediators with a "nonviolence test" (ignoring CCR guidelines). The children who gave nonviolent answers to a conflict management questionnaire were disproportionately white, female, and quiet compared to their school population, and not particularly influential among their peers. These children were not necessarily more nonviolent: such assessment instruments tend to emphasize behaviors more often associated with boys (and school disruption), such as physical fighting, rather than equally hurtful behaviors often associated with girls, such as covert mockery or exclusion (Bergsgaard 1997). The peer mediators at school 7 were engaging in some relatively autonomous reflection and decision-making, but only those students who were seen as models of the non-disruptive behavior valued by adult school leaders were allowed to participate.

School 16 highlights a major dilemma in balancing the competing priorities of schools — the relationship of active service learning to unequal student status and to academic learning. There were about 24 peer mediators at school 16, providing mediations every day by late spring of the program's first year. Mediators had demonstrated and explained their new service at two of the regularly-held school meetings. The principal supported and promoted the program and used the service regularly:

"If a kid comes in and says someone's going to bother me, I think someone's mad at me, or they're going to fight me.... I say let's get a conflict manager or mediator and we'll get you together and talk.... [The peer mediation service] frees me up because instead of taking care of all the problems, I say OK, you take care of this.... It helps solve problems" (5/21/99).

About a third of the teaching staff were also referring conflicts to the peer mediators, and students themselves often requested mediation assistance. Teachers described being surprised and delighted at how effective the newly-trained student mediators were in assisting their peers to get conflicts resolved.

School 16's mediation meetings were held after school every other week, with a late bus provided. About two thirds of the mediators were also safety patrol guards, who met with the same advisor after school on the opposite weeks. Meeting agendas involved the student mediators in evaluating their responses to their own conflicts, their skills and strategies for handling mediations they were conducting, and "a little personal training, too, about how to speak to the children, your voice tone, body language, and being as kind and courteous as you possibly can with the other children..." (advisor, 5/21/99). The critical reflection in school 16's mediator group was mainly confined to self-evaluation, not self-regulation or deliberation on larger community problems, although some collective deliberation did occasionally occur at school meetings.

By all accounts, this was already a very successful extra-curricular program. However, in a different way from school 7, the group of students at school 16 who had the opportunity to participate in this program were not typical of the school's student population. The advisor gave her teacher colleagues the following direction regarding which students in their classes to invite to join the mediation team:

Choose "someone who is able to keep up with their work, someone who is able to communicate with other children, and, you know, someone who is interested in doing this" (5/21/99).

Mostly academically-successful students who rarely got into trouble were chosen to be mediators. The 4 (of 25) who were to some degree "negative leaders" showed the most marked change in attitude and skill development as the program began, but one of these was "fired" from the program soon after the training and the others were not allowed to be very active mediators. The advisor explained, "a lot of the negative leaders are ... behind in their [academic] work as well, and I don't know if it would be helpful or harmful to [such students] to be part of this program"(5/21/99).

Even the teachers who supported the mediation program viewed it as irrelevant to academic success and were reluctant to sacrifice any classroom time

for conflict resolution activities. Mediators met as a group only after school and offered mediation services during lunch, recess, and after school. A teacher who told me enthusiastically, "Every school should have [this peer mediation program] and no school should be without it," described the active mediator in her classroom as an unusually committed and talented student who took responsibility for her own "make-up" work: "I mean she can keep up. She talks to me after school. If she doesn't understand, she will hunt me down and she will ask questions, she's intelligent. I think for the initial training of any conflict mediator, any class, they need to be able to keep up" (5/21/99). Although there were peer mediators in every grade 3-5 classroom, even these academically successful students were generally discouraged from mediating conflicts during class time.

Understandably, academic work is framed as the primary responsibility of all students in most schools, and school 16's mediators (even more explicitly than mediators in the other schools) understood that they could not participate unless they kept up academically. The question is one of balancing priorities. Although there is evidence that service learning activity can help to re-engage students in schoolwork and to enhance academically-relevant skills, overcoming the challenge of reduced time for academic tasks (Battistoni 1997, Williams 1992), this is neither well-known by educators nor perfectly substantiated in every age group and context. Thus there is a temptation to limit access to mediation activity to the part of the school population that may need it the least — those who are already positively engaged and successful in school.

The case of school 16 demonstrates how quickly such a program can take off, and how much easier it is to include the students in critical reflection and autonomous problem-solving, if it does begin by selecting high status students. Before the program began, most of these students already had relatively strong self-confidence, and the school's adult staff was already open to giving such compliant students responsibility and liberty to pursue their special activities. However, limiting access to program activity to these high-status students does not resolve the basic problem, that conflict resolution is seen as extra-curricular and the core academic curriculum is seen as the highest priority activity. It also may limit lower-status students' access to program benefits, if their sub-cultures or peer friendship groups do not intersect much with the lives of the active student mediators.

Students taking responsibility, sharing authority:

A peer mediation service program can provide opportunities for active students to develop their democratically-relevant inclinations and capacities, well beyond taking responsibility for their own behavior. The National Council for the Social Studies calls for students to share authority for solving real problems in their schools, especially where those problems are related to challenges that also arise outside in the adult political community.

Schools, like society, have a system of justice and notions of equity. Some of the issues facing them are manifestations of problems confronting society as a whole. Examples of such problems are the need to eliminate racial injustice, crime, and inequalities of treatment toward men and women. *Students need to feel a part of the system of justice,* and they need to tackle the problems within the school setting in order to gain experience in the agony and frustration of democratic decision making. (NCSS 1979, emphasis added)

Problems of violence, including intolerance and racial, homophobic, and gender-based harassment, are clearly evident both inside and outside schools. The system of justice for handling such problems in school is certainly a context in which students learn something about justice and about themselves as members of political communities. Under what conditions, and in what ways, could some measure of the responsibility for confronting such problems be shared with elementary school children?

Although conflict resolution certainly involves a set of skills, these learning goals are wrapped up in something bigger — a set of value-laden beliefs, self-concepts, and inclinations that would lead a person to actually use those skills voluntarily in various situations. Skills can be developed through demonstration and practice with feedback. In contrast, beliefs and inclinations are values that are influenced by context and internalized over time. Catherine Lewis distinguishes “skill,” which is relatively easy to develop, from the more elusive “will” to handle conflicts nonviolently, and shows how “schools that meet children’s basic psychological needs for autonomy, belonging, and competence ... may foster children’s will to solve conflicts” (1996, p.92). Lewis describes a Japanese preschool context that helped children to internalize the “will” to take peacemaking initiative, by delegating real responsibility to them for managing

conflicts and by critically discussing with them particular classroom conflict episodes in which they had been active or passive participants. Peer mediation, if it involves the delegation of authority for problem-solving and active service responsibilities, goes well beyond skill development. The mediators, and the peers they assist, are likely to internalize the values they find themselves practicing autonomously — especially nonviolence and a sense of themselves as citizens who are capable and responsible to deal with problems.

In schools 13 and 17, diverse and inclusive groups of peer mediators were beginning to take tangible responsibility for making decisions and for helping to resolve problems in their school communities. At school 17, some staff referred conflicts to mediation, especially where mediators were enrolled in their classrooms, but more often the mediators initiated their own involvement by walking up to peers in conflict and offering to help. School 17's principal highlighted the program during whole-school meetings with students and parents. He often reminded the mediators that they played an important role in improving the school's attendance record, by helping their peers to solve problems so that nobody would be suspended. The conflict resolution advisor served on the school's discipline committee, and had the agreement of most staff and parents to incorporate mediation into the school's discipline process. Mediators meetings were held during regular school hours, with parents invited to attend at any time. Mediators and teachers both reported that virtually 100% of conflicts in which mediators got involved were resolved completely, so that those problems did not resurface. A teacher reflected, "Some [students in conflict] that I *didn't* send to mediation, I probably should have, because they went right back to bickering the next day" (5/21/99). Besides offering mediation services, the mediators led conflict education activities with younger children. One mediator explained, "I like working with the kindergarteners, because they look up to us" (5/21/99). Teachers described the remarkable changes they had observed in their shy students and so-called negative leaders after they became mediators. For example, "You can tell that he feels proud to be a mediator.... Over all, he's a lot more mature and responsible" (5/19/99). Given tangible responsibility, these students became more responsible people, more of the time.

In school 13, mediators met weekly for discussion, self-evaluative skill development, and joint planning. For example, the group negotiated a policy for handling mediators' infractions of school norms regarding conflict behavior (suspension from mediation activities for two weeks), and the principal actively

supported that policy. The principal illustrated the impact of this self-regulation on a student she had seen recently: "I know that a boy who did hit some difficulty backed off very rapidly because he was scared that he was going to be removed from the team [temporarily]" (6/5/98). School 13's mediation team offered mediation both in response to teacher or principal referrals and by directly offering help to peers when they observed problems. Teachers were beginning to support the authority of the peer mediation process by discussing it directly, for example asking students whether their problems had been solved rather than either asking them to repeat confidential details or prescribing their own solutions. Mediators prepared a presentation for the school's parent organization, and planned and carried out a bake sale to raise money for badges that would identify them as mediators. They went on a field trip to meet peer mediators at another school, and were considering for the following year a joint peace project to be conducted with parents in the community. The conflict resolution advisor met regularly with the guidance advisor: together, they arranged for mediators to make presentations in all of the school's classrooms during the time normally allocated to guidance lessons.

School 17 and 13's programs were able to be more inclusive than some others because they met during school. This meeting time was itself an indication of support from the building principals and union representatives who created the timetable, and with this leadership the programs had the support of others on the staff. Students who became mediators came from all sectors of these school communities, and had engaged in the whole spectrum of compliant, resistant, and conflictual behavior. At school 13, for example, hearing impaired students who used American Sign Language were included in the program. At first, it was difficult for these students to completely catch on to the process, since it had been taught in spoken English (albeit with sign translation) in ways that emphasized verbal skills, but their teachers provided extra support during and after the training. These children were given responsibilities, like the other mediators, to make (supported) presentations to students in other (hearing impaired) classrooms. Eventually, these children got into a conflict themselves, and finally the lights really went on. The teacher encouraged them to get their notes from the mediation training and to sit down and work through their problem. When they came back to the advisor to debrief, it was clear that they were very pleased with themselves and had come to understand the process more deeply, in terms of their own modes of thinking and communicating.

Advisors and other staff at these two schools were taking the risks and doing the work to keep so-called negative leaders involved in their mediation programs. School 13's principal explained that without access to such a program,

“some of the more negative kids stay negative because they figure they can never get to the top. ‘No matter what I do, the teacher’s never going to pick me anyway,’ sort of thing.... Because some of these kids are more eloquent in their speech, I mean they really have the ability.... We find it’s primarily boys, for some reason, that’s what I get in the office here... and so we can turn that around” (6/5/98).

At schools 13 and 17, the most active mediators were boys as well as girls, and they reflected the range of populations in their schools. Thus when mediators got involved in helping their friends and classmates to handle conflicts, they were reaching a similarly wide-ranging population. As they began to take actions with which their friends and associates were unfamiliar (mediating conflicts), they did encounter some resistance: in both schools, mediators told me that some students thought mediation was “weird” or “a joke.” However, once these other children actually saw the process work and understood that it was an alternative to getting into trouble with adults, most of them decided they liked it and often soon came back for additional services.

At these schools, diverse groups of student mediators were treated as leaders and given tangible responsibility. They were guided and coached by adults, but they made quite a few decisions for themselves, including decisions about how to interpret and adapt the mediation process in their community/ cultural context, and how to confront some important problems in their communities such as school attendance and violence. These mediation programs come the closest to implementing the programs envisioned by the Cleveland Public Schools Center for Conflict Resolution — involving diverse children in democratic deliberation and in taking autonomous action to help improve their communities.

Discussion:

This paper has examined ten peer mediation programs in urban public elementary schools in the United States, showing how peer mediation can be evaluated in light of democratic service learning principles. All of the peer mediation programs examined here embodied notions of citizenship, but only a

few of them embodied "democratic" citizenship, by including critical reflection, decision making, and autonomous action by the young people themselves. The strongest element of these peer mediation programs was their emphasis on building peaceful communities, especially the training led by urban youth and the facilitation of mediators' and other students' skill development for conflict management. However, in some cases the community-building values reinforced by particular programs were dominated by a fairly small sector of their schools' gender/ cultural populations and reinforced existing structural hierarchies. Furthermore, by itself community is not sufficient to create democracy. Several programs were beginning to delegate meaningful authority to student mediators to take autonomous action outside of traditional student roles, to apply and demonstrate their skills for the benefit of others in their communities, but some school leaders limited the types of students that were allowed to expand their horizons in this way. A weak link, common to most of these programs, was the attention to critical reflection and problem solving (beyond individual self-evaluation for skill development): in particular, these programs would benefit by examining and strengthening their links to formal classroom curriculum activities, with which students and teachers occupy most of their time.

There are several challenges that emerge in relation to the development and implementation of programs such as peer mediation in urban public school contexts. The first involves fairness. The Cleveland Public Schools CCR program is extremely popular with virtually 100% of its active peer mediators. As in many service learning activities, those offering the (mediation) service get the most sustained, frequent, and satisfying opportunities to practice new skills and roles, and thus gain the most competence and self-confidence from the program (Gentry & Benenson 1992, Metis Associates 1989, Shulman 1996). It would be a pity if such opportunities were not available to a wide range of children.

The second problem, related to the first, is the capacity of mediation programs to serve (that is, to create safer environments for) the whole 'client' population of the school. It is worth remembering that conflict resolution education, like any democratic education, inescapably affirms certain values and cultural styles, and (implicitly) tries to change or replace others. It is not clear that a group of compliant and academically successful students, like that at school 16, or a group that scores high before the program on a peaceful behavior assessment as in school 7, would necessarily be able to establish a rapport with more diverse peers, sufficient to influence whole school populations to change

their ways of handling conflict. For both practical and ethical reasons, it is problematic to limit extra-curricular democratic learning opportunities to only those students who are already seen by adult educators as 'good citizens.'

The third challenge is the capacity of a program to grow and develop in the context of a school timetable, especially in the age of high-stakes standardized achievement testing. The vast majority of time in an elementary school day is classroom time. Mediators, just like other children, need some time to relax. How far can a mediation service develop, and what kinds of thinking/ learning can it facilitate, if the program remains resolutely extra-curricular, squeezed into 25-minute lunchtimes and after-school activity periods? Service and conflict education are more likely to facilitate sustainable and transferable learning if they involve frequent opportunities for guided critical reflection and problem solving (Battistoni 1997, Bickmore 1997 & 1999b, Carruthers et. al. 1996, Kahne & Westheimer 1996). In North American schools the time, the allocation of teachers' main responsibilities, and the conceptual frameworks to facilitate such deliberation and practice are embedded in what is taught (and how) in the classroom, especially in language arts, social studies, classroom human relations, and regular discipline procedures. It would be difficult for any school to overcome the typical hidden curriculum of passive citizenship, unless it built conflict management activity, and critical reflection about conflict, into the timetable, into the core curriculum, and into the lives of the whole range of students.

A fourth challenge is the goal of helping diverse students to learn the basics of democratic citizenship in a less-than-perfectly democratic system. How can a voluntary peer-assisted process for handling conflict flourish within a basically coercive system? For example, peer mediation at several of these schools was an alternative to disciplinary suspension from school, and it is well-known that such punishments are not always equitably administered (e.g. Noguera 1995, Slee 1995). Critical thinking and participatory problem solving simply cannot be learned without opportunities to critique and to address meaningful problems, such as the reasons for violence and the system of justice for handling it. Urban public schools, especially at the elementary level, often seem to create safe and non-disruptive (but consequently unstimulating or exclusionary) environments, at the expense of these critical learning opportunities (Houser 1996). It can be terrifying to trust a wide variety of children, especially to share power with those who are sometimes resistant to teacher authority — even more so in stressed urban

environments. Yet children are unlikely to become responsible people unless they are given responsibility (Kamii 1991, Lewis 1996). The young student mediators in many of these Cleveland elementary schools have shown that they can indeed rise to our expectations, if we respect their potential and give them a chance to help their communities.

The training these young mediators and their advisors received from the Cleveland Public Schools Center for Conflict Resolution both demonstrated and coached them to develop autonomy by sharing authority and making joint decisions: as of last fall, the individual school programs had not generally implemented this aspect of the program. There is a heavy weight of tradition and habit in schools, exacerbated by the newly-strengthened demands for centrally-controlled academic achievement testing, that can get in the way of democratization efforts. By being explicit about the cultural and political goals underlying peer mediation programs, educators may be more able to focus their energies on the important challenges, thereby helping to displace this weight to some degree and making a little more space for learning democracy.

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