

# Violence, Conflict, and Community Service-Learning: Measuring Impact on Students and Community

*Erica Scharrer, Leda Cooks*

## Abstract

University students were involved in the design, implementation, and assessment of a program in local schools on conflict and violence in the media and in one's own life. The community partners were sixth graders in five area classrooms in the community surrounding the university. This study assesses the impact of a project-based community service-learning (CSL) partnership on both the university students involved and the sixth graders for whom the project was designed. The data suggest that both the sixth graders/community members and the university students learned valuable information and developed critical thinking skills from participation in the project. The analysis of the data gives us important insights into the ways such work can and does make an impact on all parties involved.

## Introduction

Community service-learning (CSL) has been defined in the National and Community Service Act of 1990 as a method

(A) under which students or participants learn and develop through active participation in thoughtfully organized service that: (i) is conducted in and meets the needs of a community; (ii) is coordinated with an elementary school, secondary school, institution of higher education, or community service program, and with the community; and (iii) helps foster civic responsibility; and

(B) that (i) is integrated into and enhances the academic curriculum of the students, or the educational components of the community service program in which the participants are enrolled; and (ii) provides structured time for the students or participants to reflect on the service experience. (*Section 101, 23*)

Thus, community service-learning involves extending the classroom-based teaching and learning model into the community so that students may assist community members in addressing locally recognized needs and interests in a manner that enriches the material students learn in the classroom. The reflection element provides an opportunity for students to make classroom and community connections as well as to think about their own learning and their interactions with others in the community setting.

There are three main constituencies in community service-learning (CSL): faculty, students, and community members. Most research in service-learning scholarship focuses on only one of the three entities. The vast majority of studies conducted on CSL impact examine effects on the students participating (*e.g.*, Batenburg and Pope 1997; Bringle and Hatcher 1996; Eyler and Giles 1999; Gelmon *et al.* 2001; Giles and Eyler 1994; Renner and Bush 1997). These studies have found measurable gains in such key outcomes (“improvements”) as learning course material, commitment to volunteering or trying to “make a difference,” tolerance for diversity, honing skills (organizational skills, working with groups, public speaking, etc.), and understanding application of concepts, theories, and material learned in the classroom to a practical setting. There is growing and persuasive evidence, therefore, of numerous and important benefits to students participating in CSL. Students, however, are only one constituent of CSL.

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Relatively few previous studies have researched the community members involved (*Eyler et al.* 2001). Any data drawn from community members are typically confined to assessments of the value of the CSL initiative (*e.g.*, Bringle and Kremer 1993; Cohen and Kinsey 1994; Driscoll *et al.* 1996) rather than pre- and post-CSL measures of the actual impact<sup>1</sup> of the initiative on the community.

The present study includes the impact of a project-based CSL experience on both the university students involved in planning and carrying it out and the community members for whom the project was designed. Our measures of impact on community members go beyond self-reported evaluation of the CSL project to measure actual changes in their knowledge, attitudes, and

beliefs. Such assessment-based research is essential in furthering and refining claims supporting adoption of CSL in schools and other educational institutions, community agencies, and organizations. The project is part of a long-term (six-year) partnership between the authors and several local schools.

The CSL experience analyzed here is called the Media Literacy and Violence Prevention Program (MLVPP). Participating university students are involved in the design, implementation, and assessment of an in-school curriculum unit on conflict and violence in the media and in one's own life. The community partners were sixth graders in five area classrooms in the community surrounding the university. University students who were enrolled in one of three courses, TV Violence, Conflict and Mediation, and Public Speaking, had the option of earning an additional course credit for participating in the CSL project. This option gave students the opportunity to apply what they've been learning about interpersonal conflict, media violence, and public speaking. Working in groups, they created a short curriculum in which sixth graders learn about designated topics and university students learn from the opinions and experiences of the sixth graders. After designing the curriculum, the university students actually teach the unit and reflect on the entire process.

In the curriculum, university students shared with community sixth graders some of what they had learned about interpersonal conflicts and their mediation or resolution and media portrayals of conflict and violence and their potential effects. They also applied public speaking and presentational skills by leading discussions in classroom settings. In this article, we explore the learning process of both the university students and the sixth graders (the community members).

### **Theoretical Frameworks and Prior Research**

A number of CSL research studies informed the procedures we used to measure the impact of university students' participation in this CSL project. We borrow most heavily from the assessment monograph of Gelmon and colleagues (2001). They introduce five overarching issues to consider in assessing the impact of CSL on students: the acquisition of knowledge, perceptions of self and others, encouragement of "pro-social attitudes and behaviors" (p. 20), fostering citizenship, and consideration of background characteristics of students. Gelmon and colleagues provide specific measures that researchers can use to take a wide

and comprehensive view of the impact of CSL on students. We've adapted many of their closed-ended survey items for use in this study.

The comparatively small amount of previous research assessing community members has determined that they typically give high marks to CSL projects and the students involved (*Eyler et al. 2001*). Yet, beyond satisfaction or evaluations of the usefulness of projects, another important issue remains. In this study, we assess learning (as measured through changes in knowledge, attitudes, and beliefs about a subject) on the part of the community members as well as the university students.

### The CSL Project

**Basic structure and overview:** Participating university students worked in teams to implement the curriculum that they had spent the earlier part of the semester designing, starting with materials created by former university students who had engaged in the project. The materials included a reading packet written in easy-to-understand language that introduced models and concepts in the study of media violence and interpersonal conflict; interactive, role-playing exercises for the sixth graders to engage in; discussion questions; media content to analyze; and a creative media production exercise. Before the program began, the faculty members met with some of the teachers and principals to get their input on the curriculum design and their advice for interactions with the sixth graders. This information was applied to all classroom settings so that the program would be administered consistently. The university students met hourly once a week in a CSL colloquium (meeting) run by faculty (the authors), as well as more informally outside school in groups, to plan and design the materials used to interact with the sixth graders, to practice in-school presentations and assign roles, and to reflect with one another on their experiences. Discussion topics also included pedagogical techniques for working with preadolescents and fielding potential “hot topics” or difficult situations they might encounter (e.g., when a sixth grader has experienced real violence in his/her home life or has a parent in jail). They formed groups of three or four—each comprising at least one person from each course (TV Violence, Conflict and Mediation, Public Speaking)—and each group worked consistently with one community classroom.

The in-school sessions were conducted entirely by the groups of university students. When the in-school presentations were occurring (i.e., when the curriculum was being taught to the sixth graders), all university-based participants met weekly to reflect on how the program was going, to problem solve difficult situations involving sensitive interactions with the sixth graders (e.g., reports of witnessing real violence), and to plan for subsequent sessions. The faculty members and two participating graduate students also observed the in-school sessions. Faculty members and graduate student assistants videotaped the sessions, took notes, and offered feedback immediately afterward and later in the colloquium. The videotapes of the sessions were viewed in the following week's colloquium to facilitate discussion of interactions with the sixth graders and to give specific evidence of successes or challenges.

The university students made six one-hour visits to the sixth-grade classrooms in order to implement the curriculum that they had designed. A pretest questionnaire was administered on the first day (before beginning) to measure the sixth graders' preexisting knowledge and critical thinking about the topic. After the initial data collection, the curriculum was implemented. The posttest questionnaire was administered by the sixth grade teacher within one week after the visits from the university students (and therefore the curriculum) had ended.

***The curriculum itself:*** In the curriculum for sixth graders designed by the CSL university students, the conflict and mediation element was introduced first and consisted of discussions of how the sixth graders defined conflict, their thoughts about why conflicts occur, and their past experiences with conflict. The university students also introduced, defined, and had the sixth graders apply several models that were appropriate for children in the mediation of conflict. For instance, the reading packet contained a description of the lens model (*Wilmot and Hocker 2000*), which suggests that people in conflict consider the issue from one another's perspective, as well as from the perspective of the relationship between the two. A favorite of the sixth graders was a model that we called the LTA model, which stood for listen to the other party when in conflict, then think about the options and consequences for acting, and then act in a manner that best considers one's own and the other's goals. Both the university students and the sixth graders created and acted out scenarios in

which they applied the principles they were learning. In order to segue to the media literacy segment of the program, the sixth graders were asked to think of ways that conflicts are resolved or mediated on television, in video games, and in the movies.

The media literacy element of the curriculum then focused on ways of showing violence in the media and whether those depictions could encourage or discourage a negative effect on audiences. Four of the five factors that are identified in the National Television Violence Study (*NTVS 1998*) as constituting particularly high-risk ways of showing violence to older children and adolescents (ages seven to eighteen) were discussed. These factors were classified as exceptionally problematic because they are associated with a higher likelihood of the most disruptive type of effect on audiences, learning aggression (rather than desensitization or fright). The factors are: violence perpetrated by appealing characters, violence that is rewarded, violence that is justified, and violence without consequences. In other words, when a TV program, movie, or video game shows violence in one of these ways (as rewarded, justified, without consequences, or perpetrated by “good guys”), the likelihood of the audience member learning aggression is increased. Each factor was defined in the reading packet and was discussed with the sixth graders, who provided examples from media content that they had seen and then addressed whether those depictions were realistic compared to real-life conflicts. The factors were then identified and analyzed in media clips shown to the class.

The media clips selected for analysis were thirty-second to two-minute snippets from popular television programs, movies, and video games that at least partially targeted a young audience. For example, sixth graders “deconstructed” clips from the movies *Shrek*, *A Christmas Story*, *Spy Kids*, and *The Lion King* in discussions led by the university students. To analyze the video clips, the sixth graders were asked to consider whether any or all of the high-risk portrayal factors were present and how conflict was mediated or addressed in the clip. Positive as well as negative features of the clip were discussed. The sixth graders also volunteered other critical observations about what they saw in response to an open-ended question.

## **Methodologies and Results**

We assessed the impact of the CSL experience on our university students and on the community that it is intended to serve

(the sixth graders). For the university students, we used a quantitative survey to compare the responses of the students enrolled in the three courses who chose the CSL component with those of students in the same three courses who did not. Dimensions of comparison include learning, community involvement, attitudes about service, and professional plans. All of the university students who were enrolled in the courses were given a learning inventory survey at the end of the semester, featuring Gelmon and colleagues' items (Gelmon *et al.* 2001). For the sixth graders we employed a mixed methods (quantitative and qualitative) pre- and postcurriculum survey to measure any change in the knowledge, attitudes, and beliefs on the topic of conflict and violence associated with their participation in the curriculum. We analyze potential changes in the sixth graders' learning about conflict and violence in order to estimate the impact of the CSL project on the community. Included in the surveys for both the university students and sixth graders are questions that assess whether, what, and how they learned from each other.

***Assessing university students: Differences between CSL participants and non-CSL participants:*** In the survey of the university students, all 60 students who were enrolled in the three courses (15 who opted for the CSL component and 45 who did not) were given a learning inventory survey, administered at the end of the semester. The survey featured closed-ended items that had previously been introduced by Gelmon and colleagues (2001). The dependent measures were the items that we had selected and, in most cases, revised to increase their relevance to our specific CSL experience, from the Gelmon and colleagues' community-based learning student survey. These items measured such "impact outcomes" as perspectives on the CSL course(s), attitudes toward community involvement, influence of the service experience on students' choice of profession, and students' reflections on their CSL experience.

The primary independent variable in the quantitative university-student-oriented portion of our study was participation in the CSL component of the courses. However, we also measured additional variables, including having volunteered in the community during the semester in another capacity and having done such volunteering in general in the past. The survey responses allowed us to make quantitative comparisons between the self-reported experiences and opinions of the CSL university students and

**Table 1. Independent t-tests comparing CSL-participating university students to non-CSL-participating university students enrolled in the same classes. 1 = strongly agree and 5 = strongly disagree.**

	Year 2 only		Years 1 and 2	
	CSL participants (N = 15) M (SD)	Non-CSL participants (N = 45) M (SD)	CSL participants (N = 35) M (SD)	Non-CSL participants (N = 82) M (SD)
Course allowed me to see the use of the subject matter in real life.	1.13 (0.35)	1.24 (0.53)	1.34 (0.48)	1.39 (0.56)
I'm aware of community needs related to the subject matter.	1.67 <sup>a</sup> (0.49)	1.96 <sup>a</sup> (0.80)	1.77 (0.60)	1.95 (0.78)
Course allowed me to see my own personal strengths and weaknesses.	1.73 (0.59)	1.76 (0.71)	2.06 (0.68)	1.94 (0.81)
Course helped me to define a profession for myself.	2.33 (1.12)	2.87 (0.94)	2.51 (1.01)	2.89 (0.99)
Course made me more marketable in a desired profession.	1.80 <sup>a</sup> (0.77)	2.09 <sup>a</sup> (0.92)	2.09 <sup>a</sup> (0.85)	2.32 <sup>a</sup> (0.95)
I developed a good relationship with the course instructor.	1.27 <sup>b</sup> (0.46)	1.64 <sup>b</sup> (0.68)	1.43 <sup>c</sup> (0.56)	1.83 <sup>c</sup> (0.80)
Course made me more aware of my own biases and prejudices.	2.07 (0.96)	2.11 (0.68)	2.20 (0.83)	2.09 (0.74)
Course helped me to learn how to plan and complete a project.	2.13 (0.83)	1.91 (0.73)	1.86 (0.63)	1.87 (0.73)
Course helped me to communicate my ideas in a real world context.	1.60 (0.51)	1.62 (0.65)	1.77 (0.55)	1.73 (0.61)
Course enhanced my leadership skills.	1.73 (0.70)	1.84 (0.80)	1.89 (0.63)	1.95 (0.68)
The other students in the course had an important role in my learning.	1.47 <sup>a</sup> (0.64)	1.84 <sup>a</sup> (0.80)	1.60 <sup>b</sup> (0.65)	1.87 <sup>b</sup> (0.73)
Course helped me to develop my problem-solving skills.	2.07 (0.80)	1.98 (0.69)	2.26 (0.66)	2.11 (0.75)
I probably won't volunteer after this course.	4.60 <sup>b</sup> (0.63)	4.02 <sup>b</sup> (1.53)	4.54 <sup>c</sup> (0.66)	4.01 <sup>c</sup> (1.31)
I feel I have a responsibility to serve the community.	1.60 <sup>c</sup> (0.74)	2.44 <sup>c</sup> (1.60)	1.60 <sup>c</sup> (0.65)	2.23 <sup>c</sup> (1.30)
Most people can make a difference in their community.	1.27 <sup>a</sup> (0.46)	1.73 <sup>a</sup> (1.66)	1.37 <sup>a</sup> (0.49)	1.65 <sup>a</sup> (1.28)
I can make a difference in my community.	1.33 <sup>b</sup> (0.49)	2.00 <sup>b</sup> (1.62)	1.37 <sup>b</sup> (0.49)	1.74 <sup>b</sup> (1.28)

If the means have a shared superscript, they are statistically different from one another.  
<sup>a</sup> $p < .10$       <sup>b</sup> $p < \text{or} = .05$       <sup>c</sup> $p < .01$



those of the non-CSL university students whose educational experience in the classes would otherwise be very similar. We also brought in these same data that we had gathered in last year's program, in which an additional 57 university students completed the questionnaire (20 CSL, 37 not). This adds to the sample size and reflects the continuing scope of the project. We present data from years 1 and 2 ( $N = 117$ ) in table 1.

Combined data from two consecutive years of the project indicate that among university students, CSL participants were significantly more likely than non-CSL participants to report that they had developed a good relationship with the instructor of their course ( $t = -3.11, p < .01$ ). Compared to their non-CSL-participating counterparts, CSL participants were also significantly more likely to report that other university students had a significant role in their learning ( $t = -1.95, p = .055$ ), that they have a responsibility to serve the community ( $t = -3.50, p < .01$ ), that they can make a difference to the community ( $t = -2.27, p < .05$ ), and that they will volunteer in the community in the future ( $t = 2.91, p < .01$ ).

Other differences between CSL participants and non-CSL participants were arrayed in a direction indicating the benefits of CSL participation for university students; these approached but did not meet traditional standards for statistical significance (see table 1). These items were belief that the course helped them define a planned profession ( $t = -1.85, p = .07$ ) and that people in general have the ability to make a difference to the community ( $t = -1.68, p = .10$ ).

Finally, a series of hierarchical regression analyses were run to determine whether participation in the CSL project would remain a significant predictor after taking into account demographic items, the course in which the university students were enrolled, and whether and how much the student was volunteering currently or had in the past. First, a regression analysis was done with all service to the community items grouped together to form an additive scale (plans to volunteer in the future, belief that people can make a difference in the community, belief that one can make a difference in the community, and belief in one's own responsibility to serve the community; Cronbach's  $\alpha = .85$ ). Participation in the CSL project, when entered as the last step after accounting for demographics, course, and volunteering, was, indeed, a significant, positive predictor of attitudes toward service to the community ( $\hat{\alpha} = .28, p < .01$ ). A separate hierarchical

regression analysis was run with the “good relationship with the instructor” variable as the dependent measure. Here too CSL participation was a significant, positive predictor of the perceived relationship with instructors even after accounting for the other variables ( $\hat{\alpha} = .27, p < .01$ ). In a third analysis, with the role of other university students in one’s learning as the dependent variable and using the same step structure, CSL participation was again a significant, positive predictor of this variable, even after taking all others into account ( $\hat{\alpha} = .19, p < .05$ ).

***Assessing the critical thinking of the community participants:***

The data on community members was drawn from ninety sixth graders from five different classrooms in three towns in the Northeast. The towns were chosen because of their proximity to the university, and the classrooms were chosen due to the desire of the teachers and principals to participate. Therefore, the sample is a nonrandom convenience sample.

The mean age of the sixth graders was 11.71 (SD = 0.46). The mean response for “How many days a week do you usually watch TV?” was 5.65 (SD = 1.80). The mean response for “How many hours each day do you usually watch TV?” was 2.18 (SD = 1.46). Multiplying these numbers yielded total television exposure, which was subsequently used as a control variable to determine how amount of exposure impacted increase in critical thinking after this CSL project.

The pre- and post-MLVPP variables measured the sixth graders’ knowledge and critical thinking about conflict and violence in the media as well as in their own lives. The media-related items were designed to assess application of the concepts that had been introduced (e.g., justified violence), understanding of the relationship between particular depictions and increased risk of learning aggression, and judgments regarding the social responsibility of media producers. These items, discussed collectively as critical thinking items, were measured on a scale of 1, “I completely agree,” to 5, “I completely disagree.”

The interpersonal, real-life conflict items were a series of open-ended questions asking the sixth graders to define conflict, discuss potential ways to address it, and assess the similarities and differences between real-life conflicts and those seen on television. All questionnaire items were original measures written by the authors. Some closed-ended items were reverse-coded to prevent a response-set bias. These items were later recoded so

that, in all cases, higher numbers indicate more critical thinking and thus more “media literate” responses.

In order to determine whether the community-based CSL project was, indeed, useful to the sixth graders themselves, we performed a pre- and postpaired samples t-test comparison of the sixth graders’ responses to the closed-ended items on the questionnaires. We find some evidence of a significant increase in critical thinking about media violence and conflict (see table 2). A comparison of the pre- and posttest mean scores of the sixth graders’ responses shows that in eight of the twelve closed-ended statements on the questionnaires, an increase in knowledge about and critique of violence in the media occurred.

Significant differences in pre- and postcurriculum responses of the sixth graders were found for agreement with the statement that “good guys” on television sometimes use violence to solve problems ( $t = 4.74, p < .001$ ) and disagreement that television is good at showing grief and sorrow related to violent injury ( $t = 2.28, p < .05$ ). Very nearly significant differences were registered across the pre- and posttest responses for agreement that viewers are more likely to copy violence in the media if the characters get away with it ( $t = 1.87, p = .066$ ), that viewers can get the message that violence for good reasons is acceptable ( $t = 1.90, p = .06$ ), and that more realistic media portrayals are more likely to influence the audience than less realistic (reverse coded, so that a larger number at the posttest indicates more critical thinking; pre-test  $M = 2.17, SD = 0.98$ ; post-test  $M = 2.45, SD = 1.19$ ;  $t = -1.92, p = .06$ ).

Responses to still other questionnaire items approached but did not achieve traditional standards for statistical significance in the pre- and post- comparisons generated by the paired t-tests. However, these data were arrayed in a direction indicating evidence of learning and critical thinking in association with the curriculum. For instance, agreement with the judgment that the media should show people being punished for violence more often increased modestly after the program (pretest  $M = 2.44, SD = 1.14$ ; posttest  $M = 2.22, SD = 0.88$ ;  $t = 1.62, p = .11$ ).

Admittedly, four items of twelve showed no evidence of an increase in learning or critical thinking in pre- and postcurriculum comparisons. The sixth graders’ responses show that they already had critical attitudes or knowledge about these topics before the curriculum began. These items asked whether audiences identify more with characters they like, whether TV

**Table 2. Paired sample t-tests of sixth graders' responses to closed-ended questionnaire items before compared and after participating in the curriculum. N = 78 sixth graders.**

Variable	Precurriculum M (SD)	Postcurriculum M (SD)	t	p
Good guys sometimes use violence to solve problems.	1.84 (0.88)	1.30 (0.63)	4.74	< .001
Viewers likely to copy when characters get away with violence.	2.23 (1.21)	1.94 (0.90)	1.87	.066
Viewers identify with characters that they like.	1.91 (0.98)	1.92 (0.91)	-.12	ns
Media should show people getting punished for violence more often.	2.44 (1.14)	2.22 (0.88)	1.62	.11
Violence seen on TV is similar to violence in real life.	2.81 (1.14)	2.75 (1.26)	.46	ns
TV does a good job of showing grief and sorrow related to violence.	3.40 (1.10)	3.04 (1.30)	2.28	< .05
Actions of TV heroes are not really violence because they're for good reasons.	2.84 (1.31)	2.79 (1.24)	.26	ns
Viewers get the message from TV characters that violence is OK for certain reasons.	2.78 (1.32)	2.43 (1.14)	1.90	.06
More realistic media portrayals influence the audience more.*	2.17 (0.98)	2.45 (1.19)	-1.92	.06
Violent TV characters often get rewarded in the plot.	2.00 (1.11)	1.94 (1.01)	.33	ns
People may copy acts and think they won't get hurt if harm isn't shown.	2.57 (1.46)	2.28 (1.18)	1.74	.09
TV overlooks realistic, long-term effects of violence.*	2.00 (1.17)	2.26 (1.19)	-1.41	.16

\* Reverse coded, so that a larger number in the posttest than the pretest indicates more agreement.

violence is similar to real-life violence, whether we should view TV heroes' actions as violent even if they are performed for "good reasons," and whether violence is sometimes rewarded on television. Therefore, as we would expect, the MLVPP had the greatest impact in areas where sixth graders reported the least critical attitudes or prior knowledge in the pretest.

### **Conclusions and Contribution**

This study assesses the impact of a project-based CSL partnership on both the university students involved in planning and carrying it out and the sixth graders for whom the project was designed. The analysis of the data gives us important insights into the ways such work can and does make an impact on all parties involved. This study is a snapshot of one or two years of data in a long-term, continuing project, and therefore we feel confident in making claims regarding the contribution of this research to the CSL literature.

First, the data on the effects of the curriculum (created via a CSL project by the university students) on the sixth graders themselves suggests that these youngsters did in fact learn valuable information and develop critical thinking skills from participation in the project. Our data show that the sixth graders learned how violence and conflict are presented in the media in ways that send a message that violence and conflict are common, are unlikely to be punished, and are done by likeable characters for "justifiable reasons," and that minimize or gloss over consequences such as pain, grief, and regret. Participating in the curriculum appears to have had a measurable impact, therefore, on the sixth graders' knowledge about and attitudes and beliefs regarding media messages, processes, and effects. Actual impact of a CSL experience on the knowledge, attitudes, and beliefs of community members is an unexplored area of CSL scholarship (*Bringle and Kremer 1993; Cohen and Kinsey 1994; Driscoll et al. 1996; Eyler et al. 2001*), and therefore this constitutes one of the most important contributions of our study. This type of data is an essential element in the argument for the benefits of participation in CSL because it provides evidence that such a project can indeed "make a difference" to those participating from the community.

However, a number of items remained unchanged in sixth graders' knowledge, attitudes, and beliefs even after they participated in the curriculum, due to the preexisting high levels of

critical thinking and awareness. This is an important lesson for those engaged in CSL research and practice: a CSL project should not be conceived as a one-sided service to a helpless or hapless community. Rather, researchers should be informed of the rich perspectives and body of knowledge already existing in the community and view CSL as an opportunity to collaborate rather than to serve (*Morton 1996; Walker 2001*).

Likewise, it is also necessary, both philosophically and pedagogically, to assess the impact of a given project on the university constituents in order to direct attention to their potential transformation. In the present study, analyses of the university students' closed-ended questionnaire data show modest—but still important—differences in the qualities of self-reported learning in CSL-participating and non-CSL-participating students enrolled in the same university courses. Thus, the process of creating, implementing, and reflecting on the curriculum for the sixth graders that allowed connections to be made with course concepts and community constituents did have a measurable effect on university students' learning as well as their commitments to working in the community. Opting to participate in the CSL project, therefore, had a positive impact on the university students.

Nonetheless, we believe that this CSL project can improve in a variety of ways, as can our assessment of it. With regard to other important outcomes of CSL, such as citizen development (*Westheimer and Kahne 2003*) and social change and social justice, the project could be “thickened” (*Morton 1995*) to involve both university students and the sixth graders in taking action such as letter-writing campaigns to their representatives and to the Federal Communications Commission. In this manner, we can move the focus of the project from individual responses to the media to collective action toward social change.

Nonetheless, the “impact outcomes” that Gelmon and her colleagues (*2001*) introduce, particularly those regarding learning and developing relationships with others and developing favorable and efficacious attitudes about service, appear to have been developed in participating CSL university students more than in their classmates who did not participate. Although the analysis of participating compared to nonparticipating students enrolled in the same courses is limited by the unresolved issue of self-selection, these results are nonetheless indicative of a different sort of learning for CSL-participating university students. Perhaps most

important, then, this study demonstrates a multiplicity of positive impacts of a single CSL project.

### Endnote

1. Actual impact here is defined in terms of the change that students and community members report and demonstrate in their interactions with each other.

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### About the Authors

- Erica Scharrer (Ph.D. Syracuse University) researches, teaches, and does outreach work focusing on media violence and other issues pertaining to media and young people. She has published several studies on media content, media literacy, and media effects, and she is coauthor (with George Comstock) of three books, including *Television: What's On, Who's Watching, and What It Means* and the forthcoming *Media and the American Child*.
- Leda Cooks (Ph.D. Ohio University) teaches in the areas of intercultural and interracial communication, conflict and mediation, critical pedagogy, and the social impact of information technology. She has worked for many years to integrate her teaching and research with her outreach work in conflict education, mediation, and media literacy training with NGOs in Panama. This is reflected in her current work in middle schools on conflict education, media violence, and media literacy. She recently received the Distinguished Outreach Scholarship Award for the University of Massachusetts.