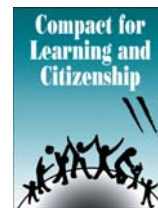




# Issue Paper

## Civic Engagement and Service-Learning



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### Civic Engagement and Service-Learning with Young Children: Intergenerational Peacemaking Projects

By the students, volunteers and staff of Peace Games

*Editor's note: This paper describes the work of Peace Games, which works to teach children the knowledge and skills they need to become peacemakers rather than bullies or victims of bullying. It illustrates one approach to the problem of school violence but is not intended to promote this particular approach over others.*

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*"Excellence in education not only coexists with responsible social behavior, ...[but] promoting ethical leadership and public service is among the high aims of education." Ruth J. Simmons, Brown University president, Journal of College & Character, 2001*

*"Being patriotic means not giving up until there's peace in the world." Rachel Maremont, age 9*

*"I have learned about things I never knew. I learned how to cooperate with people. I have learned how to love." 5th-grade Peace Games student*

*"I too became a learner." 7th grade Peace Games teacher*

### Introduction: Civic Engagement and School Violence

Violence, in all of its forms, continues to make learning difficult, if not impossible, for a substantial number of children. While high-profile incidences such as the Columbine High School shootings grab the public's attention, it is the daily difficulties of bullies, intimidation and fear that affect students in all schools (Twemlow, 2001).

According to calculations by the Children's Defense Fund, every day in the United States 10 children are murdered, 186 children are arrested for violent crimes, and approximately 160,000 students miss school because they fear physical harm. And most crime statistics do not measure "unseen" forms of violence, such as racism, sexism, homophobia and bullying.

The 32nd Annual Phi Delta Kappa/Gallup Poll of the Public's Attitudes Toward the Public Schools found that school violence and discipline remain among the top five problems with which local public schools must deal. Seven in 10 Americans in recent surveys said they believed that a shooting was likely in their school.

While violence remains a key concern for communities and schools across the country, researchers are developing a clearer picture of what works. Studies show the most effective way to curb violence is early and long-term investment in the social-emotional development of young people (Flannery, 1993; [www.familiesandwork.org/askthechildren.html](http://www.familiesandwork.org/askthechildren.html)). Moreover, students who learn social-emotional skills display higher academic performance than students who lack these skills but have the same IQ (Nowicki and Duke, 1992). Integrated service-learning projects that engage young people as problem solvers have been shown as one way to develop social-emotional skills and to create safer schools (Learning In Deed, 2002).

This paper describes Peace Games' experience helping public and private school K-5th graders learn to be peacemakers (see box for more on Peace Games). Peace Games builds on a 10-week core curriculum that focuses on communication, cooperation, conflict resolution and engagement. Teaching teams help students plan and implement service-learning activities called "Peacemaker Projects." This paper outlines some of these projects, describes benefits of this approach for elementary school students and young adult volunteers, and suggests some basic principles and guidelines for developing and implementing successful Peacemaker Projects.

## **Civic Engagement with Young Children: Language and Lenses**

Service-learning is a growing national movement that has begun to shape curriculum, instruction, community relations and public policy for K-12 schools and institutions of higher learning (Jacoby, 1996; Wade, 1997; Learning in Deed, 2002). Effective service-learning projects help both the person and the community and involve both parties in making decisions. In this way, they contribute to social development, personal and community health and safety, civic engagement, citizenship attitudes and skills, multicultural awareness, school attendance and youth-community relationships, as well as improving academic motivation and achievement (Learning In Deed, 2002).

These outcomes align with the Peace Games mission of supporting young people as peacemakers by linking community volunteers with students, schools and families. The program works with young people in elementary and middle schools, as well as high school alumnae and young adults who are recruited, trained and supported as volunteers. Intergenerational activities link three or four generations.

Civic engagement includes a range of activities that connect young children with adult partners to learn about and address important community issues. Peacemaking involves concrete actions designed to reduce violence and promote fairness in interpersonal as well as community relations. Peacemaking is seen as civic engagement, and civic

### ***A Brief History of Peace Games ...***

During the past 10 years, Peace Games has helped young people be peacemakers by forming partnerships with elementary schools, families and young adult volunteers. The program seeks to help students create their own safe classrooms and communities, engage community members in supporting students as peacemakers, inspire a new generation of educators and activists, and change how society thinks about young people.

Peace Games staff and volunteers work weekly in classrooms teaching the knowledge and skills young people need to promote peace rather than violence, fairness rather than injustice. A typical Peace Games lesson includes an opening ritual, cooperative game, debriefing, activity, evaluation and closing ritual. The first semester focuses on building skills in communication, cooperation, conflict resolution and engagement, that is, the student's willingness and capacity to reach out beyond her or his own interests and needs to help others.

The second semester guides students and volunteers through "Peacemaker Projects," the process of identifying and implementing service-learning projects that match the students' and school's developmental and cultural needs and resources.

Peace Games was started by young people who wanted to use their energies to address the youth violence of the early 1990s (Children's Defense Fund, 2000; Prothrow-Stith, 1991). The dominant research and policy models at that time saw young people in three roles: witnesses, perpetrators or victims of violence. The college students who started Peace Games saw a fourth role, that of young people as problem solvers and peacemakers.

Peace Games advocates working with an entire community. The program includes six areas: curriculum, school staff, families, volunteers, community partners and school climate. Volunteers help schools assess their resources and needs and develop intergenerational leadership. In 2001, Peace Games launched three new sites in Los Angeles and in 2002 initiated a partnership with the Fairbanks, Alaska, public schools.

*For more information on Peace Games, contact Steven Brion-Meisels, [steven@peacegames.org](mailto:steven@peacegames.org); 617.464.2600.*

engagement is viewed as one path to peacemaking.

### ***Young people are active peacemakers***

Children want to help, and they want to be useful. They have deeply rooted instincts for fairness and empathy shaped by their social experiences (Piaget, 1965; Dewey, 1916). They are actively engaged in social relationships in the school, community and the world (Dewey, 1916). They have a right to live and learn in environments that nurture their capacities for peacemaking and engagement (Hart, 1998, citing the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child). And children are wonderfully capable: they teach while they learn, they learn when they help, they gain when they give to others.

### ***Peacemaking: Challenging form of service-learning***

Peacemaking is an important opportunity for civic engagement and service-learning. Because it provides a positive alternative for young people, peacemaking engages young people with real issues, provides a positive direction and structure for their energy and their anger, teaches important social skills and demonstrates to a sometimes hostile older generation that young people are not simply nuisances who mature or move away. Peacemaking as service-learning, however, has its challenges, including distinguishing charity from social change and creating projects that engage young children in real work that has real meaning for them.

Authentic service-learning projects invite reflection and conversation about complex issues such as homelessness, cultural violence, ecological policies and human rights in ways that respect the developmental and cultural frameworks of both students and community – and that see the two groups as linked.

### ***Peacemaking helps children connect personal and social change***

Peacemaking is more than violence prevention because it extends beyond personal responses to feelings such as anger, sadness and frustration. Peacemaking is civic engagement because it connects the individual with the community in ways that promote positive social change. In its volunteer trainings, Peace Games often cites Martin Luther King's definition of peace: "True peace is not merely the absence of tension – it is the presence of justice" (King, 1986). Young children understand the difference and the connection: they seek fairness and reciprocity even as they seek safety and security.

The Peacemaker Projects highlighted in this paper all strive to make this connection. Peacemaking and civic engagement, of course, look and feel differently for kindergarten children, than they do for 8th-grade students or young adult volunteers. First-grade children, for example, may use a gardening project to learn about one another across lines of culture and language. Third-grade students learn about stereotypes related to age, race, gender and class through shared projects with peers and elders. Fifth-grade students learn about the ecological webs that connect humans with other species.

### ***Peacemaking and civic engagement promote academic learning***

Like other effective civic engagement and service-learning projects, peacemaking strengthens academic skills. The four core Peacemaker Project lessons include language arts, biography, science, math, art, music and decisionmaking. The projects integrate these academic skills into real-life activities that benefit the students, volunteers and school community.

## **Developmental Snapshots from Los Angeles and Boston**

### ***Connecting across cultures: Promoting social justice in grades K-4***

The neighborhood children in Ms. Hobart's 3rd-grade class\* (\* all names are changed) often teased their Somali-immigrant peers. They said the new kids smelled, talked and dressed funny; they didn't know how to play games and got into fights a lot. The Somali children in Mr. Pico's 3rd-4th-grade English as a Second Language class were often afraid and angry; they felt isolated, bullied, confused and stupid. To combat these problems, Peace Games volunteers used curriculum units that focused on communication, cooperation, bullying, courage and inclusion.

After completing the three introductory lessons (on community, service and peacemaking), volunteers then helped the Somali students identify key words and cultural practices they wanted to share. Together, they worked up skits, presentations, some songs and a Peacemaker Puppet Show that showcased Somali culture. At the same time, the students in Ms. Hobart's classroom began to learn about Somali culture and political history. In both classes, discussions used the core peacemaking skills (communication, cooperation and conflict resolution) to learn about stereotypes, prejudice and cultural diversity. In the spring of the school year, the classes came together for a sharing and celebration.

Across the city at another Peace Games school, a similar pattern had begun to develop in the 1st grade between neighborhood children and Haitian immigrant students. In response, a Peace Games teaching team developed the Peace Plants project. Each week, children from the two groups worked together to learn basics of plant biology, decorate planters and plant Peace Plants for the Kennedy School teachers. At the end of the project, pairs of students proudly gave their Peace Plant gifts to a school staff person. The Peace Games volunteers participated in appreciation activities, where the partners recognized and appreciated their respective cultural traditions and resources.

In these cases, the projects focused on content and processes that were developmentally appropriate for young children. Community and service focused on family members and kin, teachers and crossing guards, neighborhood helpers and peacemakers. Students chose their project from a menu developed by Peace Games staff and volunteers, rather than opening up the process as might be done with middle-grade students. The projects were simple and manageable; they emphasized pairs and partners rather than group work, and they were designed to be completed and presentable after six or seven hours of work.

### ***Responding to civic trauma: In the wake of September 11***

Children everywhere were affected by the trauma of September 11 and the subsequent military actions in Afghanistan. In some Peace Games schools, students and families from Moslem, Middle Eastern and South Asian backgrounds were potential targets for isolation and recrimination. In the wake of September 11, part of Peace Games' work was to make space for children's concerns, support cross-cultural understanding and dialogue, and reinforce the promise of peace by teaching and practicing the skills of peacemaking.

A number of 3rd-grade classrooms developed Peacemaker Care Packages. Students identified people in their communities who contribute to peace, safety and justice. They named the traditional groups (fire fighters, police, emergency workers, doctors) and also some nontraditional peacemakers (elders in the neighborhood, child care workers, teachers, young adults who mentor children). Using the Peacemaker Project curriculum, they then talked about community, service and peacemaking as important components of safety – for themselves and for others.

For 3rd-grade students, interpersonal and group relations are centrally important; therefore, their discussions and work focused on interpersonal peacemaking. They asked important questions that connected personal and social change. How can we help a friend who is sad? How can we say thank you to the fire fighter down the street? How can I help make my neighborhood more peaceful? The Peacemaker Care Packages included personal messages of peace along with small handmade gifts, drawings or photos. The culmination of the projects involved visits to the community peacemakers or celebrations back at school.

At a Peace Games school in Los Angeles, 1st-grade students created Peacemaker Tiles. Each child developed a personal image of peace or chose a peacemaker to honor. Building on the developmental needs and skills of 1st-grade children, the Peace Games volunteers used materials, themes and instructions that were concrete, personal and accessible to their young students. As might be expected, the Peacemaker Tiles were more likely to represent family members and individuals in the community, rather than broader community issues. Students also changed the physical space in their own school by mounting the tiles in their school cafeteria as a permanent legacy to those in the community who work for peace.

## **Community safety and improvement**

In Los Angeles, two Peace Games schools are located in communities regularly affected by intergroup violence, as well as by problems such as ethnic profiling and civic disengagement. At these schools, Peace Games contributed to community improvement not only by teaching peacemaking skills, but also by engaging students and their families in direct community work. At one Los Angeles school, 2nd-grade students talked about aspects of their neighborhoods that promoted or threatened peace. The usual suspects (trash, fast highways, violent gangs, police) grew to a list that also included the lack of green space and the lack of community friendliness.

This discussion in itself helped to foster developmental change as students began to look more closely at the structural forms and sources of violence in their community. As one response to this situation, students created a Peace Garden along the street side of their school. With help from the Peace Games staff and volunteers, they got a local ecology advocacy group to test the soil, collected small donations from neighborhood businesses and began to create a small green space for their community. At the same school, 3rd-grade students interviewed 1st-grade students about conflict and wrote Peace Books based on their interviews. The project ended with an authors' party, complete with readings, games and food.

At another school, teams of students, parents and Peace Games volunteers collected plants to refill large containers originally designed for plantings that had been vandalized and abandoned. Their first attempts were thwarted by more of the same, but they kept at it, allied with a broad coalition of community groups working for neighborhood improvement.

The Peace Garden became an important centerpiece for a spring neighborhood festival, and 200 family members helped celebrate. Months later, the garden continues to flourish.

The conversations that accompanied these activities were the key to making the gardens into a community service-learning project: even the young students began to connect their small garden with broader issues of community renewal. The 3rd- and 4th-grade students were more aware of, and troubled by, the patterns of neighborhood neglect and vandalism. Through discussion with their Peace Games volunteers, these students began to process their feelings, focus on concrete actions they could take together and keep moving forward.

The Peace Games model supports a full-time staff member who works with the school community over the course of a three-year partnership. At the school above, the site director connected the Peace Garden project with a broader neighborhood coalition working for neighborhood safety and wellness. The 4th-grade students not only were able to replant the gardens, but also to help facilitate a large community Health and Peace Fair. As researcher D. Hart (1998) suggests, these young children began to reflect on their proximal, concrete community and to experience themselves as active agents for social change.

## **Ten Core Principles and Practices**

Peace Games is more than service-learning; it is designed to promote schoolwide change through curriculum, family work, staff support, school climate efforts and community partnerships. Ten core principles are needed for successful service-learning projects with young children.

### ***Keep it simple***

Service-learning doesn't have to be fancy. Students engaged in any of these projects will become active change agents in their community when they begin to address some important questions. *Why* is it important to take responsibility for one's physical space? *How* does this project connect us to the community? What does it *feel* like to be a peacemaker and activist? While impressive end products may be useful tools for engaging parents and community members or gaining notice for the good work done by students, the conversations sparked by students' efforts become the heart of the learning process. For

### ***Ten Core Principles for Civic Engagement with Young Children***

1. Keep it simple.
2. Keep it fun.
3. Keep it hands-on and provide options.
4. Use the cultural resources of your school and community.
5. Involve as many people as possible.
6. Involve students as partners in decisions.
7. Give it time; nurture it with patience.
8. Plan well, carefully and often.
9. Reflect on the meaning of the work done.
10. Watch for success and celebrate it.

many students, it is important to complete a product; for others, it is less so. This is a developmental need, and it changes with age.

### ***Keep it fun***

Most Peacemaker Projects are done over the course of 10 weeks – a timeframe that allows for student choice, depth of experience, reflection and, at times, boredom. Peace Games' experience suggests some guidelines to help sustain the fun through the hard work. It is important to vary the lesson format to include student choice, outside speakers, games and more. At Peace Games, games reinforce concepts of teamwork or cooperation that complement the service-learning projects. They break the routine, provide an outlet for energy, respect students' needs and reward hard work, while keeping it fun.

### ***Keep it hands-on and give students options***

The most successful Peacemaker Projects allow for multiple methods of active involvement among students. To this end, many students work in self-designed committees (i.e., writing, publicity, acting, fund-raising) based on their interests.

### ***Use the cultural resources of your school and community***

Service-learning is a wonderful opportunity to partner with local community organizations or tap into the talents and resources that already exist within the school. For example, a class and teacher with an interest in hip-hop music focused their skills on writing and recording an educational song. A school with a large Haitian population learned about deforestation in that country and what they can do to prevent rain forest destruction across the globe. A kindergarten class connected with the nursing home down the street to deliver hand-drawn placemats and cards.

### ***Involve as many people as possible***

When done well, the excitement surrounding service-learning is contagious. Excited teachers help foster excited students who go home to tell stories to their parents about the good work they are putting into practice. As a result, parents and families become classroom assistants, chaperones or event planners as they help students complete their Peacemaker Projects. Parent volunteers, supportive and informed administrators, and active community partners can help make these projects more meaningful for students and less daunting for teachers. This kind of collaboration also shifts power relationships in a more democratic direction: families and community members are seen as resources rather than problems, new talents and connections are discovered, and community members identify positive avenues for school involvement.

### ***Involve students in making decisions***

Having a genuine voice in deciding on their Peacemaker Projects creates a sense of ownership, which, in turn, fosters a deeper level of engagement. Although student participation in making decisions will vary according to students' and schools' development, there is always room for some student choice (see Hart, 1998, for a developmental description of student involvement in decisions about community projects). For example, in 1st grade the teacher may select a general focus for a project, while the students make smaller decisions about how to carry out a given project. With older students, the what, how and why of the service-learning project can all be decided upon by students themselves.

### ***Give it time; nurture it with patience***

The decisionmaking process outlined above can be an overwhelming one for students who may never have been responsible for carrying out a long-term project from start to finish, or for whom democratic participation in their own education is new and frightening. For most Peace Games classes, determining the goal and theme of the service project take from three to five one-hour sessions, while the completion of the projects themselves last from five to eight sessions. The patience that teachers show early on in this journey will result in a more meaningful overall experience both for the students and the beneficiaries of their service. Changes in attitudes, skills and behavior patterns take time, practice and mistakes. Patience helps minimize the negative impact of deadlines and reminds students that mistakes are part of learning.

### ***Plan well, carefully and often***

Well before students are introduced to Peacemaker Projects, teachers and volunteers are engaged in laying the foundation for successful projects. Before beginning the projects, staff and volunteers research the school community, connect with local organizations, learn the theory and practice of service-learning, meet with school staff and gather materials.

The first three lessons of the Peacemaker Project curriculum review, reinforce and apply the concepts of community, service and peacemaking. Once a general focus is chosen by each class, teams construct a weekly outline (including goals for each lesson, action steps and materials needed) for each project. While these outlines are flexible enough to allow for student leadership throughout the semester, they also create a structure that helps classes successfully complete their projects.

### ***Reflect on the meaning of the work done***

As Peace Games reaches the closing weeks of service-learning projects, it becomes tempting to focus solely on completing the project and lose sight of the broader purpose of the work. Volunteers begin or end each class with a consistent set of questions: *Why* are we engaged in providing service to our communities, and *what* are we learning by doing this project? These reminders take the form of paired conversations, letters to the school community, games, whole-group discussions, etc. Reflection strengthens the first-semester skills and contribute to the overall Peace Games mission by fostering communication, cooperation and conflict resolution.

### ***Watch for success and celebrate it***

The success of Peacemaker Projects comes in many forms. For some classes, sharing their projects to the applause and support of their school community is the most obvious moment of celebration. For others, working through a disagreement or learning to complete a task as part of a group is an equally important cause for celebration. In each school, public sharing of students' projects is a fundamental part of service-learning. To this end, Peace Games recognizes the civic engagement of students through whole-school assemblies, newsletters home to parents, bulletin boards or even local newspaper coverage of their work.

## **The Importance of Civic Engagement and Community Service-Learning for Children, Young Adults and Their Communities**

School structures and schedules often work against the kind of flexibility, attention and time required for successful civic engagement. In the face of these challenges, it is important to remember the importance of civic engagement for the entire school community.

### ***Young children***

Civic engagement is built upon knowledge, skills, attitudes and habits – all of which start with young children. Civic engagement is an opportunity to safely and authentically explore complex values and questions that will affect children's later lives. Service-learning projects can be appropriate ways for young children to learn about and practice core values such as participation and service, tolerance and respect, cooperation and generosity, choice and democratic decisionmaking. They also foster the intergenerational connections that children love and need (Noddings, 1996).

Service-learning projects improve academic skills for young children as well as high school students (Education Commission for the States, 1999; Wade, 1997; Learning In Deed, 2002). Finally, community folks love young children. One benefit of the Peacemaker Projects is the miles of smiles that accompany both the intergenerational interactions and the celebrations that culminate the projects.

### ***Young adult volunteers***

Everything just described about young children holds for adolescents and young adults as well. But there are some other benefits of service-learning projects that are special for young adult volunteers. A decade of research has shown that effective service-learning projects improve students' personal and social development, reduce risky behavior, improve intercultural understanding, strengthen students' civic responsibility and citizenship skills, improve academic achievement, expand career awareness and improve positive school climate (Learning In Deed, 2002).

Peace Games' work over the past decade amplifies these findings in the stories told by volunteers, as well as the ways in which a year of service with Peace Games has shaped the career interests of college students and AmeriCorps volunteers. Many Peace Games volunteers continue to integrate community service as core components of their personal and professional lives. For Benya, for example, they provided a safe context to do something positive about racial discrimination – an issue that had previously silenced her. For Marie, the struggles of working closely with young children helped her find new ways to apply her passion for social justice to concrete issues of prejudice and intolerance.

For Pat, the Peacemaker Projects were part of a decision to become certified as a classroom teacher. For Franklin, the Peace Games experience shaped his high school and college directions. For Jessie, who watched the Twin Towers fall before moving to Boston for a year of service, the opportunity for community service helped her find a way to transform her fear and sadness into useful action. At the end of the year, Jessie wrote: "Peace Games saved me."

### ***Schools and society***

In the wake of September 11, 2001, many adults and young people reflected on the importance of meaningful work in the context of community. Although volunteerism showed at least a temporary increase in subsequent months, however, sustained civic engagement may be a more challenging accomplishment. Young people need more than trauma and encouragement to help them sustain their civic engagement; they need the knowledge, skills and habits that can best be taught and supported in a school context that connects civic engagement with academic achievement.

## **Lessons and Recommendations**

Peace Games volunteers have learned important lessons from their efforts.

- 1. Community service learning and civic engagement are effective education strategies.** These projects improve education outcomes for students and help to nurture a safer, more peaceful school culture (Learning In Deed, 2002). The Peacemaker Projects described here were overwhelmingly successful and well-received by administrators, teachers, parents and students themselves.
- 2. It is possible to share power and decisions with young children.** Roger Hart (1998) describes a developmental continuum of student involvement in decisions about civic engagement projects. Effective service-learning projects move beyond what Hart calls manipulation, decoration and tokenism toward a decisionmaking structure that informs, consults with and includes young children. When successful, Peace Games' decisionmaking structures build upon young children's developmental needs and resources.

Two risks, however, emerge in efforts to work democratically with young children. First, children may "fail" or "abuse" their power because they have not developed adequate social skills. Second, they may be thwarted by adult or institutional power. Peace Games volunteers encounter both challenges, but feedback from volunteers and students suggest that the benefits of sharing power outweigh the risks of failure, frustration or abuse. One student noted, "Adults didn't think we could really do this kind of project," while another thanked her Peace Games volunteers for "letting us be loud without telling us to be quiet."

- 3. It is important to balance flexibility and structure.** Reciprocity is a fundamental aspect of real civic engagement and service-learning. Effective community service-learning projects with young children need to take into account children's developmental interests, while remaining focused on core skills.

The Peacemaker Projects create two broad structures to help make the planning and implementation processes smoother and more consistent. First, the curriculum includes four lessons and a template for implementing the projects. Volunteers use introductory lessons, followed by lesson outlines that help them create activities to implement their projects. They also receive a closing lesson that outlines strategies for reflection, evaluation and celebration.

Second, the themes of the Peacemaker Projects are broad enough to address student and community needs and resources, while remaining focused on issues and skills related to



peacemaking. Volunteers receive a matrix of sample projects, with brief descriptions and suggestions for extending or limiting the project's scope in response to the realities of school schedules. In addition, volunteers are given training, support and resources to help them debrief the classroom activities and the service project itself. In these ways, the Peacemaker Projects use a consistent structure to focus on a core set of issues and skills, while providing flexibility as to theme and approach.

4. **Effective civic engagement projects connect young children and provide an opportunity to transform stereotypes before they take root.** This work involves risk, patience, persistence and perspiration. The Peacemaker Projects allow students to examine and undo stereotypes about one another, adults, elders, politicians, police officers and school staff. They also encourage adults in the school and community to examine and transform their own stereotypes about children, teens and young adults. In many cases, new alliances are formed, from the lunch table to the corner store to the city council chambers.
5. **Teachers have too much to do, but they are also hungry and eager for real and meaningful connections with their students and communities.** When introducing the Peacemaker Projects, many teachers said, "Don't ask us to do one more thing!" It was important to listen for the meaning and feeling behind that challenge. Teachers are overwhelmed with what they are asked to do in the time they have available. Most, however, care deeply about the values, attitudes, knowledge and skills involved in service-learning. It's important to meet teachers as well as students where they are and help them take the next steps.
6. **Community service-learning and civic engagement can and do change the way that adults view young people.** Peacemaker Projects were often greeted with skepticism. Many school staff felt that young children could not make these kinds of decisions, implement extended projects, meet elders in a nursing home without fear or disruption, talk with city legislators, write a "peace rap" without swears, care for a garden, teach young peers how to cooperate or any of a dozen other skills involved in community service-learning. In most cases, the staffs not only were surprised by the results, they were also eloquent in articulating the change they experienced in their own attitudes toward children and young adults. For example, one principal said, "The Peacemaker Projects actually helped students get beyond 'me' as the center of everything they do." This confidence about children's capacity to share power and manage their own learning spreads to other aspects of the school program and culture – from academic curriculum to school governance.
7. **Every answer creates a new set of questions.** As Peace Games evaluates its work, there are new questions: How can we prepare volunteers to do more effective debriefing and reflection? How can we build on the foundations we created? How do we avoid repetition and redundancy? How do we plan better with staff and administrators? How do we deepen students' understanding of the connection between their projects and peacemaking? The service-learning cycle mirrors the broader learning cycles that characterize meaningful educational growth.

Evaluating Peace Games' work includes being able to identify concrete strategies to measure outcomes such as cooperation and engagement. Peace Games has begun to integrate quantitative and qualitative approaches to measuring the impact of peacemaking, service-learning and civic engagement on the students and adults who make up the school community.

8. **Scale matters; start small and build on a solid foundation of allies and successes.** Although Peace Games seeks to support whole-school change, not every student in every school participates in the Peacemaker Projects. The program's strategy is to invite broadly, encourage participation and work with those able to commit. Likewise, the institutional strategy is to encourage rather than mandate, build a core set of allies, a positive "buzz" and a set of success stories. Initial data indicate that the majority of classrooms want to do Peacemaker Projects again next year, and others not involved want to be included.
9. **Stay alert for examples of change, capture it in words and pictures, and share it with the broader community.** The dominant approach to measuring success in fields such as violence prevention is to measure the reduction of negative behaviors. Civic engagement builds on resources rather than deficits and supports changes in complex patterns rather than isolated behaviors. For

adolescents and young adults, there are many traditional measures of civic engagement such as voting, participation in service clubs and interest in community-related careers. For young children, however, many of the most important indices of civic engagement occur out of site. Peace Games is beginning to identify measures to help teachers, researchers and policymakers capture and articulate both the outcomes and processes that are central to peacemaking.

**10. Stay committed to addressing local and state frameworks while responding to student interests and ideas.** Some of the most daunting challenges faced are the results of schedules, contracts, local and state mandates, as well as other institutional structures. It's important to be aware of these early, to name them and make them part of the civic engagement endeavor. Sometimes administrators and teachers need help in understanding the ways in which service-learning supports rather than obstructs academic achievement.

**11. Think and act developmentally, with students and with the school as an institution.** Starting developmentally involves attention to the content of the Peacemaker Projects. What do fairness, friendship, courage, conflict, community, service, peace and social justice mean to children at different ages? What content best matches with children's developmental interests, as well as with the rubrics of curriculum frameworks? Starting developmentally also involves structure and process. What kinds of skills do students already have and use? What are realistic, achievable next steps? What decisionmaking and management structures support these goals?

Finally, it is important to think developmentally about the adults and the school as an institution. Is this the teacher's first attempt at community service-learning? What issues meet the teacher's own needs and interests? What skills, attitudes and resources do the volunteers bring? Has the school as an institution ever done a service-learning project? Have the school staff members been part of the decision to do the Peacemaker Projects? Like any other change process, the development and implementation of a civic engagement initiative often uncovers more adult and institutional obstacles than child-related ones.

**12. It is important to get started, sooner rather than later.** Close to a century ago, John Dewey reminded his colleagues that schools must be real, living opportunities for students to practice democracy – not just learn about it (Dewey, 1916). Civic engagement activities such as the Peacemaker Projects are imperfect but important opportunities to honor the role of public education as a laboratory as well as an incubator for democracy. Find a partner or ally: a colleague, a parent, a community partner or your students themselves. Assess resources and needs. Invite students into the process. Be modest and careful.

## **Ten Tips for Creating an Effective Community Service-Learning Project with Young Children**

1. **Assess your own resources.** Effective civic engagement requires the “five Cs” of change: commitment, courage, confidence, conflict and community (DeRosa and Johnson, 1995). Find allies who bring new tools to the project.
2. **Plan.** Effective projects must move from inspiration to perspiration. Talk with teachers, administrators and parents; check out community resources; generate options; plan lessons that focus on core skills.
3. **Look for options and stay flexible.** There are many doors into the room of civic engagement; don't keep banging on the one that refuses to open. Look for staff and student interests and needs, and respond to them, while staying focused on education goals.
4. **Connect.** Students, families and the community are resources, not problems; connect with them early and often. Connect the knowledge and skills of community service-learning with other aspects of the school program.
5. **Be patient and persistent.** Like anything else, it takes time to build a sustainable structure, and it takes more than passion. Important, complex skills are learned only with guidance and practice; attitudes change slowly.
6. **Communicate.** Listen and learn from children and the community; share your ideas, questions, progress and challenges with others in the community through dialogue, presentations at staff meetings, parent newsletters.
7. **Reflect.** As individuals and as a community, look at what has been learned before moving ahead. Debrief the day and the project as a whole; model the skills and habits of self-reflection and self-evaluation.
8. **Celebrate.** Focus on accomplishments as well as frustrations; celebrate small steps and incremental changes. Make community service-learning a joy rather than a burden.
9. **Think and act developmentally.** Remember that adults and institutions develop and change, just like young children. Think developmentally about content and process for the students, volunteers, staff, families and institutions involved.
10. **Start where you can and build from there.** Start now.

## **Conclusion**

The problems of school and community violence are staggering. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the rate of firearm deaths among children under age 15 is almost 12 times higher in the United States than in 25 other industrialized countries *combined* (CDC, 1997). In this time of state standards and testing, a crucial point gets missed: children who don't feel safe in schools don't learn.

Yet if the problem of youth violence is staggering, so is the power of young people to be the solution. There is tremendous opportunity to unleash the creative and committed minds of young people to work in partnership with caring adults to serve their community. Peace Games is only one such catalyst.

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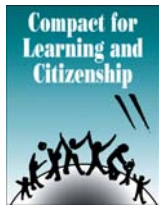
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**The Compact for Learning and Citizenship (CLC)**, a project of the Education Commission of the States (ECS), provides K-12 school leaders, legislators and other education stakeholders with resources, profiles and strategies to integrate service-learning through practice and policy. District superintendents, chief state school officers and other interested parties are invited to join. The CLC Web site ([www.ecs.org/clc](http://www.ecs.org/clc)) also provides links to other organizations, clearinghouses, publications and resources.

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