

“TO SERVE
A LARGER PURPOSE”

*Engagement for Democracy and
the Transformation of Higher Education*

Edited by
JOHN SALTMARSH AND
MATTHEW HARTLEY



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CHAPTER 3

Democratic Transformation through University-Assisted Community Schools

LEE BENSON, IRA HARKAVY, AND JOHN PUCKETT

It is not possible to run a course aright when the goal itself is not rightly placed.

—Francis Bacon, *Novum Organum* (1620)

The philosophers have only *interpreted* the world, in various ways; the point is to *change* it.

—Karl Marx, *Theses on Feuerbach* (1845–1846; original emphasis)

In conception, at least, democracy approaches most nearly the ideal of all social organization; that in which the individual and the society are organic to each other.

—John Dewey, *The Ethics of Democracy* (1888)

Democracy must begin at home, and its home is the neighborly community.

—John Dewey, *The Public and Its Problems* (1927)

Democracy has been given a mission to the world, and it is of no uncertain character. I wish to show that the university is the prophet of this democracy, as well as its priest and its philosopher; that in other words, the university is the Messiah of the democracy, its to-be-expected deliverer.

—William Rainey Harper, *The University and Democracy* (1899)

Nothing is more conducive to innovation in social theory than collaboration on a complex practical problem.

—Paul Lazarsfeld and Jeffrey G. Reitz,
An Introduction to Applied Sociology (1975)

This chapter is based on four propositions. First, the radical democratic transformation of colleges and universities is crucial to the democratic transformation of America into a genuinely democratic society. In the opening decade of the twenty-first century, it seems to us nearly axiomatic that universities are the most influential institution in advanced societies. As William Rainey Harper, John Gardner, Ernest Boyer, and Derek Bok, among others, have noted, universities possess enormous resources (most significantly human resources), play a leading role in developing and transmitting new discoveries and educating societal leaders, and basically shape the schooling system.

Second, as it currently operates, the American higher educational system does not contribute to the development of democratic communities and schools. Among other deficiencies, American universities significantly contribute to a schooling system that is elitist and hierarchical.

Third, as John Dewey emphasized, participatory democratic schooling is mandatory for a participatory democratic society. Simply put, unless the schooling system, from pre-K through 20, is transformed into a participatory democratic schooling system, America will continue to fall far short of functioning as a decent, just, participatory democracy. The transformation of higher education is crucial to the transformation of the entire schooling system and the education of creative, caring, contributing democratic citizens.

Fourth, the key question is about implementation, that is, "What is to be done to create an effective, creative, progressive university civic engagement movement dedicated to the democratic transformation of American higher education, schooling, and society in general?" Needless to say, this is an exceedingly complex question, but unless we attempt to answer it—along with the even harder question of *how* to create such a movement for participatory democracy—the university civic engagement movement could become mired in endless disputation and academic (in the pejorative sense) debate, mirroring the dominant current academic culture.

In our book, *Dewey's Dream*, we proposed, through historical analysis and illustrations from more than twenty years of work with West Philadelphia schools and neighborhoods, that university-assisted community schools constitute the best practical means for democratically transforming universities, schools, and communities in order to develop participatory democracy. We discussed how these schools need to be developed democratically, involving community, school, and university partners within a university's local ecological system, as a means to develop neighborly, democratic, face-to-face communities.¹

We also sketched how local efforts of this kind can be—and, in our case, have been—connected to national and global organizations and emerging movements. We offered these proposals primarily to stimulate democratic dialogue and generate counterproposals as to *how* to develop and advance a participatory democratic movement in order to develop a participatory democratic society. In this chapter we build on those arguments and also

discuss some of the impediments to creating and sustaining effective university-assisted community schools. Providing a concrete example from our work, we suggest *how* those impediments might be reduced so that universities can eventually realize what we view as their basic mission of contributing to an optimally democratic society through research, teaching, learning, and service.

UNIVERSITIES, DEMOCRATIC SCHOOLING, DEMOCRATIC COMMUNITIES, AND DEMOCRATIC SOCIETIES

Plato was the philosopher John Dewey most liked to read. Though Dewey admired Plato, their worldviews differed radically. We need only note two basic differences: Plato's worldview was aristocratic and contemplative, whereas Dewey's was democratic and activist. Despite their many differences, Dewey saw the great value of the basic ideas Plato had developed in *The Republic* concerning the complex relationships between education and society. To summarize Dewey's views on education after 1894, we quote a leading philosopher of education, Steven M. Cahn. According to Cahn, Dewey believed that

philosophy of education was the most significant phase of philosophy. Charles Frankel once noted that for Dewey "all philosophy was at bottom social philosophy implicitly or explicitly." I would extend this insight and suggest that for Dewey all social philosophy was at bottom philosophy of education implicitly or explicitly. As he put it, "it would be difficult to find a single important problem of general philosophical inquiry that does not come to a burning focus in matters of the determination of the proper subject matter of studies, the choice of methods of teaching, and the problem of social organization and administration of the schools."²

Noting that other philosophers also emphasized the importance of education, Cahn quotes Kant's proposition that "the greatest and most difficult problem to which man can devote himself is the problem of education." Cahn then observes that he knows of

only two major philosophers who exemplified this principle in their philosophical work: one was Dewey, the other was Plato. He too found it difficult to discuss any important philosophical problem without reference to the appropriateness of various subjects of study, methods of teaching, or strategies of learning. But while Dewey's philosophy of education rested on his belief in democracy and the power of scientific method, Plato's philosophy of education rested on his belief in aristocracy and the power of pure reason. Plato proposed a planned society, Dewey a society engaged in continuous planning. Plato considered dialectical speculation to be the means

toward the attainment of truth; Dewey maintained that knowledge is only acquired through intelligent action. . . . Suffice it to say that John Dewey is the only thinker ever to construct a philosophy of education comparable in scope and depth to that of Plato.³

Like the ancient Greek philosopher, Dewey theorized that education and society were dynamically interactive and interdependent. It followed, therefore, that if human beings hope to develop and maintain a particular type of society or social order, they must develop and maintain the particular type of education system conducive to it; that is to say, if there is no effective democratic schooling system, there will be no democratic society.

It is critically important to emphasize another radical difference between Plato and Dewey. To implement his aristocratic philosophy of education and society, Plato created what can arguably, if loosely, be viewed as the world's first university: the remarkably influential Academy, whose elitist, idealist philosophy of education continues to dominate Western schooling systems to this day. Surprisingly, Dewey never saw what Plato saw so clearly, that universities invariably constitute by far the most strategic component of a society's schooling system.

Perhaps Dewey's greatest contribution was his emphasis on the primacy of the schooling system, not the economic, political, or media systems, during the twentieth century. Put another way, Dewey powerfully theorized that the schooling system would function as the strategic subsystem of the increasingly complex industrial and "postindustrial" societies produced by the post-1800 economic and communication revolutions. To use the term now in vogue, Dewey predicted that the school-based operations of "civil society" would become more important than the traditional functions performed by the state in solving "the difficult problems of life." Just as Dewey saw citizenship expanding to take on functions that were beyond the capacity of the state in an advanced capitalist society, he saw an expanded role for the school in preparing citizens to assume these functions.

Extending Dewey's observations, particularly in the twenty-first century, we contend that it is not the judicial, legislative, and administrative state, but rather the complex schooling system of American society—from early childhood centers to elite research universities—that (1) must function as the strategic subsystem of the society; (2) has performed that function poorly—in the past and present—at all levels; (3) must radically improve its performance, at all levels, if we hope to solve the problems of American life in the twenty-first century; and (4) can only be radically reformed if questions about its performance—in the past, present, and likely future—are given the highest priority by action-oriented researchers and administrators dedicated to advancing knowledge for "the relief of man's estate,"⁴ which Francis Bacon long ago specified as the goal of science.

Higher educational institutions are, in our judgment, the strategic agent for the effective and democratic transformation of a society's schooling

system. Simply put, the path toward effective democratic schooling and large-scale, significant, ongoing systemic change must run through American higher education, particularly the American research university. The research university's significance derives in part from its status as a particularly resource-rich and powerful local institution. More fundamentally, universities have arguably become the most influential institutions in the world. In 1990, Derek Bok, then president of Harvard, highlighted the growth in importance of universities since World War II:

All advanced nations depend increasingly on three critical elements: new discoveries, highly trained personnel, and expert knowledge. In America, universities are primarily responsible for supplying two of these three ingredients and are a major source of the third. That is why observers ranging from Harvard sociologist Daniel Bell to editorial writers from the *Washington Post* have described the modern university as *the central institution in post-industrial society* [emphasis added]. . . .⁵

Bok did not explicitly emphasize, however, what we regard as the most critical reason for higher education's leadership role. As stated above, we think it axiomatic that the schooling system functions as the core subsystem—the strategic subsystem—of modern information societies. More than any other subsystem, it now influences the functioning of the societal system as a whole; it is the subsystem that, on balance, has the greatest "multiplier" effects, direct and indirect, short- and long-term. We think it equally axiomatic that universities function as the primary shapers of the overall American schooling system. The powerful role of research universities stems not only from their enormous prestige and power—they serve, in effect, as the reference group that defines and shapes the entire schooling system—but also from their role in educating teachers. In short, what universities do and *how* they do it, and what they teach and *how* they teach, have enormously complex, enormously far-reaching impacts on the entire schooling system and on society in general.

The idea that universities play the central role in shaping the schooling system, and therefore American democracy, inspired William Rainey Harper when he served as the first president of the University of Chicago (1892–1906). For Harper, the university was the "prophet," "the Messiah of the democracy." To realize in practice the promise of American democracy, Harper worked tirelessly to develop pedagogy as a university discipline of distinction and to make teaching at all levels a profession "equal to any other." In 1896, the year Dewey began the Laboratory School at Chicago, Harper enthusiastically proclaimed his "desire to do for the Department of Pedagogy what has not been undertaken in any other institution." Even more telling, when criticized by a university trustee for sponsoring a journal focused on pedagogy in precollegiate schools, Harper emphatically proclaimed, "As a

university we are interested above all else in pedagogy.”⁶ Harper’s devotion to pedagogy logically derived from two propositions central to his vision for the University of Chicago in particular and for American universities in general:⁷

1. “Education is the basis of all democratic progress. The problems of education are, therefore, the problems of democracy.”⁸
2. More than any other institution, the university determines the character of the overall schooling system: “Through the school system, the character of which, in spite of itself, the university determines and in a larger measure controls . . . through the school system every family in this entire broad land of ours is brought into touch with the university; for from it proceeds the teachers or the teachers’ teachers.”⁹

The societal, indeed global, reach of universities also makes them particularly important partners in school-system and community-wide reform. In this era of global information and communication, local school systems are powerfully affected by the larger national and global schooling systems. But local changes cannot be sustained if they remain only local and unconnected to broader national and global developments. Significant systemic change not only must, therefore, be locally rooted and generated; it must also be part of a national/global movement for change. For that to occur, an agent is needed that can simultaneously function on the local, national, and global levels. Universities are that agent. They are simultaneously the preeminent local (they are embedded in their communities) and national/global (they operate within an increasingly interactive worldwide network) institutions.

William Rainey Harper brought John Dewey from the University of Michigan to Chicago in 1894. While Dewey was at the University of Chicago, Harper significantly helped him see the crucial role the schooling system must play in the development of a democratic American society. Unfortunately, Dewey’s work on schools suffered severely from his failure to see what Harper saw so clearly, namely that the research university must constitute the primary component of a highly integrated (pre-K–post 16) schooling system that could potentially function as the primary agent of democracy in the world and in the United States in particular. As we noted earlier, Harper envisioned the university as the “prophet of democracy, its priest and its philosopher . . . the Messiah of the democracy, its to-be-expected deliverer.”¹⁰

Democracy is the soul of America—its charter myth, its ultimate end-in-view. The American university, alas, has never played anything like the messianic democratic role Harper optimistically envisioned for it. But “the times they are a-changin’,” and our work since 1985 has been strongly influenced by our own optimistic belief that Harper’s vision may yet be realized. Does our optimistic belief show that we simply are suffering from a bad case of the delusional utopianism long characteristic of American progressives and leftists? As we hope to show, this is not the case.

Following Donald Kennedy’s provocative lead in his book *Academic Duty*, we view American higher education today as in the early stages of its third revolution.¹¹ The first revolution, of course, occurred in the late nineteenth century. Beginning at Johns Hopkins in 1876, the accelerating adoption and uniquely American adaptation of the German model somewhat revolutionized American higher education. By the turn of the century, the American research university had essentially been created. The second revolution began in 1945 with Vannevar Bush’s “endless [research] frontier” manifesto and rapidly produced the big science, Cold War, entrepreneurial university.¹² We believe that the third revolution began in 1989. The fall of the Berlin Wall and the end of the Cold War provided the necessary conditions for the “revolutionary” emergence of the democratic, cosmopolitan, engaged, civic university—the radically new type of “great university” that William Rainey Harper had prophesized would advance democratic schooling and achieve the practical realization of the democratic promise of America for all Americans.

The emergence of the new type of university a century after Harper had first envisioned it can be credibly explained as a defensive response to the increasingly obvious, embarrassing, and immoral contradiction between the status, wealth, and power of American higher education—particularly its elite research university component—and the pathological state of American cities. To paraphrase Oliver Goldsmith’s late eighteenth-century lament for “The Deserted Village,” while American research universities flourished in the late twentieth century as never before, “ill-fared the American city, to hastening ills a prey.”¹³

If American research universities really were so great, why were American cities so pathological? After the Cold War ended, the contradiction became increasingly obvious, troubling, indefensible, and immoral. The manifest contradiction between the power and the performance of American higher education sparked the emergence of the truly (not simply rhetorically) engaged university and the growing acceptance of the proposition that power based on a great capacity for the integrated production and use of knowledge should mean responsible performance. In the aftermath of the Cold War, accelerating external and internal pressures forced research universities to recognize (very reluctantly) that they must—and could—function as moral/intellectual institutions simultaneously engaged in advancing universal knowledge, learning, and improving the well-being of their local geographic communities (i.e., the local ecological systems that powerfully affect their own health and functioning). We believe that after 1989, the combination of external pressure and enlightened self-interest spurred American research universities to recognize that they could, indeed must, function simultaneously as universal and local institutions of higher education—institutions not only *in* but *for* their local communities.

To reduce, if not avoid, misunderstanding, we emphasize that we view the “third revolution” as still in its very early stages. As the old academic joke has it, American universities constitute such remarkably fragmented,

self-contradictory, internally competitive, and conflicted institutions that they tend to move with all the speed of a runaway glacier. But things are changing in the right direction. One indicator of positive change is the accelerating number and variety of universities and colleges (i.e., “higher eds,” a less cumbersome term than “higher educational institutions” or “postsecondary institutions”) that now publicly proclaim their desire to collaborate actively with their neighboring public schools and local communities. Predictably, to date, public proclamations of collaboration far surpass tangible, interactive, mutually respectful, and beneficial collaboration, but progress is being made.

To help accelerate progress to the point where major changes become firmly institutionalized and produce significant results, we call for action-oriented acceptance of this radical proposition: all higher eds should explicitly make solving the problem of the American schooling system a very high institutional priority; their contributions to its solution should count heavily both in assessing their institutional performance and in responding to their requests for renewed or increased resources and financial support. Actively helping to develop an effective, integrated, genuinely democratic pre-K through higher education schooling system, we contend, should become a primary mission of American universities and colleges.

Primary mission does not mean sole mission. Obviously, American higher eds now have—and will continue to have—important missions other than collaboratively helping to solve the problems of the American schooling system. If we had unlimited space, we would try to show in great detail how those other missions would benefit greatly from successful collaborative work on the schooling problem. Here we restrict ourselves to a barebones statement of two corollary propositions:

1. Solving the overall problem of the schooling system must begin with changes at the higher education level.
2. Solving the overall schooling-system problem would, in the long run, both directly (e.g., increased governmental and philanthropic support) and indirectly (e.g., more diverse and able student body and faculty) give higher eds much greater resources than they now have to carry out *all* of their important missions.

We concede that, in the short term, our proposed mission change would require higher eds to experience the trauma entailed by any attempt to radically change academic priorities, structures, and cultures. We are calling on these institutions to reallocate a very large share of their intellectual (among other) resources to the immediate improvement of their neighboring public schools and communities. Given their ferociously competitive “pure research” orientation, how in the world can we possibly expect universities to answer our call positively rather than contemptuously? Until the recent economic recession began to affect them, higher eds were not experiencing any real crisis. Why then should self-congratulatory, increasingly rich, prestigious,

powerful, “successful” American research universities undertake the difficult job of trying to transform themselves into engaged civic institutions that accept reciprocal and mutually respectful collaboration with their local schools and communities as a priority for the new millennium? Particularly in light of the worsening global recession, they should try to do so for strong institutional reasons. If they succeed, they will be much better able than they are now to achieve their self-professed, traditional missions of advancing, preserving, and transmitting knowledge; and they will help produce the well-educated, cultured, truly democratic citizens necessary to develop and maintain a genuinely democratic society.¹⁴

To restate two core propositions that undergird our argument: We think it axiomatic that universities—particularly elite research universities with highly selective arts and sciences colleges—function as the primary shapers of the overall American schooling system. We think it equally axiomatic that, in the global era, the schooling system increasingly functions as the core subsystem—the strategic subsystem—of modern information societies. Contrary to the position taken by orthodox Marxist ideologists, for example, more than any other subsystem, it now influences the functioning of the societal system as a whole. Viewed systemically, the schooling system has the greatest “multiplier” effects, direct and indirect, short and long term.

To understate the case, developing the democratic, cosmopolitan, civic university dedicated to, actively engaged in, and pragmatically capable of solving the problem of the overall American schooling system will be extraordinarily hard. There is a great deal to think about and do. Among many other things, to fully develop that new type of American university will require countering and displacing the now-dominant big science, Cold War, entrepreneurial university strategy with a more compelling, morally inspiring, and intelligent one. Since 1985, we have been trying to contribute concretely to the complex process of developing such a strategy by following brilliant leads provided by William Rainey Harper, John Dewey, and many others. We have stood on their shoulders and consciously tried to integrate, realize, and progress beyond their combined visions.

UNIVERSITY-ASSISTED COMMUNITY SCHOOLS AS A PRACTICAL STRATEGY TO ACHIEVE A DEMOCRATIC DEVOLUTION REVOLUTION

Since 1985, the University of Pennsylvania has engaged itself with its local public schools in a comprehensive school-community-university partnership that was initially known as the West Philadelphia Improvement Corps (WEPIC). In its nearly 25 years of operation, the project has evolved significantly, spawning a variety of related projects that engage Penn with public schools in West Philadelphia. From its inception, we designed Penn’s work with WEPIC to forge mutually beneficial and respectful university-school-community partnerships. In recent years, we have begun to conceptualize that

work in much broader terms, namely as part of a radical attempt to advance a “democratic devolution revolution.”¹⁵ It is from that lofty perch that an overview of Penn’s work—and the work of many other higher educational institutions engaged with their local public schools—is best comprehended.

For nearly a generation, John Gardner, arguably the leading spokesperson for the “New Democratic, Cosmopolitan Civic University” (our term for it), thought and wrote about organizational devolution and the university’s potential role. For him, the effective functioning of organizations required the planned and deliberate rather than haphazard devolution of functions:

We have in recent decades discovered some important characteristics of the large-scale organized systems—government, private sector, whatever—under which so much of contemporary life is organized. One such characteristic—perhaps the most important—is that the tendency of such systems to centralize must be countered by deliberate dispersion of initiative downward and outward through the system. The corporations have been trying to deal with this reality for almost 25 years and government is now pursuing it. . . . What it means for government is a substantially greater role for the states and cities. And none of them are entirely ready for that role. . . . Local government must enter into collaborative relations with non-governmental elements. . . . So how can colleges and universities be of help?¹⁶

Gardner powerfully extended the Harper-Dewey vision by proposing a multisided involvement in “contemporary life” for higher eds, including initiating community building, convening public discussions, educating public-spirited leaders, offering continuing civic and leadership seminars, and providing a wide range of technical assistance. The effective, compassionate, democratic devolution revolution we call for requires much more than practicing new forms of interaction among federal, state, and local governments and among agencies at each level of government; it requires, to use Gardner’s phrase, “the deliberate dispersion of initiative downward and outward through the system.” For Gardner, government integration by itself does not make meaningful change. New forms of interaction and alignment among the public, for-profit, and nonprofit sectors are also mandatory. Government must function as a collaborating partner, effectively facilitating cooperation among all sectors of society, including higher educational institutions, to support and strengthen individuals, families, and communities.¹⁷

To extend Gardner’s observations about universities and colleges (and similar observations by such highly influential thinkers as Ernest Boyer, Derek Bok, Lee Shulman, and Alexander Astin), we propose a democratic devolution revolution.¹⁸ In our proposed “revolution,” government serves as a powerful catalyst and largely provides the funds needed to create stable, ongoing, effective partnerships. But government would function only as a second-tier

deliverer of services, with higher eds, community-based organizations, unions, churches, other voluntary associations, school children and their parents, and other community members functioning as the first-tier operational partners. That is, various levels and departments of government would guarantee aid and significantly finance welfare services. Local personalized-care services, however, would actually be delivered by the third tier (private, nonprofit, voluntary associations) and fourth tier (personal—family, kin, neighbors, friends) of society. Government would not be primarily responsible for the delivery of services; it would instead have macro-fiscal responsibilities, including fully adequate provision of funds.

The strategy we propose requires creatively and intelligently adapting the work and resources of a wide variety of local institutions (e.g., higher eds, hospitals, faith-based organizations) to the particular needs and resources of local communities. It assumes, however, that universities and colleges, which simultaneously constitute preeminent international, national, and local institutions, potentially represent by far the most powerful partners, “anchors,” and creative catalysts for change and improvement in the quality of life in American cities and communities.

Of course, for universities and colleges to fulfill their great potential and really contribute to a democratic devolution revolution, they will have to do things very differently than they do now. To begin with, changes in “doing” will require recognition by higher eds that, as they now function, they—particularly universities—constitute a major part of the problem, not a significant part of the solution. To become part of the solution, higher eds must devote themselves to the difficult task of becoming socially responsible, responsive, civic universities and colleges. To do so, they will have to radically change their institutional cultures and structures, democratically realign and integrate themselves, and develop a comprehensive, realistic strategy.

The major component of the neo-Deweyan strategy now being developed and slowly implemented by Penn focuses on developing university-assisted community schools designed to help educate, engage, activate, and serve all members of the community in which the school is located. The strategy assumes that community schools, like higher eds, can function as focal points to help create healthy urban environments, and that both universities and colleges function best in such environments. More specifically, the strategy assumes that, like higher eds, public schools can function as environment-changing institutions and can become the strategic centers of broadly based partnerships that genuinely engage a wide variety of community organizations and institutions. Since public schools “belong” to all members of the community, they should “serve” all members of the community. (No implication is intended that public schools are the only community places where learning and social organization take place; other “learning places” include libraries, museums, private schools, etc., and ideally, all of these places would collaborate.)

We contend that, more than any other institution, public schools are particularly well suited to function as neighborhood “hubs” or “centers” around which local partnerships can be generated and developed. When they play that innovative role, schools function as community institutions par excellence. They then provide a decentralized, democratic, community-based response to rapidly changing community problems. In the process, they help young people learn better, at increasingly higher levels, through action-oriented, collaborative, real-world problem solving.

For public schools to actually function as integrating community institutions, however, local, state, and national governmental and nongovernmental agencies must be effectively coordinated to help provide the myriad resources community schools need to play the greatly expanded roles we envision them playing in American society. How to conceive that organizational revolution, let alone implement it, poses extraordinarily complex intellectual and social challenges. But as Dewey argued, working to solve complex, real-world problems is the best way to advance knowledge and learning, as well as the general capacity of individuals and institutions to do that work.

We argue, therefore, that American universities should give the highest priority to solving the problems inherent in the cultural and organizational revolution we have sketched above. If universities were to do so, they would demonstrate in concrete practice their self-professed theoretical ability to simultaneously advance knowledge, learning, and societal well-being. They would then satisfy the critical performance test proposed in 1994 by the president of the State University of New York at Buffalo, William R. Greiner, namely that “the great universities of the twenty-first century will be judged by their ability to help solve our most urgent social problems.”¹⁹

Since 1985, to increase Penn’s ability to help solve America’s most urgent social problems, we have worked to develop and implement the idea of university-assisted community schools. We emphasize “university-assisted” because community schools require far more resources than traditional schools and because we have become convinced that, in relative terms, universities constitute the strategic sources of broadly based, comprehensive, sustained support for community schools.

The idea we have been developing at Penn since 1985 essentially extends and updates John Dewey’s theory that the neighborhood school can function as the core neighborhood institution—the neighborhood institution that provides comprehensive services, galvanizes other community institutions and groups, and helps solve the myriad problems communities confront in a rapidly changing world. Dewey recognized that if the neighborhood school were to function as a genuine community center, it would require additional human resources and support. But to our knowledge, he never identified universities as the (or even a) key source of broadly based, sustained, comprehensive support for community schools.

It is critical to emphasize, however, that the university-assisted community schools now being developed have a very long way to go before they

can effectively mobilize the powerful, untapped resources of their communities, and thereby enable individuals and families to function as community problem solvers, as well as deliverers and recipients of caring, compassionate local services.

ACADEMICALLY BASED COMMUNITY SERVICE, THE NETTER CENTER, AND PENN’S DEVELOPMENT OF UNIVERSITY-ASSISTED COMMUNITY SCHOOLS IN WEST PHILADELPHIA

Following the brilliant leads provided by Harper, Dewey, Gardner, and others, we believe that, as is true of all American universities, Penn’s highest, most basic, and most enduring responsibility is to help America realize in concrete practice the egalitarian promise of the Declaration of Independence: America will become an optimally democratic society, the path-breaking democratic society in an increasingly interdependent world, the exemplary democratic model for the improvement of the human condition. Once that proposition is granted, the question then becomes how can Penn best fulfill its democratic responsibility? We believe it can best do so by effectively integrating and radically improving the entire West Philadelphia schooling system, beginning with Penn but including all schools within West Philadelphia, the university’s local geographic community.

Admittedly, the history of Penn’s work with West Philadelphia public schools has been a process of painful organizational learning and conflict; we cannot overemphasize that we have made many mistakes and our understanding and activities have continually changed over time.²⁰ Moreover, Penn is only now beginning to tap its extraordinary resources in ways that could mutually benefit both Penn and its neighbors and result in truly radical school, community, and university change. Significantly, we have come to see our work as a concrete example of Dewey’s general theory of learning by means of action-oriented, collaborative, real-world problem solving. Conceptualizing our work in terms of schools as the strategic components of complex urban ecological systems represented a major advance for us.

When we first began work on university-community relationships in 1985, we did not envision schools or universities as highly strategic components of urban ecological systems. What immediately concerned us was that West Philadelphia was rapidly and visibly deteriorating, with devastating consequences for Penn. Given that “present situation” (as Dewey would have phrased it), we asked, what should the university do? Committed to undergraduate teaching, we designed an Honors Seminar aimed at stimulating undergraduates to think critically about what Penn could and should do to remedy its “environmental situation.” For a variety of reasons, the president of the university, Sheldon Hackney, himself a former professor of history, agreed to join us in hosting that seminar in the spring semester of 1985. The seminar’s title suggests its general concerns: Urban University-Community Relationships: Penn–West Philadelphia, Past, Present, and Future as a Case Study.

When the seminar began, we didn't know anything about Dewey's community school ideas. We literally knew nothing about the history of community school experiments and had not given any thought to Penn working with public schools in West Philadelphia. For present purposes, we need not recite the process of trial, error, and failure that led us—and our students—to see that Penn's best strategy to remedy its rapidly deteriorating environmental situation was to use its enormous internal and external resources to help radically improve both West Philadelphia public schools and the neighborhoods in which they are located. Most unwittingly, during the course of the seminar's work, we reinvented the community school idea.

Put another way, during the seminar, we developed a strategy based on this proposition: universities can best improve their local environment if they mobilize and integrate their great resources, particularly the "human capital" embodied in their students, to help develop and maintain community schools that function as focal points for creating healthy urban environments.

As noted above, by their very nature, community schools engage in far more activities and serve far wider constituencies than do traditional neighborhood schools. To do all that successfully, however, a community school, serving a specific neighborhood, requires far more resources (broadly conceived) than does a traditional school serving the same neighborhood.

Once that problem was recognized, the service-learning that students had been performing in West Philadelphia schools helped us to see that the solution was to actively mobilize the great resources of universities like Penn to assist the transformation of traditional neighborhood schools into innovative community schools. And once that was seen, the concept of university-assisted community schools followed logically. From then on, the seminar concentrated on helping to develop and implement that concept in real-world practice. In effect, the highly complex problem that the seminar concentrated on solving became the problem of effectively mobilizing and integrating Penn's resources to help transform the traditional public schools of West Philadelphia into innovative community schools.

Over time, as students continually worked to develop and implement the concept of university-assisted community schools, the seminar evolved into an innovative service-learning program. Briefly, the program was based on collaborative, action-oriented community problem solving, which provided both Penn students and teachers, and students in West Philadelphia schools, "with a real motive behind and a real outcome ahead," to quote John Dewey's proposition about the conditions most likely to permit effective learning.²¹

Observing the work of our students and our partners in West Philadelphia community schools over a number of years led us to develop a key principle that has guided their thinking and practice in a wide variety of ways and situations. That principle can be formulated as follows: at all levels (K through 16 and above), collaborative, community-based, action-oriented service-learning projects, which by their nature innovatively depart from customary, teacher-dominated school routines, allow and encourage both teachers and students

to participate democratically in school and classroom governance and functioning. Put another way, such projects create spaces in which school and classroom democracy can grow and flourish.

In our judgment, that general principle can be instrumental in inspiring and developing effective programs for democratic citizenship in a wide variety of schools (at all levels) and communities. It warrants careful consideration, we believe, by everyone engaged in trying to solve the complex problems inherent in education for democratic citizenship.

Over time, the seminar's increasingly successful work stimulated an accelerating number of "academically based community service" (ABCS) courses in a wide range of Penn schools and departments, developed and implemented under the auspices of the university's Netter Center for Community Partnerships. (For historical reasons that are unique to Penn, "academically based community service" is the term the university uses for what elsewhere is called "service-learning.") ABCS courses focus on action-oriented, community problem solving and the integration of research, teaching, learning, and service, as well as reflection on the service experience and its larger implications (e.g., why poverty, racism, and crime exist).

To date, approximately 160 such courses, working with schools and community organizations to solve strategic community problems, have been developed at Penn. Fifty-nine courses, across eight schools and twenty-one departments, involving over 1,500 Penn undergraduate and graduate students were offered during the 2007–2008 academic year. Over the past fifteen years, an increasing number of faculty members, from a wide range of Penn schools and departments, have revised existing courses, or have created new courses, to offer innovative curricular opportunities for their students to become active learners, creative real-world problem solvers, and active producers (as opposed to passive consumers) of knowledge. That relatively rapid growth has resulted largely from the organizational innovation described below.

In July 1992, the president of the university, Sheldon Hackney, created the Center for Community Partnerships. (The Center was renamed the Barbara and Edward Netter Center for Community Partnerships in 2007 in recognition of the generous term and endowment support provided by Barbara and Edward Netter.) To highlight the importance Hackney attached to the Center, he located it in the Office of the President and appointed Ira Harkavy as its director, while Harkavy continued to serve as director of the Penn Program for Public Service, created in 1988 in the School of Arts and Sciences. Symbolically and practically, the Center's creation constituted a major change in Penn's relationship with West Philadelphia and the city as a whole. In principle, by creating the Center, the university formally committed itself, as a corporate entity, to finding ways to use its enormous resources (e.g., student and faculty "human capital") to help improve the quality of life in its local community—not only in respect to public schools but also to economic and community development in general.

The Netter Center is based on the assumption that one highly effective and efficient way for Penn to simultaneously serve its enlightened institutional self-interest and to carry out its academic mission of advancing universal knowledge and educating students is to function as a truly democratic, cosmopolitan, engaged, civic university. It assumes that Penn's research and teaching should strongly focus on strategic universal problems—such as schooling, health care, and economic development—as these universal problems manifest themselves locally in West Philadelphia and the rest of the city. By focusing on strategic universal problems and effectively integrating general theory and concrete practice, as Benjamin Franklin advocated in the eighteenth century, Penn would improve symbiotically both the quality of life in its ecological community *and* its academic research and teaching.

The Netter Center is also based on the proposition that when Penn is creatively conceived as a community-engaged civic university, it constitutes, in the best sense, both a universal and a local institution of higher education. As we optimistically envisioned it functioning, the Center for Community Partnerships would constitute a far-reaching innovation in university organization. To help overcome the remarkably competitive fragmentation that had developed after 1945, as Penn became a very large research university, the Center would identify, mobilize, and integrate Penn's vast resources that could be used to help transform traditional West Philadelphia public schools into innovative community schools.

The emphasis on partnerships in the Center's name was deliberate: it acknowledged that Penn could not try to go it alone in West Philadelphia as it had been long accustomed to do. The creation of the Center was also significant internally. It meant that, at least in principle, the president of the university would have—and use—an organizational vehicle to strongly encourage all components of the university to seriously consider the roles they could appropriately play in Penn's efforts to improve the quality of its off-campus environment.

Implementation of that strategy accelerated after Judith Rodin became president in 1994. A native West Philadelphian and Penn graduate, Rodin was appointed in part because of her deeply felt commitment to improving Penn's local environment and to transforming Penn into *the* leading urban American university.²²

IMPEDIMENTS TO DEVELOPING AND SUSTAINING UNIVERSITY-ASSISTED COMMUNITY SCHOOLS IN WEST PHILADELPHIA

Amy Gutmann, Penn's current president, is a distinguished political philosopher whose scholarly work has explored the role public schools and universities play in advancing democracy and democratic societies. In her inaugural address on October 15, 2004, President Gutmann unveiled a comprehensive Penn Compact designed to advance the university "From Excellence

to Eminence." Although the compact's first two principles—increased access to a Penn education and the integration of knowledge—have significant implications for our discussion, the third principle is particularly relevant:

The third principle of the Penn Compact is to engage locally and globally. No one mistakes Penn for an ivory tower. And no one ever will. Through our collaborative engagement with communities all over the world, Penn is poised to advance the central values of democracy: life, liberty, opportunity, and mutual respect. Effective engagement begins right here at home. We cherish our relationships with our neighbors, relationships that have strengthened Penn academically while increasing the vitality of West Philadelphia.²³

Penn as an institution is now strongly oriented to advancing democratic, civic work.²⁴ Penn, of course, cannot become an institution dedicated to preparing a moral, engaged democratic citizenry with a set of disconnected programs, no matter how extensive. It must become a central organizing principle of the institution, embedded in its DNA, so to speak—and that is a primary goal of Gutmann's Penn Compact.

Even with partnerships dating back over twenty years with schools and communities in West Philadelphia, a developing and expanding critical mass of faculty and students involved in academically based community-service teaching and learning, and visible and sustained support from the Netter Center and from President Gutmann, serious impediments have prevented Penn from realizing the potential of university-assisted community schools in practice. These impediments have also had the general impact of slowing Penn's development as a truly democratic, cosmopolitan, engaged, civic university dedicated to realizing Franklin's original vision for the university to educate students with "an *Inclination* join'd with an *Ability* to serve Mankind, one's Country, Friends and Family [original emphasis]."²⁵ The impediments are not unique to Penn. To the contrary, they affect nearly all higher eds in the United States to some significant extent, and, therefore, need to be significantly reduced if the university civic engagement movement is to make progress and move to the next level in the years ahead.

In our judgment, the forces of Platonization, commodification, and disciplinary ethnocentrism, tribalism, and guildism stand as powerful impediments to the development of democratic university-school-community partnerships, particularly university-assisted community schools.

Platonization

Plato's elitist, idealist theory of schooling has had, and continues to have, incalculable day-to-day impacts on education and society. In part, the continuing extraordinary impact of Plato's antidemocratic theory on American

democracy can be explained by John Dewey's failure to translate his own ideas into practical action.

Like Plato, Dewey theorized that education and society were dynamically interactive and interdependent. But their aims differed radically. Plato's philosophy of education aimed to achieve aristocratic order; Dewey's, to achieve democratic community. For Dewey, then, it followed that if human beings hope to develop and maintain a participatory democratic society, they must develop and maintain a participatory democratic schooling system.

Ironically, however, it was the philosophical idealist Plato who pragmatically created an influential Academy to implement his aristocratic philosophy of education and society, while the philosophical activist Dewey failed to work pragmatically to institutionalize his democratic philosophy of education and society, except by "lay preaching." That is, despite the historical example of Plato's Academy, Dewey flagrantly violated his own general theory of thinking and action. Perhaps too simply stated, as a result of Dewey's astonishing error, Plato's general theory of learning and knowledge—which argued for the great superiority of elegant "pure theory" and "pure science" compared to "inferior" real-world practice—and his elitist theory of governance are deeply embedded in the culture and structure of American colleges and universities.²⁶

Indeed, the "dead hand" of Plato continues to shape American higher education, and through American higher education it shapes the entire schooling system. Yet, as we argue, the development of genuinely democratic community-university partnerships through democratic, collaborative, community problem solving can be an effective strategy for releasing the vise-like grip of Plato's dead hand.²⁷ "Overthrowing" Plato, however, would only achieve a partial victory. A clear and present danger to the democratic mission of higher education and to American democracy in general also comes from the forces of commodification (i.e., education for profit, students as customers, syllabi as content, academics as superstars).

Commodification

To discuss systematically the history of commodification in American higher education would require much more space than we have in this chapter. We merely note, therefore, that it was the Cold War and its extraordinarily complex consequences, direct and indirect, short and long term, that "redefined American science" and accelerated and deepened the commodification of American universities in powerful and, in our judgment, deeply disturbing ways.

To place that highly complex development in historical perspective, we cite Stuart Leslie's analysis that during the Second World War, to a far greater extent than during the First World War, universities had

won a substantial share of the funds [going into wartime mobilization], with research and development contracts that actually dwarfed

those of the largest industrial contractors. . . . Vannevar Bush, the chief architect of wartime science policy and a strong advocate of university research, was the man behind the change.²⁸

Bush engineered that change as director of the powerful wartime Office of Scientific Research and Development. Late in 1944, President Roosevelt, highly impressed by its accomplishments, asked Bush to draft a long-term plan for postwar science. Bush delivered his famous report *Science: The Endless Frontier* in 1945. General agreement exists that since 1945, that report has profoundly influenced America's science policy.²⁹ For our purposes, the chief importance of Bush's "Basic Science Manifesto" (our sardonic term for it) is that it rapidly produced what we have previously characterized as the big science, Cold War, entrepreneurial, commodified American research university system. Derek Bok brilliantly stigmatized this development in his book *Universities in the Marketplace* as the "commercialization of higher education."³⁰

Perhaps the most important consequence of the commercialization of higher education is the devastating impact it has on the values and ambitions of college students. When universities openly and increasingly pursue commercialization, their behavior legitimizes and reinforces the pursuit of economic self-interest by students and contributes to the widespread sense that they are in college primarily to gain career skills and credentials. It would only belabor the argument to comment further on how student idealism and civic engagement diminish strongly when students see their universities abandon academic values and scholarly pursuits to function openly and enthusiastically as entrepreneurial, competitive, profit-making corporations. Commercialization also powerfully stimulates faculty members to celebrate and practice disciplinary ethnocentrism, tribalism, and guildism.

Disciplinary Ethnocentrism, Tribalism, Guildism

Disciplinary ethnocentrism, tribalism, and guildism strongly dominate American universities today and work against their efforts to implement what they promise rhetorically to do.³¹ A few years ago, the postmodern literary theorist Stanley Fish provided us with a marvelous case in point. In his monthly column in the *Chronicle of Higher Education* (May 16, 2003), Professor Fish caustically attacked

the authors of a recent book [Anne Colby, Thomas Ehrlich, Elizabeth Beaumont, and Jason Stephens], *Educating Citizens: Preparing America's Undergraduates for Lives of Moral and Civic Responsibility* (Jossey-Bass 2003). A product of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, the volume reports on a failure that I find heartening.³²

The failure, according to the authors of *Educating Citizens*, is that undergraduate education does not provide “the kind of learning [college] graduates need to be involved and responsible citizens.”³³ Why was that failure “heartening” to Professor Fish? Because, he insisted unequivocally, professors cannot possibly provide that kind of learning; nor should they attempt it. Their job is simply to teach what their disciplines call for them to teach and to try to make their students into good disciplinary researchers. Professors can’t make their students “into good people and . . . shouldn’t try.” Indeed, for Fish, “emphasis on broader goals and especially on the therapeutic goal of ‘personal development’ can make it difficult to interest students in the disciplinary training it is our job to provide.”³⁴

In effect, Professor Fish not only called on American academics to repudiate John Dewey and his democratic adherents, he called on them to repudiate Plato and his antidemocratic elitist adherents. Since Plato’s philosophy of education, like Dewey’s, gives its highest priority to making good citizens, according to the Fish doctrine of professorial responsibility, they both were completely wrong. As teachers, according to Fish, the only duty of professors is to teach their discipline; it emphatically does not require or permit them to try to make their students “into good people.”

In a perverse way, Fish’s attack on the authors of *Educating Citizens* actually performed a valuable function. It splendidly illuminated what might be called the “disciplinary fallacy” afflicting American universities, namely the fallacy that professors are duty-bound only to serve the scholastic interests and preoccupations of their disciplines and have neither the responsibility nor the capacity to help their universities keep their longstanding promises to prepare “America’s Undergraduates for Lives of Moral and Civic Responsibility.” In effect, Professor Fish baldly asserts what most professors now believe and practice but tend not to admit openly. This belief and practice also tend to produce disciplinary isolation, or “silozation,” which severely inhibits the interdisciplinary cooperation and integrated specialization necessary to solve significant, highly complex, real-world problems.³⁵

REDUCING IMPEDIMENTS TO DEVELOPING AND SUSTAINING UNIVERSITY-ASSISTED COMMUNITY SCHOOLS IN WEST PHILADELPHIA

Having briefly identified the impediments that prevent Penn and other higher eds from developing democratic university-assisted community schools, we turn now to the really hard, really significant, question: What is to be done to release higher education from the dead hand of Plato and the live hands of commodification and the disciplinary fallacy? More specifically, what is a practical strategy to reduce these impediments and help American higher education overthrow Plato and institute Dewey, reject commodification and disciplinary guildism, and practically realize its democratic mission? In our view, the first step is to clarify and even redefine the purpose of undergraduate education.

Refocusing the Ends of Undergraduate Education

In the foreword to *Educating Citizens*, Lee Shulman, President of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching (the book’s publisher) emphasized the crucial role colleges play in the development of the virtues and understanding vital for democratic citizenship. Observing that a democratic society requires an “educated citizenry blessed with virtue as well as wisdom,” Shulman hailed the book’s demonstration that achieving the requisite

combination of moral and civic virtue accompanied by the development of understanding occurs best when fostered by our institutions of higher education. It does not occur by accident, or strictly through early experience. Indeed, I argue that there may well be a critical period for the development of these virtues, and that period could be the college years. During this developmental period, defined as much by educational opportunity as by age, students of all ages develop the resources needed for their continuing journeys through adult life.³⁶

Shulman’s astute observation helps us see the important, diverse roles that colleges play in the lifelong, all-encompassing development of the different types of personnel who directly and indirectly control and operate the American schooling system. If their formative years at college neither contribute to their own development as democratic citizens nor concretely demonstrate to them how schools can function to produce democratic citizens, they will necessarily reproduce what they have learned—more precisely, failed to learn—in college. As a result of that disastrously flawed reproductive process, the schooling system will be incapable of developing an effective program for democratic citizenship. Put another way, we agree with Shulman that American colleges constitute the strategically important component of American universities when their goal is to help develop an American schooling system capable of producing students who possess the set of attributes necessary to function as democratic citizens.

We have, for example, devoted lots of thought and hard work to the question of *how* best to create a democratic classroom. Besides trying to function more “as a guide on the side” than a “sage on the stage,” each of us has encouraged our students to work in collaborative groups with community members on community-identified and societal problems that are of deep personal interest. In effect, we have been trying to put into practice Dewey’s insight that individuals learn best when they are driven by “a real motive behind and a real outcome ahead.” Moreover, Lee Benson and Ira Harkavy have organized their seminars, including a seminar on University-Community Relationships they have cotaught since 1985, so that relatively early in the semester students and faculty in the seminar collaboratively design the

syllabus and take an increasing (and, over time, the primary) responsibility for the organization and operation of the seminar itself. We cannot describe here the detailed steps, both useful and “false,” we and our colleagues have taken to help advance genuinely democratic learning at Penn, including in the seminars we teach. Suffice it to say that, although we believe we have made progress, particularly during the past five or so years, we have a very long way to go to realize Dewey’s democratic vision in practice.

What more specific steps might help engage Penn, as well as other universities, to embrace this goal actively as well as rhetorically? Two of these steps are described below.

Act Locally and Democratically

In her edited volume *Building Partnerships for Service-Learning*, Barbara Jacoby and her associates emphasize that creating effective, democratic, mutually beneficial, mutually respectful partnerships should be a primary, if not *the* primary, goal for service-learning in the first decades of the twenty-first century. Jacoby calls on colleges and universities to focus their attention on improving democracy and the quality of life in their local communities.³⁷ Here she is echoing one of John Dewey’s most significant propositions: “Democracy must begin at home, and its home is the neighborly community.”³⁸ Democracy, Dewey emphasized, has to be built on face-to-face interactions in which human beings work together cooperatively to solve the ongoing problems of life. In effect, Jacoby and her associates have updated Dewey and advocated this proposition: Democracy must begin at home, and its home is the engaged neighborly college or university and its local community partner.

The benefits of a local community focus for college and university civic engagement programs are manifold. Ongoing, continuous interaction is facilitated through work in an easily accessible local setting. Relationships of trust, so essential for effective partnerships and effective learning, are also built through day-to-day work on problems and issues of mutual concern. In addition, the local community also provides a convenient setting in which a number of service-learning courses, community-based research courses, and related courses in different disciplines can work together on a complex problem to produce substantive results. Work in a college or university’s local community, since it facilitates interaction across schools and disciplines, can create interdisciplinary learning opportunities. And finally, the local community can function as a democratic real-world learning site in which community members and academics pragmatically determine whether the work is making a real difference, and whether both the neighborhood and the institution are better as a result of common efforts.

Since our work began more than twenty-five years ago, we have devoted particular attention to developing democratic, mutually beneficial, mutually respectful partnerships between Penn and schools and communities in

West Philadelphia/Philadelphia. Over time we have come to conceptualize the Netter Center for Community Partnerships’ work to develop university-assisted community schools as an ongoing, communal, participatory action research project designed to contribute simultaneously to the improvement of West Philadelphia and to Penn’s relationship with West Philadelphia, as well as to the advancement of learning and knowledge. As an institutional strategy, communal participatory action research differs significantly from traditional action research. Both research processes are directed toward problems in the real world, are concerned with application, and are participatory; but they differ radically in the degree to which they are continuous, comprehensive, and beneficial both to the organization or community studied and to the university.

For example, traditional action research is exemplified in the efforts developed by the late William Foote Whyte, Davydd Greenwood, and their associates at Cornell University to advance industrial democracy in the worker cooperatives of Mondragón, Spain.³⁹ Its considerable empirical and theoretical significance notwithstanding, the research at Mondragón is not at all an institutional necessity for Cornell. By contrast, the University of Pennsylvania’s enlightened self-interest is directly tied to the success of its research efforts in West Philadelphia—hence its emphasis on, and continuing support for, communal, participatory action research. In short, proximity to an easily accessible site and a focus on problems that are institutionally significant to the university encourage sustained, continuous research involvement. Put another way, strategic community problem-solving research tends strongly to develop sustained, continuous research partnerships between a university and its local community.

Given its fundamental democratic orientation, the Netter Center’s participatory action research project has worked toward achieving higher levels of participation by community members in problem identification and planning, as well as in implementation. To put it very euphemistically, this has not been easy to do. Based on decades of Penn’s destructive action and inaction involving the local community, university-community conflicts take significant effort and time to reduce.⁴⁰ The Center’s work with university-assisted community schools has focused on health and nutrition, the environment, conflict resolution and peer mediation, community performance and visual arts, school and community publications, technology, school-to-career programs, and reading improvement. Each of these projects almost inevitably varies in the extent to which it engages and empowers public school students, teachers, parents, and other community members in each stage of the research process. Though it has a long way to go before it actually achieves its goal, the Center’s overall effort has been consciously democratic and participatory—to genuinely work *with* the community, not *on* or *in* it.

As university-assisted community schools and related projects have grown and developed, and as concrete positive outcomes for schools and neighborhoods have continued to occur, community trust and participation have

increased. It would be terribly misleading, however, if we left the impression that town-gown collaboration has completely—or even largely—replaced the town-gown conflicts that characterized Penn-community relationships before 1985. It has not.

Penn's engagement with West Philadelphia schools and neighborhoods has certainly come a long way since 1985. But Penn still has a far distance to travel before it radically changes its hierarchical culture and structure and truly uses its enormous resources to help transform West Philadelphia into a democratic, cosmopolitan, neighborly community and multidimensional asset for a major university. Stated directly, we do not think we have largely solved the problem of developing and implementing the practical means needed to realize Dewey's theory of participatory democracy. We are well aware that we are a long way from having done so. As noted above, however, we have found that working with the community to solve strategic community-identified problems is a powerful means for advancing ongoing, increasingly democratic relationships between Penn and schools and communities in West Philadelphia.

Focus on Significant, Community-Based, Real-World Problems

To Dewey, knowledge and learning are most effective when human beings work collaboratively to solve specific, strategic, real-world problems. "Thinking," he wrote, "begins in . . . a *forked road* situation, a situation which is ambiguous, which presents a dilemma, which poses alternatives [original emphasis]." ⁴¹ A focus on universal problems (such as poverty, unequal health care, substandard housing, hunger, and inadequate, unequal education) as they are manifested locally is, in our judgment, the best way to apply Dewey's brilliant proposition in practice. To support our position, we turn to a recent example from Penn's work with West Philadelphia.

REDUCING IMPEDIMENTS AND DEVELOPING UNIVERSITY-ASSISTED COMMUNITY SCHOOLS IN PRACTICE: A BRIEF CASE STUDY

In a number of other publications, the three of us and our colleague Matthew Hartley have described how a focus on the problem of improving health care in a specified school and community resulted in a comprehensive integration of Penn resources and the development of the most successful university-assisted community school in West Philadelphia, Sayre High School. ⁴² The work with the Sayre school and its community to create and operate a large-scale health promotion and disease prevention program continues to be a particularly powerful example of the benefits that can result when a university and its neighbors work together to solve a complex, real-world, community-identified problem. ⁴³ For the purposes of this chapter, however, we think it

best to briefly describe another example: our work to help improve community planning and design with West Philadelphia High School (WPHS) students and with community members residing within the boundaries of the school's catchment area.

Since the summer of 2005, West Philadelphia residents from diverse backgrounds, including John Puckett and Elaine Simon, director of the university's Urban Studies Program, have organized to establish a new West Philadelphia High School, to be composed of small theme-based academies located on a quiet green-space campus. This organizing effort has led to the School District of Philadelphia's designation of a site and completion of an architectural plan for a new facility, which is scheduled to open in the fall of 2011.

Each semester Puckett and Simon teach a seminar on "Schools and Community Development," which engages Penn undergraduates and WPHS students and teachers in collaboratively planning and implementing an urban studies academy. The academy is now being developed at the existing high school for transfer to the new high school in 2011. The seminar's joint activities are defined as "public work," as they engage groups from different social and economic backgrounds to accomplish shared goals for neighborhood planning and design, a decidedly public purpose. ⁴⁴ For the high school students these activities are also academic, involving higher-order analytic and communication skills needed to solve the problem of what West Philadelphia should be and do in the future. In the process, the students contribute to the construction of the high school as a "community-centered school," a goal advocated by the Philadelphia Student Union and the community organizing team. For the university, this initiative produces not only tangible intellectual benefits for Penn undergraduates—for example, "a first-hand contact with actualities" (to use John Dewey's apt phrase) and a set of theoretical lenses to interpret that experience—but also centers on a real-world universal problem whose resolution activates interschool, interdepartmental, and interdisciplinary cooperation at Penn—and advances the idea of "One University."

Penn is perhaps the only major American university where all of its schools and colleges are located on a contiguous urban campus. In the early 1970s, Martin Meyerson, then the newly appointed president of the university, emphasized the extraordinary intellectual and social benefits that would result if the university took optimum advantage of the ease of interaction that a single campus location provides. To realize those benefits, he called for implementation of a "One University" organizational realignment—in which Penn would be characterized by intellectual collaboration and synergy across departments, divisions, colleges, and schools that would result in significant advances in knowledge and human welfare.

That kind of radical realignment, of course, is much easier said than done. In practice, overcoming Penn's disciplinary fragmentation and conflict, narrow specialization, bureaucratic barriers, and what Benjamin Franklin stigmatized in 1789 as "ancient Customs and Habitudes," ⁴⁵ proved enormously

difficult to achieve; the “One University” idea essentially remained an idea, not a program of action. We are convinced, however, that it is possible to resurrect and realize the “One University” idea in practice through working to implement solutions to highly complex community-identified problems (such as improving community health care and designing and developing an effective urban high school) that require interschool and interdisciplinary collaboration.

The following chronology briefly explains the progress of the high school planning initiative and the immediate background of the seminar.

Meeting throughout the late summer and fall of 2005, a large citizens’ group called the “Plenary,” which included some 180 West Philadelphia residents, teachers, and students, deliberated democratically (and often heatedly!) to draft a proposal to create a “new” West Philadelphia High School. The new school would replace the existing antiquated structure at Forty-sixth and Walnut streets, a neo-Gothic edifice that has been in continuous operation since 1912, and since the 1970s has been racially segregated and neglected by the city. Eric Braxton, founding director of the Philadelphia Student Union, and a small cadre of WPHS students gave informed presentations to the Plenary regarding small theme-based high schools they had visited in cities such as New York, Oakland, and Hartford. The Plenary subsequently backed the idea of replacing “the old West” with a set of small high schools or academies, each to be organized around a particular theme.

Completing the initial community-side planning for the new high school in December 2005, the Plenary then designated a smaller working group named the “Sustainability Circle” (later renamed the “West Philadelphia High School Community Partners”) to fine-tune the general proposal and to work out the themes for each academy. Suggested by the Student Union and endorsed by a vote of the Sustainability Circle, an urban studies academy became part of the proposal in the summer of 2006. Throughout 2006 and into 2007, the Sustainability Circle worked on the final proposal and vigorously lobbied School District CEO Paul Vallas and the city’s School Reform Commission (the School District’s appointed governing board); the high school’s neighboring community associations in Walnut Hill, Spruce Hill, and Garden Court; and the area’s local politicians—Councilwoman Jannie Blackwell, State Representative Jim Roebuck, and Congressional Representative Chaka Fattah.

In the spring of 2007, the longstanding crisis of malign neglect at West Philadelphia High School erupted in student assaults on teachers, incidents of arson, and other building-clearing disruptions, underscoring the virtual collapse of education in this under-resourced, badly failing comprehensive high school. To stabilize the situation, Vallas removed the principal and brought in an interim leadership team. Next, responding to heavy pressure from the Sustainability Circle, Vallas’s staff appointed an “executive committee” with a twofold charge: (1) to launch concrete plans to support the implementation of four theme-based “academies” at the existing high school in the fall of

2007, and (2) to interview principal candidates and to recommend up to three names to the School District’s chief academic officer. This executive committee was broadly representative, including the School District, the Walnut Hill and Garden Court community associations, the Student Union at WPHS, two teachers, community members, the Home and School Association, and a Penn faculty member (John Puckett). The committee was chaired by the head of the Secondary School Division and facilitated by a consultant to the School District. In June 2007, at the end of this process, Saliyah Cruz, a dynamic African American applicant, was appointed the new principal of West Philadelphia High School. Puckett, Simon, and Richard Redding, director of community planning at the Philadelphia City Planning Commission, with the approval of the Sustainability Circle and Principal Cruz, organized EDUC 410/URBS 327, an academically based community service seminar to provide on-site planning support and implementation strategies for the new Urban Studies Academy (URBSA).

In the fall of 2007 three new academies opened at WPHS: URBSA, CAPA (Cultural and Performing Arts), and Business/Technology. (A previously existing entity, the Automotive Academy, is located in a separate building on Hansen Street, a block west of WPHS; “Auto” will remain on Hansen Street after the new high school opens in 2011.) URBSA start-up projects in 2007–2008 included, among others, the publication and public presentation of a plan to redesign and rehabilitate a vacant lot at Forty-ninth and Chancellor Streets. For this project, the Penn students in EDUC 410/URBS 327 taught their high school counterparts principles of scale-modeling, which the West students applied to produce mathematically precise designs for a vest-pocket park on the site. At a celebratory picnic held with the Penn students at the end of the spring semester, the West students voted on the best design features of their collective work to be incorporated into the final plan. This project was advised by Michael Nairn, a landscape architect who teaches in the Urban Studies Program and lives in West Philadelphia, and it was carried out in conjunction with the West Philadelphia Enterprise Center Community Development Corporation (TEC-CDC), which served as a “client” for the West students. (Exemplifying the web of school-community-university cooperation supporting this effort, Gabe Mandujano, director of the TEC-CDC, a 2005 Penn graduate with a dual degree from Wharton and Urban Studies, a former Marshall Scholar, and a former student of ours, mediated the seminar’s relationship with the Walnut Hill neighborhood, where the project was based.) The West students wrote and digitally designed the booklet that includes the final plan for the project, which Nairn produced professionally, based on the students’ own drawings. Residents of the two blocks adjacent to the vacant lot have embraced the project, which puts a benign, neighborly face on the high school after years of nonengagement.

It is important to note the problem-focused orientation of EDUC 410/URBS 327: Its commitment is to provide a continuous flow of new ideas and resource support to the URBSA. In addition to the activities just described,

Penn students located and annotated resources (books, articles, and curriculum guides) for three new courses that were introduced in the URBSA in fall 2008: The American City, Urban Sociology, and Neighborhood Planning and Design. In fall 2008, the seminar assisted a project in the new Neighborhood Planning and Design course, taught by Neil Geyette, the new URBSA coordinator and the teacher with whom the Penn team had worked previously; this was a research and community organizing project to address the problem of a vacant, delinquent, blighted apartment building adjacent to the high school. With Puckett and Simon, John Landis, chair of Penn's Department of City and Regional Planning, and Domenic Vitiello, an assistant professor in the department, provided a summer institute to help the URBSA teachers plan the components of Geyette's course and to brainstorm interdisciplinary activities that would link their own courses to Geyette's.⁴⁶

To briefly summarize, the West Philadelphia High School initiative stands on a foundation of school, community, and university cooperation. The community problem-solving orientation of the EDUC 410/URBS 327 seminar, and the interschool/interdepartmental/ interdisciplinary relationships (Graduate School of Education, School of Arts and Sciences, School of Design) the seminar activates, illustrate fundamental propositions of the idea and strategy of "One University."

CONCLUSION

Although we have focused on the efforts at Penn, we believe this strategy holds promise for all institutions of higher learning. Indeed, many have already made significant commitments to developing university-assisted community schools, including the University of Dayton, University of New Mexico, Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis (IUPUI), and University of Oklahoma-Tulsa. We have learned, and continue to learn, a great deal from these and other universities and their school and community partners that we have applied to our work in West Philadelphia.

When institutions of higher learning give very high priority to actively solving strategic, real-world, community-identified problems in their local communities, a much greater likelihood exists that they will significantly advance learning, research, teaching, and service and thereby simultaneously reduce the dysfunctional "ancient Customs and Habitudes" that impede the development of mutually beneficial, democratic university-school-community partnerships. More specifically, by focusing on solving universal problems that are manifested in their local communities, institutions of higher learning will be better able to realize what we view as their basic mission of contributing to an optimally democratic society. Even more specifically, they will be able to translate the theoretical advantages of the "One University" idea into practical action and help create the university-assisted community schools, which, as this chapter contends, is one of the

best ways to help develop democratic students, K through age twenty, and thereby significantly contribute to the development of democratic schools, democratic universities, and a democratic American Good Society in the twenty-first century.

NOTES

1. Benson, Harkavy, and Puckett 2007.
2. See Cahn 1981, pp. xvi-xvii. Cahn quotes from John Dewey's "The Determination of Ultimate Values or Aims through Antecedent or A Priori Speculation or through Pragmatic Inquiry."
3. Cahn 1981, pp. xvii-xviii.
4. For an insightful analysis of Bacon's conception of science, see Rossi 1996, pp. 25-28.
5. Bok 1990.
6. Quoted in White 1977, p. 15. For our views on the Harper-Dewey relationship at the University of Chicago, see Benson and Harkavy 2000, pp. 174-196; and Benson and Harkavy 1999, pp. 14-20.
7. For Harper's view of the university as the "Messiah" of democracy, see his 1899 address in Harper 1905, pp. 1-34. See also the highly insightful study of Harper and the University of Chicago in Wind 1987.
8. Harper 1905, p. 32.
9. Ibid., p. 25.
10. Ibid., p. 12.
11. Kennedy 1997, pp. 265-288, 299.
12. For a highly perceptive, devastatingly critical analysis of Bush's report *Science: The Endless Frontier*, see Stokes 1997.
13. Goldsmith 1910, p. 24.
14. For an illuminating discussion of the American university's democratic mission, see Anderson 1993 and Anderson 1997, pp. 111-130. See also Harkavy 1999, pp. 7-24.
15. Discussion of the concept of a democratic devolution revolution is found in testimony by Harkavy (U.S. Congress 1997).
16. Gardner 1998.
17. Ibid.
18. See Astin 1997, pp. 207-223; Bok 1990, *passim*; Boyer 1994, p. A48; and Schulman 1997, pp. 151-173.
19. Greiner 1994, p. 12.
20. For an illuminating discussion of the concept of organizational learning, see Whyte 1991, pp. 237-241.
21. Dewey 1991, p. 12.
22. Rodin 2007.
23. Gutmann 2004.
24. Benson, Harkavy, and Puckett 2007.
25. Franklin, "Proposals Relating to the Education of Youth in Pennsylvania [sic]," reprinted in Best 1962, pp. 150-151.
26. Benson and Harkavy 2000, pp. 174-196.
27. Harkavy and Benson 1998, pp. 11-19.

28. Leslie 1993, p. 6.
29. Leslie 1993.
30. Bok 2003.
31. The discussion of disciplinary ethnocentrism, tribalism, and guildism, as well as the sections that follow, were initially developed in Benson and Harkavy 2003.
32. Fish 2003, p. C5.
33. Colby, Ehrlich, Beaumont, and Stephens 2003, p. 7.
34. Fish 2003, p. C5.
35. In its 1982 report, *The University and the Community*, the Organization for Economic Development (OECD) describes the inhibiting impacts of university "silozation" and narrow "departmentalism" on fostering the interdisciplinary scholarship necessary for solving real community problems. The following epigraph, which begins part 3, chapter 2, neatly captures the report's argument: "Communities have problems, universities have departments." See Center for Educational Research and Innovation 1982, p. 127.
36. Schulman 2003, p. viii.
37. Jacoby 2003.
38. Dewey 1954, p. 213.
39. Greenwood and Santos 1992; W. F. Whyte and K. K. Whyte 1988.
40. Harkavy and Puckett 1991, pp. 10–25.
41. Dewey 1990, p. 11.
42. See, for example, Benson, Harkavy, and Hartley 2005, pp. 185–216; Benson, Harkavy, and Puckett 2007; Harkavy 2006, pp. 5–37.
43. The benefits for Sayre High School included achieving Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP), according to No Child Left Behind (NCLB) measures, by meeting thirteen out of thirteen AYP targets in 2006–2007. For example, student attendance increased from 75 percent to 85 percent from the 2005–2006 to 2006–2007 school year. Sayre is one of only five neighborhood high schools (of a total of more than thirty citywide) that made AYP in 2007. The Sayre-Penn Partnership also received recognition for its work, including a School District of Philadelphia Best Practices for Effective Community Partnerships Award (May 2008) and the Coalition for Community School's National Award for Excellence (June 2007). Also, Penn State nurse practitioners and Sayre students received first prize in the research poster category at the 24th Annual Pediatric Nursing Conference in June 2008 for their work assessing growth and diabetes risk factors in the school and the community.
44. For public work theory and citizenship, see Boyte 2004; and Boyte and Kari 1996.
45. See Reinhold 1968, p. 224.
46. During the more than two years when this chapter was under review and later in press, the Schools and Community Development seminar, in conjunction with an undergraduate class in the Penn School of Design, provided technical support for a branding project inside the high school, for which Geyette's students, on the basis of schoolwide surveys, designed the logos and banners for each academy. The most recent project is a plan submitted by Geyette's students for the partial rehabilitation of a large vacant property that stands in the shadow of the city's newly renovated Market Street Elevated station at Forty-sixth and Market streets. Two-thirds of the CDC-controlled lot is already under development for community and commercial gardening. The West students' contribution is a digitally rendered landscape design—supported by their historical, marketing, and stakeholder research—for a park that would front the gardening components on the site.

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