Dewey, Implementation, and Creating a Democratic Civic University

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> Thinking begins in . . . a *forked-road* situation, a situation that is ambiguous, that presents a dilemma, that poses alternatives.
>
> —John Dewey (*How We Think* 122)

> The social philosopher, dwelling in the region of his concepts, "solves" problems by showing the relationship of ideas, instead of helping men solve problems in the concrete by supplying them hypotheses to be used and tested in projects of reform.
>
> —John Dewey (*Reconstruction in Philosophy* 192)

> Democracy must begin at home, and its home is the neighborly community.
>
> —John Dewey (*The Public and Its Problems* 213)

DEMOCRACY, AS WE ALL KNOW, is seriously threatened throughout the world (Fisher). In the United States, the chasm-like inequities laid bare by COVID-19, the ongoing killing of black Americans, the violent insurrection at the Capitol, and the continuing attempt to subvert the electoral process are powerful indicators of a system under severe strain (Guardian Staff; Rubin). These developments are also a sign of deep and chronic problems, including the following:

1. Increasing economic, political, social, educational, and health inequalities
2. Increasing racism, anti-Semitism, and xenophobia
3. Increasing attacks on science, knowledge, and democracy itself
4. Declining trust in nearly all major institutions

Many things, obviously, contribute to the present situation. Among them is the failure of universities to successfully do what they are supposed to do: educate students to be ethical, empathetic, engaged, democratic citizens, and

advance knowledge for the continuous betterment of the human condition (Benson et al., *Knowledge*). To use a Marxian framework, but to reject its economic determinism, universities, in my judgment, are not a part of society's superstructure. They are, to the contrary, a core component of its base (Marx, "Preface"). What they do matters enormously, significantly determining the kind of society we have now and will have in the future.

Universities, as former Harvard president Derek Bok and others have emphasized, have become the central societal institutions in the world (Bok, *Universities and the Future* 3). Research universities, in my judgment, are the most central. They develop new ideas and technologies, incubate businesses, serve as cultural and artistic centers, and are engines of local, national, and global economies. As anchor institutions, they often engage in partnerships with government, the private sector, and community-based organizations to revitalize local neighborhoods and schools ("Anchor Institutions Task Force"). It is the university's role as an educational institution, however, that is most important.

The schooling system increasingly functions as the core subsystem—the strategic subsystem—of modern information societies. Schooling, more than any other subsystem, as John Dewey claimed, influences the functioning of the societal system as a whole. Viewed systemically, it has on balance the greatest "multiplier" effects, direct and indirect, short-term and long-term. Restating these points somewhat differently, I strongly agree with the Chilean sociologist Eugenio Tironi that the answer to the question "What kind of education do we need?" is to be found in the answer to the question "What kind of society do we want?" (Tironi). Education and society are dynamically interactive and interdependent. If human beings hope to maintain and develop a particular type of society, they must develop and maintain the particular type of education system conducive to it. As Dewey in effect argued: *No effective democratic schooling system, no democratic society*.[1]

For William Rainey Harper, who, as the first president of the University of Chicago, brought Dewey to Chicago, universities are the primary shapers of the American schooling system. In an 1899 speech at the University of California, he perceptively observed that "[t]he school system, the character of which, in spite of itself, the university determines and in a large measure controls. . . . [T]hrough the school system every family in this entire broad land of ours is brought into touch with the university; for from it proceed the teachers or the teachers' teachers" (Harper 25). Agreeing with Harper, I contend that higher education institutions powerfully shape the learning, values, and aspirations of students from kindergarten through graduate school.

Given the university's societal role and influence, creating and sustaining an inclusive, just democratic society requires a radical, indeed revolutionary, change in higher education. To return to a pre-pandemic status quo is not an option.

Higher Education and the Pre-Pandemic Status Quo

In the early 1990s, I wrote that a higher education institution "can no longer try to remain an oasis of affluence in a desert of urban despair" (Benson and Harkavy 14). The impacts of COVID-19 and the powerful lessons of Black Lives Matter, among other things, make this statement seem even more true today.[2]

Pre-pandemic conditions for black, Latinx, and Native Americans, including lower income and wealth levels, greater food and housing insecurity, and higher unemployment, left these communities more vulnerable to the economic shocks of COVID-19 (Hardy and Logan 2; Weeks). The health impacts of the pandemic are particularly unsettling: life expectancy fell in 2020 by nearly three years for black Americans and three years for Latinxs (compared to one-and-two-tenths years for white Americans) (Leonhardt). According to the Indian Health Service, "American Indians and Alaska Natives have infection rates over three-and-one-half times higher than non-Hispanic whites, are over four times more likely to be hospitalized as a result of COVID-19, and have higher rates of mortality at younger ages than non-Hispanic whites" ("Coronavirus [COVID-19]"). The risk of being orphaned due to COVID-related deaths of primary caregivers is also significantly higher for children of racial and ethnic minority groups than for white children (Hillis et al. 5–6). There should be no "return to normal" when normal means unremitting poverty and such radically different life prospects for different communities.

Unfortunately, normal also means a higher education system that too often fosters and exacerbates inequality. A 2017 *New York Times* study, for example, revealed that at least thirty-eight elite universities in the United States, including Penn and four other Ivy League institutions, enrolled more students from the top 1% of the income scale than from the entire bottom 60% (Aisch et al.). Penn, as well as other institutions, have certainly made progress over the last five years, but it remains insufficient. Analysis by *The New York Times* also revealed that, at the top one hundred US colleges and universities, black and Hispanic students are even more under-represented now than they were in 1980 (Ashkenas et al.).

For higher education institutions to make the contributions that they could and should, they must recognize that, as they now function, they—particularly research universities—are, today, more part of the problem than part of the solution. And in so doing, they also need to move beyond, indeed reject, the neoliberal model that I believe significantly defines the pre-pandemic and the current pandemic-impacted university.

Since the 1980s, the neoliberal university has gained increasing currency and power throughout the world, contributing to increasingly savage inequalities and a diminished sense of public purpose. Education for profit, not virtue; students as consumers, not producers of knowledge; academics as individual entrepreneurial superstars, not members of a community of scholars—all these developments reflect the commercialization of higher education, which contributes to an overemphasis on institutional competition for wealth and status, and has a devastating impact on the values and ambitions of students (Bok, *Universities in the Marketplace* 3).[3]

When institutions openly pursue commercialization, their behavior legitimizes and reinforces the pursuit of economic self-interest by students and amplifies the widespread sense that they are in college or university *exclusively* to gain career-related skills and credentials. Student idealism and civic engagement are strongly diminished when students see their universities abandon academic values and scholarly pursuits to function as competitive, profit-making corporations. Commercialism and the neoliberal university not only foster an environment in which higher education is seen as a private benefit rather than a public good, but they also simultaneously contribute to rising economic disparities both on and off campus and the overall underfunding of higher education (Bessner; Mintz 84).

Returning to a traditional liberal arts/college model, in which the institution is detached from society, would fail to counter the neoliberal university. On the contrary, its disciplinary focus and emphasis on elite and elitist education similarly work against core democratic goals such as diversity, inclusion, and equity. What is needed instead is a liberal arts in line with Dewey's call for an engaged, problem-solving approach to scholarship and learning. As he wrote in *Reconstruction in Philosophy*: "The social philosopher, dwelling in the region of his concepts, 'solves' problems by showing the relationship of ideas, instead of helping men solve problems in the concrete by supplying them hypotheses to be used and tested in projects of reform" (Dewey, *Reconstruction in Philosophy* 189–90). Putting Dewey's call into action would be at the heart of a democratic civic university.

The Democratic Civic University

There has certainly been an increase in university engagement since the early 1990s. Many colleges and universities, including my own, have programs that focus on educating students for democratic citizenship and improving schooling and the quality of life in partnership with the communities in which they reside. Service learning, engaged scholarship, community-based participatory research, volunteer projects, and neighborhood economic development initiatives are some of the means employed. No higher education institution, as far as I can tell, however, has the depth and breadth of engagement needed at this time. The post-pandemic (or more accurately, the pandemic-impacted) university needs to be radically different from what now exists. Its *primary* mission should be *advancing democracy democratically* on campus, in the community and across the wider society.

Colleagues and I have labeled this new kind of higher education institution a "democratic civic university" (Harkavy et al., "Universities Must Help" 23) that would involve significant and ongoing engagement of an institution's comprehensive assets (academic, human, cultural, and economic) in partnership with community members to produce knowledge and educate ethical students with the ability to help create and maintain just, anti-racist, democratic societies. Importantly, a democratic civic university would infuse democracy across all aspects of the institution. Participatory democracy and a culture of democracy, not just democracy as defined by voting or a system of government, would be central goals. It would work to realize in practice Dewey's vision of democracy as "a way of life" (Dewey, "Creative Democracy" 341) in which all members of the community (on and off campus) actively participate in the communal, societal, educational, and institutional decisions that significantly shape their lives.

Henry Louis Taylor, professor of urban and regional planning at the University of Buffalo, added to our understanding of the concept by emphasizing that anti-racism would be a core component of a democratic civic university: "To realize in practice their aspiration of being democratic civic universities dedicated to producing knowledge and educating ethical, empathetic students for just and sustainable democratic societies, they must be 'anti-racist' and produce knowledge for racial and social change. It is not enough," Taylor continued, "to simply produce knowledge; they must produce knowledge for 'social change' that can inform the creation and development of the 'neighborly community'" (Taylor 42).

Calling for a democratic civic university and describing what it should do are, of course, relatively easy. It is much harder to figure out what specifically needs to change. It is even harder to identify how to bring about the desired change. I now turn to these difficult implementation questions. Let me admit upfront that my responses, alas, are much too general and lack a satisfying "here to there" (from the neoliberal to the democratic civic university) strategy. But here they are, nonetheless.

A New Kind of University Requires a New Epistemology

In 1995, the philosopher and organizational theorist Donald Schön wrote an influential essay, "Knowing-in-Action: The New Scholarship Requires a New Epistemology," which built on Ernest Boyer's expansion of the definition of scholarship to include teaching, application (later termed engagement), and integration, as well as the dominant mode of discovery or basic research. Just as the title of the article says, Schön called for employing a new action-based epistemology that "will conflict with the norms of technical rationality—the prevailing epistemology built into the research universities" (Schön 27). For Schön, "knowing in action" entails making room for the practitioner and "the practitioner's reflection in and on action" (34). He argues for going beyond "creating plans" to "enacting them" (31) and having higher education institutions legitimize "reflective action research" (34).

My argument, like Schön's, has its roots in the writings of Dewey and the social psychologist Kurt Lewin and their focus on learning through resolving real-world dilemmas, implementation, and ongoing reflection. Also, with Schön, I am advocating for a form of action research—in my case, participatory action research as advanced by two distinguished Cornell faculty members, sociologist William Foote Whyte and anthropologist Davydd Greenwood, with its emphasis on democratic process.[4] My goal, however, is less the changing of higher education institutions to accept practitioner knowledge, and more the creation of inclusive, democratic partnerships with those outside the university to create knowledge for social change, including the radical change of research universities (as well as higher education in general).

I am, in effect, calling for a *democratic implementation revolution*, which requires breaking down idealist categories that separate theory and application, scholars and practitioners, and academics and community members. Useful perspectives and knowledge exist in many places and domains, not just in the university. The difficult question is how to bring multiple perspectives

and various kinds of knowledge together to solve, not merely identify and address, the major problems facing our communities, society, and world. My answer to that question proposes that faculty do three interrelated things: focus on place-based local partnerships, develop an inclusive approach involving a "community of experts," and make democratic implementation the process and goal of research.[5]

1. *Focus on place-based local work in the university's geographic community*. Dewey famously wrote: "Democracy must begin at home, and its home is the neighborly community" (*Public and Its Problems* 368). Democracy, he emphasized, has to be built on face-to-face interactions in which human beings work together cooperatively to solve the ongoing problems of life. I am updating Dewey and advocating the following proposition: *Democracy must begin at home, and its home is the engaged neighborly college or university and its local community partners*.

The benefits of a local community focus are manifold. Ongoing, continuous interaction is facilitated through work in an easily accessible location. 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 provides a convenient setting in which 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 university's local community, since it facilitates interaction across schools and disciplines, can also create interdisciplinary learning opportunities. Finally, the local community is a democratic real-world learning site in which community members and academics can 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.

For Dewey, knowledge and learning are most effectively advanced when human beings work collaboratively to solve specific, important real-world problems in "a *forked road* situation, a situation that is ambiguous, that presents a dilemma, which poses alternatives" (Dewey, *Public and Its Problems* 122). Focusing on universal problems—such as poor schooling, eroding environments, inadequate health care, poverty, and high levels of economic inequality—that are manifested locally is, in my judgment, the best way to apply Dewey's brilliant proposition.

2. *Develop an inclusive approach that involves knowledge possessed "on the ground" by community members*. This approach expands the definition of

expertise and knowing to include other voices—those not necessarily steeped in professional credentials or academic knowledge, but in lived experience of the conditions and actualities under examination. What is needed is a movement away from a narrow definition of an "expert" to a "community of experts"—a broadening of context to include indigenous place-based knowledge, which is essential for solving locally manifested universal problems (Cantor and Englot 121). Community members with that knowledge must also be *actively* involved when the problem is defined, and remain involved through the development and implementation of solutions (Whyte et al.).

3. *Make democratic implementation the process and goal of the research*. In their 1998 essay, the philosopher and systems scientist C. West Churchman and the organizational theorist Ian Mitroff in effect call for an implementation revolution in which implementation is the "top priority" of research. For them, "'[t]ruth' is the result/outcome of knowledge that is gained through the 'successful' implementation of a proposed, ethical solution to a significant world problem" (Churchman and Mitroff 117). As I have indicated, work *with* partners in a university's local community is perhaps the best way to develop an ethical implementable solution to a significant world problem. I would term this approach *democratic implementation research*, which involves the continuous integration of theory and practice in the course of place-based problem solving (Harkavy; National Science Foundation; "Committee on Equal Opportunities in Science and Engineering").[6] This approach assumes that human beings learn effectively (perhaps best) from and through ongoing implementation and reflection.[7] It also assumes that research designed to realize large societal goals through developing and implementing programs on the ground with community partners, refining these programs, and engaging in an iterative process leads to significant learning, high-level theoretical advances, and improved practice. The core rationale for democratic implementation research is perhaps best expressed in a well-known maxim attributed to Kurt Lewin: "If you want to truly understand something, try to change it."

To briefly state my argument for a democratic implementation revolution somewhat differently:

- Locally manifested universal problems cannot be solved without the inclusion and active involvement of community members residing in the locality that is the focus of engagement and study.
- The inclusion and active engagement of community members will result in better, more innovative and transformative research, as well as better, more decent, and just universities, communities, and societies.

- Democratic, place-based implementation research projects that are carried out with community members and focus on locally manifested universal problems form a promising strategy to help transform research universities, increasing their contribution to knowledge and the continuous improvement of the human condition.[8]

Having claimed that a new epistemology based on democratic place-based implementation research with community partners is needed for a democratic civic university, I should now provide an illustration of a university where that theory of knowledge and approach is being put into practice by a critical mass of faculty members, having truly transformational results. Unfortunately, I am unable to do that since I cannot find an example of that occurring.[9] I can, however, do two things that might be useful: place my argument into historical context and describe the case I know best that roughly approximates the approach I described. That case is not an entire university, but that of the Netter Center's thirty-year effort to develop democratic partnerships between Penn and its local geographic community of West Philadelphia.

First, I turn to a historical overview written in the spirit of Dewey's statement in *Democracy and Education* that "[t]he true starting point of history is always some present situation with its problems" (222).

The Unrealized Democratic Public Purpose of Higher Education

The critical past and current roles of historically black colleges and universities, other minority-serving institutions, community colleges, and state comprehensive institutions in educating a majority of undergraduate students (particularly minority populations) and serving their communities cannot be overemphasized. My focus, however, is on research universities. This is not only because I work at one but also because research universities, as previously discussed, are extraordinarily influential, significantly shaping how the rest of the higher education system functions (Benson et al., *Dewey's Dream*).

The primary founding purpose of every colonial college—except for the University of Pennsylvania—was to educate ministers and religiously orthodox men capable of creating good communities built on religious denominational principles, whereas Benjamin Franklin founded the University of Pennsylvania (Penn) as a secular institution to educate students in a variety of fields.[10] In 1749, envisioning the institution that would become the University of Pennsylvania, he wrote of developing in students "an *Inclination* join'd with an *Ability* to serve Mankind, one's Country, Friends and Family;

which *Ability* . . . should indeed be the great *Aim* and *End* of all Learning" (Franklin 150; emphasis in original).

Franklin's call to service is echoed in the founding documents of hundreds of private colleges established after the American Revolution, as well as in the speeches of many college presidents. A similar blend of pragmatism and idealism found expression in the subsequent century in the Morrill Act of 1862, which established land-grant colleges and universities whose purpose was to advance the mechanical and agricultural sciences, expand access to higher education, and cultivate citizenship. The University of Wisconsin's "Wisconsin Idea" later broadened the purpose to include developing institutions to solve significant, practical problems—making "the boundaries of the university . . . the boundaries of the state" (Stark 101–02; Benson et al., *Knowledge* 71).

The land-grant institutions eventually came to adopt a three-part mission that included research, teaching, and extension for the public good. Granted, this history is hardly all about progress and democracy. Land acknowledgments recognizing the dispossession of Indigenous peoples and slavery projects by universities (including my own) have helped to connect past policies and practices to the racism and inequities we see today (Lee and Ahtone; "Penn and Slavery Project").

The history of US colleges and universities, nonetheless, strongly supports the claim that the public—indeed, democratic—mission is and should be the primary mission for higher education. As political scientist Charles Anderson observed:

> With deliberate defiance, those who created the American university (particularly the public university, though the commitment soon spread throughout the system) simply stood this [essentially aristocratic] idea of reason on its head. Now it was assumed that the widespread exercise of self-conscious, critical reason was essential to *democracy.* The truly remarkable belief arose that this system of government would flourish best if citizens would generally adopt the habits of thought hitherto supposed appropriate mainly for scholars and scientists. We vastly expanded access to higher education. We presumed it a general good, like transport, or power, part of the infrastructure of the civilization. (Anderson 8)

In summary, strengthening democracy at the expense of old social hierarchies served as the central mission for the development of the US research university, including both land-grant institutions and urban universities. In 1876, Daniel Coit Gilman, in his inaugural address as the first president of Johns Hopkins, the first modern research university in the United States, expressed

the hope that universities would "make for less misery among the poor, less ignorance in the schools, less bigotry in the temple, less suffering in the hospital, less fraud in business, less folly in politics" (qtd. in Long 184). Belief in the democratic purposes of the research university echoed throughout higher education at the turn of the twentieth century. In 1908, Harvard's President Charles Eliot wrote: "At bottom most of the American institutions of higher education are filled with the democratic spirit of serviceableness. Teachers and students alike are profoundly moved by the desire to serve the democratic community. This is a thoroughly democratic conception of their function" (qtd. in Veysey 119).

Urban university presidents of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries worked to develop major national institutions capable of meeting the needs of a rapidly changing and increasingly complex society. Imbued with boundless optimism and a belief that knowledge could change the world for the better, Seth Low at Columbia and Harper at Chicago (Bender 279–84; Benson et al., *Knowledge* 32–47), among others, envisioned universities as leading the way toward a more effective, humane, and democratic society for all, particularly for residents of the city. Academics at this time also viewed the city as their arena for study and action. They seized the opportunity to advance knowledge, teaching, and learning by working to improve the quality of life in cities that were experiencing the traumatic effects of industrialization, immigration, and large-scale urbanization (Diner).

Few Progressive Era (1890–1920) university presidents and academics, however, viewed local communities as reciprocal partners from whom they and their students could learn through identifying and solving strategic community problems. University–community engagement was essentially a one-way enterprise characterized by elitism and noblesse oblige. University "experts" armed with scientific knowledge would identify community problems and authoritatively prescribe solutions, not work collaboratively with community members in a mutual relationship from which both groups might benefit and to which both groups would contribute knowledge, ideas, and insights. The expert's role was to study and assist, not to learn from and with, the community (Hackney 145).

In 1899, W. E. B. Du Bois, in his classic study *The Philadelphia Negro*, written while he was an instructor at the University of Pennsylvania's Wharton School, succinctly captured the purpose of Progressive Era research "as the scientific basis of further study, and of practical reform" (4). Yet scholarship focused on producing direct and positive change had largely vanished from universities after 1918. The First World War was the catalyst for a full-scale retreat (Harkavy and Puckett 306). The brutality and horror of that conflict

ended the buoyant optimism and faith in human progress and societal improvement that had marked much of the so-called Progressive Era of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (Ross).

As Penn colleague Lee Benson observed:

> In the decades after World Wars I and II, American higher education . . . increasingly concentrated on essentially scholastic, inside-the-Academy problems and conflicts rather than on the very hard, very complex problems involved in helping American society realize the democratic promise of American life for all Americans.
>
> As a result, they increasingly abandoned the public mission and societal engagement that had powerfully, productively inspired and energized them during their pre-World War I formative period of great intellectual growth and development. (Benson qtd. in Harkavy, "School-Community-University Partnerships" 14)

Since the end of the Cold War and a turn from competition and conflict among great powers abroad to domestic crises such as the so-called "urban crisis,"[11] there has been a substantive and public re-emergence of what might be termed "community engaged scholarship" designed to contribute to democracy.[12] The academic benefits of community engagement have also been illustrated in practice—and the intellectual case for engagement increasingly made.[13] That case, simply stated, is that higher education institutions would better fulfill their core academic functions, including advancing knowledge, teaching, and learning, if they focused on improving conditions in their societies, including their local communities. More broadly, a burgeoning democratic civic and community engagement movement has developed across higher education in the United States to better educate students for democratic citizenship and to improve schooling and the quality of life (Benson et al., *Knowledge* 68–84). Granting that progress, engagement has been, in my judgment, inadequate to the task at hand.

For a case study of progress as well as the need to do much, much more, I turn to a brief discussion of Penn's Netter Center for Community Partnerships.

Penn, the Netter Center, and the West Philadelphia Community

Formative Years

The Netter Center's work was particularly inspired by Benjamin Franklin's founding vision for Penn, which was rooted in the Enlightenment idea,

powerfully expressed by Francis Bacon, that "knowledge is power" for "the relief of man's estate."[14] My colleagues and I also came 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 (Benson and Harkavy 2–28).

What had immediately concerned us was that West Philadelphia was rapidly and visibly deteriorating, with devastating consequences for community residents as well as the university. These consequences included increased blight, crime, and poverty, as well as concern about Penn's ability to continue to attract and retain outstanding faculty, staff, and students. Given that "present situation" (as Dewey phrased it), we asked, What should the university do? (Dewey, *Democracy and Education* 222). Committed to undergraduate teaching, fellow-historian Lee Benson and I designed an honors seminar aimed at stimulating undergraduates to think critically about what Penn could and should do to remedy its "environmental situation." Intrigued with the concept, Sheldon Hackney, then the president of the university and also a historian, joined us in teaching 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. (It is a class that I teach to this day.)

Over time, Benson and I and our students began to see that Penn's best strategy to remedy its rapidly deteriorating environmental situation was to use its internal and external resources to help radically improve both West Philadelphia public schools and the neighborhoods in which they are located. Unwittingly, during the course of the seminar's work, we rediscovered the community school idea. We developed a strategy based on the following proposition: universities can best improve their local environment if they mobilize and integrate their assets, particularly the "human capital" embodied in their students, to help develop and maintain university-assisted community schools that engage, empower, and serve not only students, but also all other members of the community, and function as focal points for creating healthy urban environments.

Observing the work of the Penn students and their partners in the West Philadelphia community schools over a number of years led Benson, me, and our colleagues to develop a key principle that has guided our thinking and practice in a wide variety of ways and situations. That principle is that at all educational levels (K–16 and above), collaborative, community-based, problem-solving, action-oriented 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. Such projects create spaces in which school and classroom democracy can grow and flourish. In my judgment, that general principle can be instrumental in inspiring and developing effective programs for democratic citizenship in a wide variety of schools and communities.

During its early years, the Center developed two key strategies that continue to underpin its work today. The first strategy is *academically based community service* (ABCS): community service rooted in and intrinsically connected to research, teaching, learning, and practice. The second, *university-assisted community schools* (UACS), is a comprehensive approach to neighborhood and school improvement that educates and engages students, their families, and other members of the community and provides an organizing framework for bringing university resources, including ABCS courses, to West Philadelphia schools.

Academically Based Community Service

The Netter Center has developed well over two hundred ABCS courses, seminars, and internship programs in forty departments in all of Penn's twelve schools. In local public schools, ABCS courses have contributed to curricular and co-curricular activities in such areas as reading, nutrition and disease detection/prevention, dance and physical activity, urban environmental issues (including lead toxicity and brownfields), urban gardening and landscaping (vest-pocket park and school grounds design, for example), housing renovation, music, social-base mapping, transit-oriented development, African American culture and history, and the STEM disciplines. Academically Based Community Service courses have also supported professional development for teachers, college-access programs, and community arts.

The Agatston Urban Nutrition Initiative (AUNI) is an example of an evolving and expanding Netter Center program that was developed through ABCS. In 1991, Professor Francis Johnston, a renowned expert on nutritional anthropology, decided to redesign the Anthropology 210 course to focus on helping to solve the community-identified problem of poor nutrition. The work began at Turner Middle School, where the teachers had recognized that the standard snack of potato chips and colored sugar water was not contributing to their students' health or academic success. Johnston's redesigned course "Anthropology 310: Nutrition, Health, and Community Schools" became the prototype for ABCS courses.

The initial class of eighteen Penn students worked with Turner Middle School teachers, led by Marie Bogle, an extraordinary educator and organizer, and sixth grade students on a range of small-scale participatory action research projects dealing with healthy foods, physical growth, dietary intake, and obesity status. The results were used in planning subsequent activities. The success of Anthropology 310 not only influenced the Anthropology Department, but it also inspired other Penn departments and schools to become involved in ABCS (Johnston and Harkavy).

Over the next few years, a widening circle of Penn faculty and students worked with Johnston, in collaboration with local middle school teachers and students, to understand the nutritional practices in the community and to address the problem through a series of jointly developed projects. These included an educational program, an in-school market that provided healthy snacks, a school-based garden, and a nutritional outreach program for the community. Ultimately, Johnston's course led to the development of the Agatston Urban Nutrition Initiative—a central Netter Center program that works with approximately sixteen Philadelphia public schools, serving more than six thousand students, as well as hundreds of adults, at a variety of West Philadelphia community and senior centers.

Another example of innovative ABCS teaching is the work of Karen Detlefsen, Professor of Philosophy and Education. Her research focuses on early modern philosophy, including the history of the philosophy of science, the history and philosophy of education, and women in the history of philosophy. Detlefsen, who is also Penn's vice provost for Education, is leading Penn's Project for Philosophy for the Young, whose goal is to bring philosophy systematically into the pre-college classroom across Philadelphia, as a model for other school districts in the United States and beyond. Academically based community service courses are core to both the development and ongoing implementation of the program partnership between Penn and Philadelphia public schools. Detlefsen has developed four of these courses since 2015. One of them, Philosophy 249: Philosophy of Education, engages Penn undergraduates in studying a variety of topics in philosophy with the aim of developing curricula and lesson plans for university-assisted community schools in West Philadelphia.

In one iteration of this course, Penn undergraduates worked closely with a group of high school students, who eventually wrote and presented their own original papers at a conference on Penn's campus. More recently, Penn students have worked with Detlefsen—as well as with a teacher in a

local middle school and a curricular planner from Penn's Graduate School of Education—to develop a series of one-hour lessons in philosophy, which they then taught to local fifth grade students. The course provides the fifth grade students with the opportunity to explore philosophical ideas and improve their critical thinking skills, while at the same time providing Penn students with the opportunity to develop their teaching and communication skills and deepen and solidify their understanding of philosophical concepts and methods through teaching. The latest version of the course resulted in Philadelphia's first regional Ethics Bowl in February 2020, where six local high school teams competed for a chance to participate on a national level. A hallmark of Penn's Project for Philosophy for the Young, mirrored in the ABCS Ethics Bowl course, is the cultivation of collaborative partnerships among school district teachers and Penn's faculty and students.

Detlefsen's graduate students have co-taught ABCS courses, as well as researching and helping to develop age-appropriate philosophy curricula for high school and middle school students, which they have then taught in a range of after-school clubs. Detlefsen was also the faculty advisor of an inaugural (2019) Provost's Graduate Academic Engagement Fellow at the Netter Center, Michael Vazquez. This two-year fellowship is open to PhD students across all schools and fields at Penn. It is designed to support graduate students whose work centers on ABCS and other forms of community-engaged scholarship, as well as to elevate the education and training of the next generation of community-engaged academics. As part of his fellowship, Vazquez developed and taught an ABCS course in Spring 2020 entitled "Public Philosophy and Civic Engagement," which engaged undergraduate students in philosophical discussions with local high school students related to civic life in a democratic society. He is currently Teaching Assistant Professor and Director of Outreach in the Department of Philosophy and the Parr Center for Ethics at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

Academically based community service has experienced considerable growth since the Netter Center's founding in 1992, when only four such courses were offered. Approximately seventy-five to eighty courses are now taught each academic year, enrolling seventeen hundred to eighteen hundred undergraduate and graduate students.

As noted above, the Netter Center's second strategy is university-assisted community schools, providing an implementation approach for bringing university resources, including ABCS courses, to West Philadelphia schools. This strategy developed from Dewey's idea of community schools.

University-Assisted Community Schools

Until his appointment to the University of Chicago in 1894, Dewey had only a minor interest in how schooling systems functioned and how they might be improved. The Chicago appointment led to a radical change in his interests. During his ten years in Chicago, Dewey became convinced that revolutionizing the schooling system was the best means to transform America into the participatory democratic, "organic" society he had envisioned as early as 1888 in a lengthy essay entitled "The Ethics of Democracy" (227–50).

In Chicago, Dewey came to believe that a major component of that schooling revolution would be the transformation of American public schools into *community schools*—that is, schools that would function as the social centers of the communities in which they were located. Although he did not invent the concept of community schools, he extended the work of other scholars and added his own distinctive interpretation. He envisioned neighborly organizations that would help educate democratic citizens by bringing together people of diverse backgrounds for continuous lifelong education and social interaction in collaborative ways that would surmount the barriers of race, class, and religion. He came to the community school idea largely through his close association and friendship with Jane Addams and her colleagues at Hull House, the famous social settlement that Addams and Ellen Gates Starr had founded on Chicago's poverty-stricken West Side. The practical activities of the women of Hull House, and the powerful theories and insights these passionate activists derived from their work, helped Dewey to understand the central role that local communities played in American society and also to see that public schools could function as strategic agencies to help develop participatory democratic communities (Knight).[15]

In 1902, inspired by Hull House and settlement houses in other cities, Dewey presented a significant, prescient address, "The School as Social Centre," at a National Education Association conference (Dewey, "School as Social Centre" 80–93). Viewed in historical perspective, the talk clearly anticipated some of the community school movements that episodically rose and fell in the United States after 1902 and are now strongly rising again ("Coalition for Community Schools"). The current community school movement builds on and extends Dewey's idea that since public schools "belong" to all members of the community, they should "serve" all members of the community—and 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, providing a decentralized, democratic, community-based response to rapidly changing community problems. In the process, they help young people learn and develop skills through action-oriented, collaborative, real-world problem solving.

Dewey's 1902 address on the "School as Social Centre" and the various community school movements that it inspired would, in complex ways, eventually lead to the development of the theory and practice of university-assisted community schools. The university-assisted community school logically extends and updates Dewey's theory of the school as a social center. In my colleagues' and my neo-Deweyan conception, the neighborhood school becomes the core institution that provides comprehensive services, galvanizes other community institutions and groups, and helps solve the myriad problems that communities confront in a rapidly changing world. Dewey rightly recognized that if the neighborhood school is to function as a genuine community center, it requires additional human resources and support. In this vein, my colleagues and I emphasize "university-assisted" because community schools do indeed require far more resources than traditional schools, and because we are convinced that, in relative terms, universities constitute the strategic and most powerful sources of broadly based, comprehensive, sustained support for community schools. University-assisted community schools engage universities as lead partners, providing that support for community schools. This partnership between a higher education institution and a local school and its community is designed to improve both the quality of life in the community and the quality of learning at all levels of schooling.

The Netter Center's work has grown in recent years to include approximately thirty-seven hundred children and their families at eight UACS sites in West Philadelphia. Expansion to additional sites has resulted from interest and requests from principals, as well as new funding opportunities that arose from the Netter Center's positive track record in West Philadelphia (Harkavy et al., "History and Development" 303–21). A Netter Center site director is based at a particular school full-time and collaborates closely with that school and its community to determine activities that best serve their specific needs and interests. In addition to coordinating the programs, UACS site directors serve as liaisons between the university and the school, as well as between schoolteachers and the after-school program. Staff from the Center's thematically based programs, such as the Agatston Urban Nutrition Initiative, Moelis Access Science (STEM outreach), UACS Sports, and College Access/Career Readiness programs, also regularly work in the schools.

As it has grown and developed, the Netter Center has become increasingly involved in the direct implementation of programs. It employs a diverse team of fifty full-time staff to support its initiatives on campus and in the community. Staff and programming are funded through a combination of government grants, private gifts, and university support. Staff supervise and support the engagement of over three thousand Penn students in Netter's programs through ABCS courses, work-study, internships, and volunteer opportunities. The Netter Center also hires over 125 part-time staff each year, the majority of whom are from West Philadelphia, to work in the Center's grant-funded after-school and summer programs at university-assisted community schools.

As the Netter Center has increased its focus on and capacity for implementing programs with community partners in West Philadelphia, I believe it has been able to develop more effective learning experiences for both Penn and K–12 students. Much more work, of course, remains to be done to successfully involve all aspects of the university in democratic community partnerships and to better integrate currently siloed, disconnected efforts. Lots of organizational learning and learning from others will also be required if Penn is to become a democratic civic university.

From Local to Regional, National, and Global: Sharing and Learning from and with Others

Since the Netter Center's inception, one of its objectives has been to cultivate regional, national, and international networks of individuals and institutions of higher education that are committed to democratic civic engagement with their communities. The Netter Center builds these networks to learn from and work with others, to stimulate change in and across localities, and to help develop a higher education democratic civic and community engagement movement. In my judgment, creating, developing, and sustaining a large movement(s) is necessary to transform communities and universities for the better.

For example, in 1987, with colleagues from Temple and La Salle, I founded the Philadelphia Higher Education Network for Neighborhood Development (PHENND), a consortium of now more than twenty-five colleges and universities in the greater Philadelphia area dedicated to helping revitalize local communities and schools and to fostering civic responsibility among the region's institutions of higher education.

From the early 1990s, several institutions across the United States began to express an interest in the university-assisted community school model being developed by the Netter Center and its partners. With private and governmental support, twenty-three adaptation sites were funded and provided with technical assistance. With the 2007 endowment to the Netter Center, the center's strategy for adaptation shifted to creating regional training centers based at higher educational institutions that have demonstrated significant experience in and commitment to the work. Regional centers have been supported on three-year cycles at the University of Oklahoma-Tulsa (2008), IUPUI in Indianapolis (2011), the University of Connecticut (2014), UCLA (2017), and Binghamton University (2020). In response to the growing number of institutions of higher education that are engaged with community schools, a national UACS network was formed in 2015, with over seventy colleges and universities now participating.

Comprehensive democratic engagement of universities and other institutions in community and economic development is at the core of the Anchor Institutions Task Force (AITF), which was formed in 2009 following the submission of the report of a task force I chaired to Secretary of Housing and Urban Development Shaun Donovan ("Anchor Institutions Task Force"). Expertly led by David Maurrasse, AITF, on which I serve as founding chair, has grown to include approximately one thousand individual members in the United States and abroad and has stimulated a European Platform created by the Council of Europe on the Local Democratic Mission of Higher Education.

For over twenty years, a transatlantic and now global co-operation has been working to realize the democratic purpose and promise of higher education. The organizations involved include the International Consortium for Higher Education, Civic Responsibility and Democracy (which I chair and which is housed at the Netter Center)—comprised of the United States, Australia, Ireland, South Africa, the United Kingdom, and the Magna Charta Observatory—the Council of Europe, the Organization of American States, and the International Association of Universities. The Global Cooperation for the Democratic Mission of Higher Education undertakes cross-national research projects and the sharing of best practices and has hosted six global forums, each resulting in an edited volume. The seventh Global Forum, which is on "Higher Education Leadership for Democracy, Sustainability, and Social Justice," was held in Dublin in June 2022.

For Francis Bacon, true advancement of learning is contingent on "a closer connection and relationship between the universities." Writing in the

early seventeenth century, Bacon had a limited frame of reference, just "the universities of Europe" (Bacon 54), but his proposition provides a pragmatic rationale for collaboration between and among universities in today's global society. The more universities combine insights, ideas, and resources to focus on and help solve multifaceted community and societal problems, the greater the likelihood of advances in learning and well-being. Moreover, contemporary problems, such as the climate crisis—as well as threats to democracy, racism, and economic inequality—are global in scope, so the democratic civic university must also advance globally if meaningful change is to occur.

Conclusion: The Task before Us

In 1939, Dewey wrote the article "Creative Democracy—The Task before Us" in response to the growing threat of Nazism. Describing democracy as "a way of life," he went on to write: "Intolerance, abuse, calling of names because of differences of opinion about religion or politics or business, as well as because of differences of race, color, wealth or degree of culture are treason to the democratic way of life" ("Creative Democracy" 342). Dewey did not identify universities as having a role in defending, preserving, and advancing democracy in that brilliant essay. More generally, higher education is absent from his discussions of creating democratic schooling, community schools, and the "neighborly community," which he claimed essential for democracy itself.

Although my approach is largely derived from Dewey's creative, far-reaching ideas, I clearly place higher education institutions and the work of faculty at the center of developing and sustaining democracy, particularly participatory democracy. In summary, I have argued that a democratic civic university dedicated to democracy on campus and in communities and societies is urgently needed. To create that new type of university will, I have further argued, require faculty to engage in democratic implementation research with members of their university's local geographic community. Simply stated, universities and university faculty members should give a very high priority—in fact, their highest priority—to solving locally manifested universal problems.

"Only connect!"—the powerful evocative epigraph to E. M. Forster's classic novel *Howard's End* captures the essence of my argument (Forster, front matter). Namely, the necessary revolutionary transformation of colleges and universities is most likely to occur in the crucible of significant, serious, sustained engagement with local public schools and their communities. Neither

abstract, contemplative, Ivory Tower isolation nor narrow, market-driven, careerist commercialism will shed intellectual light on our most pressing societal problems and produce positive social change. They will not get us where we need to go at this crucial moment. To put it more positively, I conclude by calling on active, community-engaged academics and their community partners to work together to create and sustain a global movement dedicated to developing democratic civic universities and realizing Dewey's vision of neighborly communities and participatory democratic societies.

NOTES

1. Harry Boyte, senior scholar at Augsburg University, persuasively argues that now is a critical time to make the case for democratic education in theory and action: "[W]e are in a 'Deweyan moment,' when John Dewey's focus on the centrality of democracy to education and on education as the wellspring of a democratic way of life has never been more important to emphasize in theory and to make come alive in practice" (Boyte 1).

2. The wealth of elite urban research universities has also increased enormously since the early 1990s, resulting in an immoral and indefensible situation of extreme community poverty in the shadows of extremely wealthy universities. See Ginia Bellafante, "Have Urban Universities Done Enough for the Neighborhoods Around Them?," *The New York Times*, 10 Dec. 2021, www.nytimes.com/2021/12/10/nyregion/urban-universities-neighborhoods.html.

3. The neoliberal university has been strongly supported by immensely wealthy individuals with very conservative ideological agendas. Funding from right-wing sources have subverted the core values of the university. For example, the Koch brothers' promotion of free-market ideology through endowed university chairs, scholarships, and research centers with undue influence on both curriculum and hiring decisions has had pronounced negative impacts on academic freedom as well as on research and education. See, for example, Dave Levinthal, "Koch Foundation Proposal to College: Teach Our Curriculum, Get Millions," 12 Sept. 2014, publicintegrity.org/federal-politics/koch-foundation-proposal-to-college-teach-our-curriculum-get-millions/.

4. See Whyte 383–84; Whyte et al.; Whyte and Whyte; Greenwood and González; Greenwood et al.; and Greenwood. In previous writings, colleagues and I described our work with West Philadelphia as communal participatory action research. The concept assumes that the proximity of the university and its local community as well as a focus on problems of institutional significance to Penn would encourage sustained, continuous research involvement and something like a communal relationship between the university and the community. See Benson et al., *Knowledge* 104–07.

5. Here, I am reframing a conceptualization that appeared in Greenwood et al. 175–92.

6. My ideas on implementation research were developed as a member, vice chair, and chair of NSF's Committee on Equal Opportunity in Science and Engineering (CEOSE) from 2012–2018. Although many committee members helped shape my thinking, I am particularly indebted to Nancy Cantor, Chancellor of Rutgers University–Newark. To avoid confusion, I should note that CEOSE's work on implementation research differs from implementation science/research in health care, which concerns "the study of methods to promote the adoption and integration of evidence-based practices, interven-

tions and policies into routine health care and public health settings" (www.fic.nih.gov/ResearchTopics/Pages/ImplementationScience.aspx).

7. Churchman and Mitroff are sharply critical of pragmatism for being incomplete, for failing to move from a theory of knowledge and action to actual implementation: "We agree that 'truth' is to be equated with that knowledge that makes a difference in the quality and scope of our lives. However, pragmatism says very little about how such knowledge is to be implemented, that is, how we humans are to pass from sound propositional arguments to ethically valid actions" (Churchman and Mitroff 113). In *Dewey's Dream*, which I co-authored with Lee Benson and John Puckett (Benson et al., *Dewey's Dream*), we observed that despite his passionate belief in, and advocacy of, participatory democracy, Dewey never actually developed, let alone implemented, a comprehensive strategy and program capable of realizing his powerful general theory in real-world practice.

8. For a discussion of the connection between the advancement of knowledge and the continuous improvement of the human condition, see Benson et al., *Knowledge*.

9. There are higher education institutions that, in my judgment, have made significant progress toward becoming democratic civic universities, including Augsburg University, Berea College, Rutgers University–Newark, and University of San Diego.

10. Primary does not mean sole motive. Economic purposes have also played a significant role in the founding and ongoing development of American colleges and universities. Colleges, it was anticipated, would bring more than religious and educational benefits to a local community; they would bring economic (and a wide variety of other) benefits. The Brown brothers of Providence, Rhode Island, provide a particularly clear—and crass—statement of anticipated economic benefits. Appealing for support to the "businessmen of Providence and . . . surrounding towns," they promised that "[b]uilding the College here will be the means of bringing great quantities of money into the place, and thereby greatly increase the markets for all kinds of the country's produce, and consequently increasing the value of estates to which this town is a market." Similarly, Franklin not only highlighted the educational, moral, and civic value, but also the economic benefits to Philadelphia of a creating a college. The quotation can be found in Thomas C. Cochran, *Business in American Life: A History*, McGraw Hill, 1972, p. 35.

11. Russia's invasion of Ukraine, of course, marks the return of great powers conflict.

12. The impacts of increased black presence on campus and student unrest, beginning in the wake of the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr., also helped pave the way for increased civic and community engagement in higher education.

13. See Bok, *Universities and the Future*; Boyer, *Scholarship Reconsidered*; Boyer, "Scholarship of Engagement"; Gutmann; Benson et al., *Dewey's Dream*; Delbanco; Padrón; Benson et al., *Knowledge*; Cantor, "Anchor Institution" 121.

14. Although Bacon wrote "knowledge itself is a power," the famous statement "knowledge is power" captures Bacon's meaning and is widely attributed to him. See his *Meditationes Sacrae*, 1957, ed. Basil Montagu, *The Works of Francis Bacon*, vol. 1, R. Worthington, 1984, en.wikisource.org/wiki/Meditationes_sacrae, Accessed 3 Nov. 2017. The phrase for "the relief of man's estate" can be found in Bacon, "Advancement of Learning" 29.

15. Jane Addams's contributions, of course, extend far beyond helping to develop the community school idea. Particularly pertinent to this paper, she convincingly made the case, through both the work of Hull House and her writings, of the necessity to "attempt to test the value of human knowledge by action" and "to apply knowledge to life" (Addams 78).

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