

An Implementation Revolution as a Strategy for Fulfilling the Democratic Promise of University-Community Partnerships: Penn-West Philadelphia as an Experiment in Progress

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In this article, the authors argue that the academic-practitioner divide is largely a product of the Platonic false dualism between “superior” pure theory and “inferior” applied practice. The authors call for a Dewey-inspired implementation revolution to build local democratic neighborly communities as a means for advancing academic-practitioner collaboration, fulfilling America’s democratic promise, and overcoming the influence of Plato’s aristocratic philosophy on American higher education. The authors describe the University of Pennsylvania’s Center for Community Partnerships’ work with public schools as an experiment in progress designed to advance academic-practitioner collaboration and a “democratic devolution revolution.” Academically based community service learning and research and communal participatory action research are highlighted as particularly useful approaches for improving scholarship and communities and forging democratic, mutually beneficial, and mutually respectful university-school-community partnerships.

The academic-practitioner divide is largely a product of the Platonic aristocratic false dualism between “superior” pure theory and “inferior” applied practice. Fulfilling the democratic promise of American society for all Americans in the new millennium requires that scholars and practitioners work hard to exorcise the “living ghost” of Plato from the body of the American higher educational system. Quite simply, to improve the state of American society—indeed, of the world—requires significant serious, sustained, and mutually respectful collaboration between academics and practitioners. To put it another way, no big problem that really matters (e.g., poverty, environmental degradation, illiteracy, hunger, poor schooling, urban crises) can be solved and understood without academics and practitioners working closely together to solve it.

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Academic-practitioner collaboration, we believe, is imperative for advancing both knowledge and human welfare. Fifteen years of work with a comprehensive participatory action research project has helped us to see that implementation (i.e., successfully putting ideas into practice) is the test of knowledge. In their extraordinary essay, Churchman and Mitroff (1998) in effect call for an implementation revolution in which implementation is the first and primary task of scholarship. Terming this approach “managerialism,” they write:

Implementation assumes top priority because it is one of the most difficult problems that humans ever face. In this sense, managerialism challenges the entire scientific pecking order. The so-called “hard” sciences are “easy” under managerialism because they do not grapple with and come face to face *with the most difficult problem of all, how to change people and human institutions*. [emphasis added]

“Truth” is the result/outcome of knowledge that is gained through the “successful” implementation of a proposed, ethical solution to a significant world problem. In other words, *knowledge cannot be separated from the process of its implementation. To repeat, “truth” is knowledge that is gained through the process of implementation. Truth is thereby not only equated with implementation, but it is only said to have occurred, or resulted, when implementation has occurred* [emphasis added]. (p. 117)

To implement the implementation revolution requires breaking down idealist categories that separate both theory and practice and academics and practitioners. Multiple perspectives and approaches are needed to improve settings, make a difference, and change the world for the better. Useful but partial knowledge exists in many places and domains, not just in the academy. The very 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 world. Churchman and Mitroff (1998), in fact, 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* [emphasis added]. (p. 113)

Even Dewey, the most significant pragmatist philosopher (whose theory of instrumental intelligence and democratic instrumental education provides the underpinnings for the growing democratic crusade against Plato’s aristocratic, idealist, and contemplative philosophy), failed to focus on implementation, on answering the crucial How do we get there from here? question. After

leaving the University of Chicago for Columbia in 1904, Dewey essentially concentrated on a "reconstruction of philosophy" and did little to solve the pressing problems that he brilliantly described and analyzed. Dewey's retreat from action and the implementation question, we believe, can be significantly explained by his separation from Jane Addams and other Chicago activist practitioners and his failure to make a connection to similar groups in New York City.

However, in our judgment, Dewey did identify perhaps the central problem that practitioners and academics should work together to solve. "Democracy," he argued, "must begin at home, and its home is the neighborly community" (Dewey, 1927/1954, p. 213). Only by reconstructing face-to-face communities could the public find itself and work as an integrated whole to achieve the full benefits of modern science and technology. Only in the neighborly community could "effective regard for whatever is distinctive and unique in each [person], irrespective of physical and psychological inequalities," be achieved (Dewey, 1927/1954, p. 151).

As alluded to above, Dewey unfortunately did not designate the agents or institutions that might bring about the transformation he envisioned and advocated. He did not indicate how American society would be transformed "from the Great Society to the Great Community" (Benson & Harkavy, 1991). We still do not know how to create democratic, neighborly communities 73 years later. Events in Kosovo and Bosnia, Rwanda and Zaire, the states of the former Soviet Union, South Africa, France, Germany, and so on indicate that this very practical and core theoretical problem is more than an American dilemma.

The Center for Community Partnerships of the University of Pennsylvania is founded on the idea that the vast range of resources of the American university, appropriately and creatively employed, can help us figure out how best to proceed. At Penn over the past number of years, we have been working on the problem of how to create modern, cosmopolitan local communities. It is within the American city that the need for communities based on face-to-face relationships and exemplifying humanistic universal values is most acute. The problem of the city is the strategic problem of our time. As such, it is a problem most likely to advance the university's primary mission of preserving, advancing, and transmitting knowledge. This resonates with Dewey's claim that real advances in knowledge occur through a focus on the central problems of society.

For Penn, as well as all other urban universities, one, if not *the* strategic real-world and intellectual problem we face is what should be done to overcome the deep, pervasive, interrelated problems affecting the people in our local geographic areas. This concrete, immediate, practical, and theoretical problem, needless to say, requires creative, interdisciplinary, interactive, democratic scholarship. It is a problem that can help to transcend traditional boundaries between academics and practitioners and among disciplines,

leading to a level of mutual understanding, innovation, and cooperation rarely achieved in the past.

Much of the center's work has focused on the public school as the educational and neighborhood institution that can, if effectively transformed, serve as the catalytic hub of community change and innovation.¹ The center has worked to create university-assisted community schools that function as centers of education, services, engagement, and activity within specified geographic areas. With its community and school collaborators, the center has developed significant service-learning programs that engage young people in creative work designed to advance skills and abilities through serving their school, families, and community. Penn students and faculty are also engaged in a variant of service learning that requires the development and application of knowledge to solve problems and engage in active and serious reflection.

In this article, we discuss the Center for Community Partnerships' work with public schools as an example of a much broader development, a "democratic devolution revolution." We also discuss academically based community-service learning and research and practitioner-academic collaboration through communal participatory action research as particularly useful approaches for advancing scholarship, improving communities, and forging democratic, mutually beneficial, and mutually respectful university-school-community partnerships.

PENN'S ENGAGEMENT WITH LOCAL PUBLIC SCHOOLS AS A PRACTICAL EXAMPLE OF "DEMOCRATIC DEVOLUTION REVOLUTION"

Since 1985, Penn has increasingly engaged itself with its local public schools in a comprehensive school-community-university partnership, the West Philadelphia Improvement Corps (WEPIC). In its 15 years of operation, the project has evolved significantly. Moreover, it has helped spawn a variety of related projects that also engage Penn with public schools in its local community, West Philadelphia. From its inception, we conceptualized Penn's work with WEPIC as designed 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 (literally) radical attempt to advance a "democratic devolution revolution." It is from that lofty perch, we believe, that an overview of the work at Penn (and the work at many other higher educational institutions engaged with their local public schools and communities) is best comprehended.

For nearly a generation, John Gardner, arguably the leading spokesperson for the New American Cosmopolitan Civic University (our term) has been thinking and writing about organizational devolution and the university's potential role. For Gardner (1998), the effective functioning of organizations

requires 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 15 years, and government is now pursuing it.

What this means for government is a substantially greater role for the states and cities. And none of them are entirely ready for that role. . . . [L]ocal government must enter into collaborative relations with non-governmental elements. . .

So how can colleges and universities be of help? (p. 3)

In effect, Gardner (1998) proposes a multisided involvement in contemporary life for “higher eds,” including building community, convening public discussions, educating public-spirited leaders, offering continuing civic and leadership seminars, and providing a wide range of technical assistance (broadly conceived). An effective, compassionate, democratic devolution revolution, he emphasizes, requires much more than practicing new forms of interaction among federal, state, and local governments and among agencies at each level of government. For Gardner, government integration by itself does not make meaningful change. New forms of interaction 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 (Gardner, 1998).

To extend Gardner’s observations about universities (and similar observations by such highly influential thinkers as Astin, 1997; Bok, 1990; Boyer, 1994; Shulman, 1997), we propose a democratic devolution revolution. In our proposed revolution, the government serves as a powerful catalyst and largely provides the funds needed to create stable, ongoing, effective partnerships. However, government would function only as a second-tier deliverer of services, with universities, 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, whereas local, personalized, caring services would actually be delivered by the third (private, nonprofit, voluntary associations) and fourth (family, kin, neighbors, friends) sectors of society. In

other words, government would not be primarily responsible for the delivery of services; it would primarily have macro-fiscal responsibilities, including fully adequate provision of funds.

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

However, for colleges and universities to fulfill their potential and really contribute to a democratic devolution revolution will require them to do things very differently than they do them now. To begin with, higher eds will be required to recognize that they are a major part of the problem as they currently function, not a significant part of the solution. To become part of the solution, higher eds must give full-hearted, full-minded devotion to the hard task of transforming themselves to becoming socially responsible, civic universities. To do that well, they will have to change their institutional cultures and develop a comprehensive, realistic strategy.

As we previously noted, one component of the strategy being developed by Penn (as well as by an increasing number of other urban higher educational institutions) 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 can function as focal points to help create healthy urban environments and that universities function best in such environments. Somewhat more specifically, the strategy assumes that, like higher eds, public schools can function as environment-changing institutions and become the strategic centers of broad-based partnerships that genuinely engage a wide variety of community organizations and institutions. Public schools “belong” to all members of the community. They are particularly well suited, therefore, to function as neighborhood hubs or nodes around which local partnerships can be generated and formed. When engaged in that role, schools function as community institutions *par excellence*; they can then provide a decentralized, democratic, community-based response to significant community problems.

The university-assisted community school reinvents and updates an old American idea, namely that the neighborhood school can effectively serve as the core neighborhood institution, the core institution that provides comprehensive services and galvanizes other community institutions and groups. That idea inspired the early settlement house workers. They recognized the centrality of the neighborhood school in community life and hailed its potential as the strategic site for community stabilization and improvement. At the turn of the 20th century, it is worth noting that deeply motivated, socially

concerned, and brilliantly creative settlement house workers such as Jane Addams and Lillian Wald pioneered the transfer of social, health, and recreational services to the public schools of major American cities (Harkavy & Puckett, 1994). In effect, settlement leaders recognized that although there were very few settlement houses, there were very many public schools. Not surprisingly, Dewey's idea about "the school as a social Centre" had been strongly, directly shaped by his enlightening experiences and discussions with Jane Addams and others at Hull House. In a 1902 highly influential address, Dewey (1902/1976) explicitly paid homage to them:

I suppose, whenever we are framing our ideals of the school as a social Centre, what we think of is particularly the better class of social settlement. What we want is to see the school, every public school, doing something of the same sort of work that is now done by a settlement or two scattered at wide distances through the city. (pp. 90-91)

Dewey failed to note, however, two critically important functions that community schools could perform: (a) the school as a community institution actively engaged in the solution of basic community problems and (b) the school as a community institution that educates young children, both intellectually and morally, by engaging them in real-world, community problem solving. He did recognize that if the neighborhood school were to function as a genuine community center, it needed additional human resources and support. Yet, to our knowledge, Dewey never identified universities as a key source of broadly based, sustained, comprehensive support for community schools.

To suggest the contributions that university-assisted community schools can make to an effective, compassionate, democratic devolution revolution capable of achieving Dewey's utopian goal of cosmopolitan democratic communities,² some results of the "community school-creating" efforts presently being undertaken by higher eds across the country. Undergraduates, as well as dental, medical, social work, education, and nursing students are learning as they serve; public school students are also connecting their education to real-world problem solving and providing services to other students and community members; adults are participating in locally based job training, skill enhancement, and ongoing education; and effective integration (distinct from colocation) of services for school children and their families is now significantly under way in many communities.

It is critical to emphasize, however, that the university-assisted community schools now being developed have a long way to go before they can effectively mobilize the potentially powerful, untapped resources of their communities and thereby enable individuals and families to function both as deliverers and recipients of caring, compassionate local services. To make this point, we briefly recite the "narrative history" of our experience at Penn; it suggests how far we have come and how far we have to go.

PENN AND WEST PHILADELPHIA
PUBLIC SCHOOLS: LEARNING BY REFLECTIVE DOING

Following the brilliant lead provided by Gardner (1998), we believe that as is true of all American universities, Penn's most basic, most enduring responsibility is to help America realize the democratic promise of the Declaration of Independence in practice: to become an optimally democratic society, the path-breaking democratic society in an increasingly interdependent world, the exemplary democratic "City on the Hill." Granted that proposition, how can Penn best fulfill its democratic responsibility? For reasons sketched below, we believe it can best do that by effectively integrating and radically improving the entire West Philadelphia schooling system, beginning with Penn but including all schools within its local geographic community and within the urban ecological system in which it functions as the strategic component.

The history of Penn's work with West Philadelphia public schools has been a process of painful organizational learning. We cannot overemphasize that our understanding and activities have continually changed over time.³ For example, Penn has recently embarked on two new, highly ambitious ventures: (a) leading a coalition of higher educational institutions, medical, and other nonprofit institutions, for-profit firms, and community groups to improve 26 West Philadelphia public schools and (b) developing a university-assisted public school adjacent to campus in partnership with the School District of Philadelphia and the Philadelphia Federation of Teachers.

Reaching this level of activity has been neither an easy nor straight path. Moreover, Penn is only now beginning to tap its extraordinary resources in ways that eventually will mutually benefit Penn and its neighbors and result in substantial school, community, and university change. Significantly, we have come to see our work as a concrete example of a general theory of action-oriented, real-world, problem-based learning. We have come to see that our real-world strategic problem has been and continues to be radically improving the quality of the entire West Philadelphia schooling system, beginning with Penn. We are convinced that coming to see our work in terms of what we now conceive as the strategic schooling component of a complex urban ecological system has constituted a major conceptual and theoretical advance for us.

Ironically, and instructively, when we first began work on university-community relationships in 1985, we did not envision it in terms of schools, problem-based learning, 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. What should the university do? Committed to undergraduate teaching, two of us (Benson and Harkavy) designed an Honors Seminar that aimed to stimulate undergraduates to think critically about what Penn could do to remedy its "environmental situation" (broadly conceived). For a variety of reasons, the president of the university, Sheldon Hackney, a former

professor of history, agreed to join us in giving that seminar in the 1985 spring semester. The seminar's title, "Urban University-Community Relationships: Penn-West Philadelphia, Past, Present, and Future, As a Case Study," suggests its general concerns.

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 do not need to recite the complex and painful processes 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 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!

Public schools, we came to realize more or less accidentally, could effectively function as genuine community centers for the organization, education, and transformation of entire neighborhoods. They could do that by functioning as neighborhood sites for WEPIC, consisting of school personnel and neighborhood residents who would receive strategic assistance from Penn students, faculty, and staff. Put another way, the seminar helped invent WEPIC to help transform the traditional West Philadelphia public school system into a revolutionary new system of university-assisted, community-centered, community-problem-solving schools.

TRANSLATING THE UNIVERSITY- ASSISTED COMMUNITY SCHOOL IDEA INTO PRACTICAL ACTION

Given Penn's long, deeply rooted, institutional resistance to serious involvement with West Philadelphia's problems, the limited resources available to us, and the intrinsic difficulty of transforming conventional, inner-city public schools into community schools, we decided that our best strategy was to try to achieve a visible, dramatic success in one school rather than marginal, incremental changes in a number of schools. Therefore, while continuing the WEPIC program at other schools, we decided to concentrate initially on the John P. Turner Middle School, largely because of the interest and leadership of its principal.

Previous experiments in community schools and community education throughout the country had depended primarily on a single university unit, namely, the School of Education, which was one major reason for the failure, or at best, the limited success of those experiments. The WEPIC concept of university assistance was far more comprehensive. From the start of the Turner experiment, we understood the concept to mean both assistance from, and

mutually beneficial collaboration with, the entire range of Penn's schools, departments, and administrative offices. For a variety of reasons, however, it soon became apparent that the best way to develop and sustain the Turner project would be to initiate a school-based community health program.

Given the development of a community health program at Turner in the summer of 1990, Professor Francis Johnston, chair of the Anthropology Department and a world leader in nutritional anthropology, decided to participate in the project. To do that effectively, for the fall 1990 semester, he revised Anthropology 210 to make it what we have come to call a strategic, academically based community service seminar. Anthropology 210 has a long history at Penn and focuses on the relationship between anthropology and biomedical science. An undergraduate course, it was developed to link pre-medical training at Penn with the Department of Anthropology's major program in medical anthropology. Premed students are highly important in Penn undergraduate education and the department's program in medical anthropology is world-renowned. Professor Johnston's decision to convert Anthropology 210 into a strategic academically based community service seminar therefore constituted a major milestone in the development of the Turner community school project, in Penn's relation to the Turner School, and in our overall work with West Philadelphia public schools.

Since 1990, students in Anthropology 210 have carried out a variety of activities at Turner focused on the interactive relationships between diet, nutrition, growth, and health. The seminar is explicitly and increasingly organized around strategic academically based community service. After Professor Johnston began to increasingly focus his own research and publications on his work with Turner students and community residents, he came to function as a noteworthy example for other anthropology professors and graduate students; many are now integrating their teaching and research with the Turner program, or with other WEPIC programs in West Philadelphia public schools. Even more significantly, Anthropology 210 not only affected the anthropology department (which has recently developed an academic track in Public Interest Anthropology⁴), its success has radiated out to other departments and schools. Undoubtedly, the course and Professor Johnston have played major roles in the increasingly successful campaign to expand strategic academically based community service at Penn (Benson & Harkavy, 1994; Harkavy, Johnston, & Puckett, 1996).

At present, approximately 96 such courses working with schools and communities have been organized and are on the books at Penn, with 43 being offered during the 1999-2000 academic year. Moreover, an increasing number of faculty members, from an ever-widening range of Penn schools and departments, are now seriously considering how they might revise existing courses or develop new courses that would enable their students to benefit from innovative curricular opportunities to become active learners and creative real-world problem solvers.

THE CENTER FOR COMMUNITY
PARTNERSHIPS AND PRESIDENTIAL
AND FACULTY LEADERSHIP

Encouraged by the success of the university's increasing engagement with West Philadelphia, in July, 1992, President Hackney created the Center for Community Partnerships. To highlight the importance he attached to the center, he located it in the Office of the President and appointed one of us (Harkavy) to be its director (while continuing to serve as director of the Penn Program for Public Service created in 1988).

Symbolically and practically, the creation of the center constituted a major change in Penn's relationship to West Philadelphia and Philadelphia in general. The university as a corporate entity now formally and organizationally committed itself to finding ways to use its truly enormous resources (broadly conceived) to help improve the quality of life in its local community, not only in respect to public schools but to economic and community development in general.

The emphasis on partnerships in the center's name was deliberate; it acknowledged, in effect, that Penn could not try to go it alone as it had long been (arrogantly) 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 now 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 of Penn 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 American urban university.

Rodin made radical reform of undergraduate education her first priority. To achieve that far-reaching goal, she established the Provost's Council on Undergraduate Education (1995) and charged it with designing a model for Penn's undergraduate experience in the 21st century. Following the lead of Penn's patron saint, Benjamin Franklin, the Provost's Council emphasized the action-oriented union of theory and practice and "engagement with the material, ethical, and moral concerns of society and community defined broadly, globally, and also locally within Philadelphia" (p. S-1). The Provost's Council defined the 21st century undergraduate experience as, ". . . provid[ing] opportunities for students to understand what it means to be active learners and active citizens. It will be an experience of learning, knowing, and doing that will lead to the active involvement of students in the process of their education" (Provost's Council on Undergraduate Education, 1995, p. S-1). To apply this Franklinian-inspired orientation in practice, the Provost's Council designated academically based community service as a core component of Penn undergraduate education during the next century.

Building upon themes identified by the Provost's Council, Penn's 1994-1995 annual report was entitled, "The Unity of Theory and Practice: Penn's Distinctive Character" (University of Pennsylvania, 1996). Describing the university's efforts to integrate theory and practice, President Rodin observed that:

... there are ways in which the complex interrelationships between theory and practice transcend any effort at neat conceptualization. One of those is the application of theory in service to our community and the use of community service as an academic research activity for students. *Nowhere else is the interactive dimension of theory and practice so clearly captured.* [emphasis added]

For more than 250 years, Philadelphia has rooted Penn in a sense of the "practical," reminded us that service to humanity, to our community is, as [Benjamin] Franklin put it, "the great aim and end of all learning." Today, thousands of Penn faculty and students realize the unity of theory and practice by engaging West Philadelphia elementary and secondary school students as part of their own academic course work in disciplines as diverse as history, anthropology, classical studies, education, and mathematics.

For example, anthropology professor Frank Johnston and his undergraduate students educate students at West Philadelphia's Turner Middle School about nutrition. Classical studies professor Ralph Rosen uses modern Philadelphia and fifth century Athens to explore the interrelations between community, neighborhood, and family. And history professor Michael Zuckerman's students engage West Philadelphia elementary and secondary school students to help them understand together the nature—and discontinuities—of American national identity and national character. (Provost's Council on Undergraduate Education, 1996, pp. 9-10)

The 1994-1995 annual report illustrated and advanced a fundamental, far-reaching cultural shift that had begun to take place across the university. By the end of her first year in office, Penn's president had significantly increased the prominence of undergraduate education, defined the integration of theory and practice (including theory and practice derived from and applied within the local community) as the hallmark of Ben Franklin's University, and identified academically based community service focused on West Philadelphia and its public schools as a powerfully integrative strategy to advance university-wide research, teaching, and service.

Presidents can provide leadership, but it is faculty members who develop and sustain the courses and research projects that durably link a university to its local schools and community. More specifically, it is through faculty teaching and research that the connection to local schools and communities is

ultimately and durably made. We gave high priority, therefore, to increasing the number and variety of academically based community service courses. Thanks in large measure to President Rodin's strong support, the number of academically based community service courses has grown exponentially, from 11 when the center was founded in 1992 to 96 in the fall of 2000. As a result of the highly positive reaction to those courses, the long-term process of radically changing Penn's undergraduate curriculum has gained accelerating momentum. In addition to the development of the Public Interest Anthropology track cited above, after years of complex negotiations, a new interdisciplinary minor in Urban Education has recently been created and hailed by undergraduates. A joint program between the School of Arts and Science and the Graduate School of Education, the new minor includes faculty advisors from Anthropology, Classical Studies, Earth and Environmental Science, Education, English, History, Linguistics, Mathematics, Sociology, and Urban Studies.

DEMOCRATIC PARTNERSHIPS AND COMMUNAL PARTICIPATORY ACTION RESEARCH

The significant development of academically based community service learning and research courses at Penn in and of itself does not necessarily denote an ongoing democratic partnership with West Philadelphia schools and communities. The WEPIC project, however, has provided the integrative, community-focused organizational vehicle that helps these courses to make a difference in West Philadelphia schools and their communities. The courses, therefore, are a key component (probably *the* key component) of a wider university-school-community partnership that has as its primary focus providing neighborly assistance.

Over time, we have come to conceptualize the Center for Community Partnerships' work through and with WEPIC as an ongoing communal participatory action research project designed to contribute to improving West Philadelphia and Penn and to advancing knowledge. As an institutional strategy, communal participatory action research is different from traditional participating action research. Both research processes are directed toward problems in the real world, concerned with application, and obviously participatory. They differ in the degree to which they are continuous, comprehensive, beneficial, and necessary to the organization or community studied and the university. For example, traditional participating action research is exemplified in the efforts of Whyte and his associates at Cornell University to advance industrial democracy in the worker cooperative of Mondragón, Spain (Greenwood and Gonzáles, 1992; Whyte & Whyte, 1991). Its considerable utility and theoretical significance notwithstanding, the research at Mondragón is not an institutional necessity for Cornell.⁵ 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 communal participatory action research. In short, proximity and a focus on problems that are institutionally significant to the university encourage sustained, continuous research involvement. Problem-focused research, in turn, necessitates sustained, continuous research partnerships between the university and its local environment.

The center's participatory action research project has worked toward increasingly higher levels of participation by community members in problem identification and planning as well as implementation (Whyte, 1991). To put it mildly, this has not been an easy process. Decades of community distrust of Penn based on decades of community-destructive actions and inactions on the part of Penn take significant effort and time to reduce (Harkavy & Puckett, 1991a). The center's work with WEPIC has focused on health and nutrition, the environment, conflict resolution/peer mediation, community performance and visual arts, school/community publications, technology, school-to-career programs, and reading improvement. Each of these projects varies to the extent to which they engage public school students, teachers, parents, and other community members in each stage of the research process. The center's overall effort, however, has been consciously democratic and participatory. As WEPIC and related projects have grown and developed, and as concrete, positive outcomes for schools and neighborhoods have occurred and continue to occur, community trust and participation have increased. Nonetheless, different kinds of projects involving different disciplines, skills, and material and led by different faculty members with different students, necessarily involve different levels of participation. Two very different faculty-led research projects (one in health and nutrition, the other in sociolinguistics) exemplify how the center has attempted to connect the university with the community. Although these projects initially focused on different public schools and neighborhoods in West Philadelphia, they both have developed a major concentration in Drew School, a Grades K through 8 school bordering the university.⁶

ANTHROPOLOGY 210

Professor Johnston's health nutrition project that emerged from Anthropology 210 has already been briefly described. It is the center's most developed and comprehensive example of communal participatory action research. Because it began at the Turner Middle School (it is now in three other West Philadelphia public schools), it is known as the Turner Nutritional Awareness Project (TNAP). Given its 9-year history at Turner, we will describe the program at that location. TNAP attempts to bridge the gap that separates the three major components of the mission of a research university: (a) teaching, (b) research, and (c) service. This project is based firmly on the principle that each of these components can be carried out more effectively when integrated with

the other two. The result is a total experience that engages students, faculty, and staff, bringing them to a common and unified focus on the problems of the university's local environment.

The TNAP has three major purposes: (a) to instruct students in the relationship between food, nutrition, and health in urban America using an anthropological perspective; (b) to describe and analyze the nutritional status of the middle school-age population of West Philadelphia and to monitor changes in that status over time; and (c) to help alleviate nutrition problems by providing Turner School students with informed choices about their food and nutritional habits. Although three service-learning courses in anthropology focus on TNAP, the primary mechanism for carrying out the program is the course entitled "Anthropology and Biomedical Science" (Anthropology 210). This course is offered to undergraduates typically in the third and fourth years of their 4-year course of study, and it largely draws students whose majors are in the social and biological sciences, as well as those who have an interest in community service. The enrollment for the class is kept to about 25, which is optimal for the range of activities to be conducted.

The academic/theoretical component of the course takes place during two weekly seminar sessions. Students discuss their reading of materials dealing with health, nutrition, and nutritional status; with issues related to urban life; and with action research strategies for solving problems. All of this is conducted within the context of the analysis of complex bio-social systems. The readings are chosen to present a mixture of theory and case studies and to provide the major stimulus for class discussions.

Early in the course, the Penn students are introduced to the TNAP, its purpose and design, and to the research done by earlier classes. They are made aware of the longitudinal nature of the project and of their role as part of a continuing effort. They visit the school and receive a brief onsite orientation by Turner staff and students.

For their work at Turner, the Penn students are divided into four groups. One group, about half of the class, is responsible for teaching nutrition to Turner students on a weekly basis throughout the semester. Under the guidance of a graduate teaching assistant, lesson plans are discussed and formulated. This group of Penn students uses the lesson plans to teach about nutrition, food, and the health outcomes of the Turner students' dietary choices. A second group of Penn students is charged with carrying out the collection and analysis of dietary data at Turner; in this activity, they interview individual students, collect 24-hour recalls of food intake, and enter the data into computers for analysis using appropriate software. A third group carries out an anthropometric determination of nutritional status, focusing on physical growth, body fatness, and the prevalence of obesity, which is a major problem among the urban poor. The fourth group (the smallest) involves students in related research on a range of topics, including observational studies of the local school lunchroom, type and distribution of restaurants and grocery stores in the area, children's attitudes about food, and other issues important

in a nutritional ecosystem. Data collection and analysis are presented as an ongoing research project subject to the principles of research design, reliability and validity, and both quantitative and qualitative analysis.

Rather than being separated from the Penn researchers, Turner students are incorporated as fully as is practicable into these activities. It is fundamental to the TNAP that participant involvement in the program is essential to changing behavior. The traditional quasi-experimental model of research, "experts" using experimental and control groups, is replaced by a participatory model in which the research process itself is a democratic intervention. Turner students are brought into close contact with researchers and learn that the daily problems they face can be understood by the methods of formal analysis.

The interaction of theory and onsite research is developed throughout the semester. Penn students regularly report to the seminar on their group projects; results are written up and presented at the end of the semester. The Penn students also present their findings to Turner staff and students.

The course has thus far achieved its goals. From the standpoint of research, it has produced basic descriptive data presented at university seminars and scholarly meetings and published in the scientific literature (Johnston & Hallock, 1994). These data focus on aspects of the quality of the diets of the Turner students, and the high prevalence of obesity, which is among the highest yet reported for American youth of any ethnic group. These data have also stimulated at least one doctoral dissertation that seeks to disentangle further dietary and cultural correlates of obesity.

From an instructional standpoint, the course has become part of the undergraduate major in anthropology; it is increasingly overenrolled as students respond to its unique approach to learning. It has provided a springboard for two additional courses, one that focuses on enhancing nutritional behavior and another that involves the longitudinal evaluation of the TNAP.

From a service standpoint, the TNAP involves all three grades of the Turner School (Grades 6 through 8). A nutrition center is being established at the school that will enable the students to learn principles of nutrition at their own pace and monitor their own dietary intake and nutritional status. Increased participation of Turner students as research assistants will help them make informed choices about diet and its health consequences; it will also increase their sense of efficacy as they learn to bring ideas and principles of action research to bear on the problem in their daily lives.

LINGUISTICS 161

Functioning in quite a different way is an action (as distinct from a participatory action) research project led by Bill Labov, a professor of linguistics and director of the Linguistics Laboratory at Penn. Professor Labov is intensely concerned with the low reading achievement of African American youth in poor urban school districts. He has worked to develop a comprehensive

research program to analyze reading deficiencies and design interventions to overcome them.

A highly distinguished sociolinguist, Professor Labov has long had a theoretical and empirical interest in African American linguistic patterns. His decision to focus on solving "the reading problem" of West Philadelphia teachers and school children was spurred by two Penn undergraduates who were members of our seminars. They proposed to Professor Labov that he offer an academically based community service course that would go beyond the Ebonics controversy and make positive use of African American cultural and linguistic patterns to improve reading performance. Impressed by the students' ideas, interest, and passionate engagement with the problem, Labov hired one of them as an undergraduate teaching assistant (with support provided by the Center for Community Partnerships) and offered the course in the spring of 1998.

One main goal of Linguistics 161, "The Socio-Linguistics of Reading," is to make an action-oriented, detailed study of reading impairments among African American children at the Wilson Elementary School, a nearby public school. Undergraduates in the course meet with children experiencing reading problems and attempt to diagnose the source of their difficulties. Using sophisticated measurement techniques, the Penn students obtain samples of reading errors committed by the children; this enables them to compare their performance against other children having fewer reading problems. Having analyzed his students' findings, Professor Labov is now developing a reading program to overcome the impairments observed in the Wilson School children.

Encouraged by the work of the spring 1998 semester, Professor Labov decided to expand the project considerably during the 1998-1999 academic year. To do that, he is giving four linguistics courses (undergraduate and graduate) around the reading improvement program and extending it to another public school in West Philadelphia, the Charles Drew School. One course focuses on Penn undergraduates developing linguistically and culturally appropriate narrative texts and illustrations to teach reading. Another course trains Penn students to work as tutors in the Wilson and Drew schools. To help develop linguistically and culturally appropriate materials, an innovative goal of Linguistics 161 is to understand the role that hip-hop music plays as a socializing influence on African American youth. In current and future seminars, undergraduates will study how elementary school children acquire and use hip-hop language. The undergraduates and Professor Labov will then try to design a more effective program to teach standard English and develop new curricula that use hip-hop materials as a culturally valuable learning tool.

Professor Labov's courses are connected to after-school programs at both Wilson and Drew. Initially, the after-school program at Wilson had been designed by undergraduates in one of our seminars as a peer-tutoring

program. Among other things, it involved Penn undergraduates who supervised students from West Philadelphia High School, who, in turn, tutored Wilson students. Inaugurated in the spring of 1996, the potentially promising program was, according to teachers and Penn students, at best only a modest success. In January, 1997, however, with the addition of graduate student coordinator Bettina Baker, whose field of academic interest is early education, the program significantly improved. Moreover, Baker introduced Labov to the Wilson after-school program as a possible empirical site for his theoretical work. As a result, the theoretically derived reading techniques Labov had been developing came to be used with an initial group of 40 students. Baker also recruited a number of Penn undergraduates supported by President Clinton's America Reads program to work with the Wilson students from 3:00 to 4:30 p.m., four days a week. The early results proved to be impressive. Baker has described the findings as follows:

The program assessed the pre-and post-intervention Jerry Jons Informal Reading Inventory (IRI) scores of 40 randomly selected subjects and a matched control group. The subjects were in Grades 2 through 5, and were one to two years behind in reading grade level before participating in . . . [the] extended day program . . . at Wilson. . . . All of the 40 subjects' IRI scores increased by one grade level after 3.5 month's enrollment in the program, which met 4 days per week for 1.5 hours per day. Thirty-three of the 40 subjects were caught up to their classroom reading grade level (approximately two grade reading levels). Three of the seven subjects who were not caught up to their grade levels were recently from Ethiopia (ESL students) and one was in a learning support (IEP) program. There was a statistically significant increase in average IRI reading scores of special education participants. The 4th grade participants had statistically significant gains in SAT-9 reading scores. The student's average SAT-9 achievement test scores increased from "below basic" to "basic" levels on the test. (Baker, in progress)

We hesitate to make too much of early round statistical successes; work of this kind can only be carefully evaluated over the very long haul. But the impressive results cited above help explain the program's rapid expansion. As of 1999-2000, the extended day program enrolls 40 students at Wilson and 40 students at Drew. Staffing the programs (and illustrating the resources potentially available for such programs) are 76 Penn America Reads work-study students, 13 Penn volunteers, and 9 elementary school teachers. Activities include literacy tutoring, help with homework, and literacy-based enrichment.

A school-day program has recently been added. Approximately 70 Penn students supported by the America Reads funds are placed with classroom teachers from Grades pre-K through 8 at both schools at least one day a week. With America Reads tutors and students from Professor Labov's seminar, the

program has helped significantly to reduce class size during literacy instruction and after-school activities. Not surprisingly, we have found that reducing class size enables teachers to provide more attention to individual students, and constitutes one of the most significant benefits made possible by an effective university/school partnership.

We think it important to note that Professor Labov's reading improvement project is extraordinarily comprehensive. It has effectively integrated a theoretically based, major action research project, a series of Penn undergraduate and graduate seminars, and a volunteer program to develop a highly creative and innovative model. Combining the skill, expertise, and cutting-edge theoretical work of a senior faculty member and the intensive training of graduate and undergraduate students, the program exemplifies in practice the valuable results that can be achieved when academically based community service projects work with local public schools. Given the importance of ending the "minority differential" in reading, the findings from this project have major national significance. So much so, in fact, that the Oakland School Board (the focal point of the Ebonics controversy), California State University-Hayward, and Penn have been generously funded by the United States Department of Education's Office of Educational Research Innovation to further develop and extend the reading improvement project described above.

CONCLUSION

In this article, we have examined a multipronged, collaborative strategy for concretely solving some of the chronic problems of communal life in postindustrial America. In 1985, the WEPIC coalition launched a "neo-Deweyan" strategy and gradually began to reverse a tide of long-standing grievances resulting from Penn's institutional expansion and disengagement from the social problems of its neighboring community. Today, the coalition functions in its general aim and movement as a communal participatory action research project, with university-assisted community schools as the core component, supported by academically based community service.

In an early article, we described our work as a "long march" through the institutions (Harkavy & Puckett, 1991b). Although we are still on that long march and have very far to go, we have made some real advances in the past 15 years. The WEPIC coalition has given significant impetus to action-oriented social research in West Philadelphia and the development of academically based community service. Perhaps even more important for long-term school, community, and university change (i.e., for a successful long march), Penn has put an urban agenda at the core of its academic/institutional mission. And even more important, Penn and a number of other higher educational

institutions across the country are beginning to show signs of functioning as agents for realizing Dewey's democratic vision of the "Great Community." We find this development to be truly encouraging.

To conclude by restating the quote from Dewey (1927/1954) that we previously cited, "Democracy must begin at home, and its home is the neighborly community" (p. 213). In our judgment, building local democratic neighborly communities is the primary path to academic, institutional, and social excellence for American higher education.⁷ If that path is to lead us there, then academics and practitioners will have to construct the path collaboratively and democratically. And if that occurs, American higher education would be well on its way toward (finally!) overthrowing Plato and implementing a Dewey-inspired implementation revolution.

Notes

1. In recent years, with the aid of generous grants from the HUD Office of University of Partnerships, W. K. Kellogg Foundation, Jessie Ball duPont Fund, the center has significantly expanded its work with nonprofit organizations, particularly community-based organizations and communities of faith. Two major new efforts, Program in NonProfits Universities, Communities, and Schools (Kellogg supported) and Program in Communities of Faith, Universities, Schools, and Neighborhoods, and organizations (duPont supported) integrate Penn's various efforts with schools, community-based organizations, and communities of faith.

2. For a fuller discussion of Dewey's utopian goal of cosmopolitan democratic communities and university-assisted community schools, see Benson & Harkavy (1991, 1997). We created *Universities and Community Schools* in 1989 as a means to advance mutually beneficial, innovative partnerships between universities and local schools in general, and university-assisted community schools in particular.

3. For an illuminating discussion of the concept of organizational learning, see Whyte (1991), particularly pages 237-241.

4. A fuller definition of Public Interest Anthropology can be found in Peggy Reeves Sanday's "Opening Statement: Defining Public Interest Anthropology," presented at Symposium on Defining Public Interest Anthropology, 97th Annual Meeting of the American Anthropological Association, Philadelphia, December 3, 1998. Sanday's statement is located at <http://www.sas.upenn.edu/~psanday/pia.99.html>

5. For more background on Mondragón participatory action research, see the work of Whyte and Whyte (1984, 1991).

6. An article in the *Philadelphia Inquirer* entitled "Philadelphia Schools Awarded \$3.5 Million for Improvements" reported: "Charles Drew School in Philadelphia, showed more improvement on the state's standardized reading and math than any other school in the state, 1999 results show" (Snyder, 1999). Although reasons for this extraordinarily impressive performance are many, Penn's concentrated efforts at Drew, including the projects in health and nutrition and sociolinguistics, would appear to be a significant contributing factor.

7. For a discussion of the concept of social excellence and its application to higher educational institutions, see Deutsch (1999).

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