EDITORIAL

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The Journal welcomes articles on a variety of topics. Please see the description below and the Guidelines for Writers on page 9.
Citizenship, Community Service, and University-Based Community Schools

By Marie K. Bogle and Ira Harkavy

Marie Bogle is the West Philadelphia Improvement Corps Coordinator for the School District of Philadelphia. A teacher in the Philadelphia schools since 1971, Bogle has been a leader in WEPIC since its inception. She works to link projects to students’ learning experiences, welcoming the involvement of parents, community residents, and the WEPIC partners in these efforts. With her transfer to the Turner Middle School in 1988, Bogle rooted WEPIC in new soil and it blossomed. By 1989, the school had opened on Saturdays for classes for all the community. Significant curricular innovations also occurred, with the support of Principals Robert Chapman and Charles D’Alfonso, in developing the thematically-based WEPIC House and the Summer Institute.

Bogle has presented WEPIC’s work at numerous conferences, including the National Symposium on Partnerships in Education, the American Federation of Teachers, the National Newspaper Publisher’s Association, and the U.S. Department of Education, Region III.

Ira Harkavy is Associate Vice President and Director of the Center for Community Partnerships at the University of Pennsylvania. He teaches in the departments of history, urban studies, and city and regional planning, and is Executive Editor of Universities and Community Schools. Harkavy recently served as Assistant to the President, Director of the Penn Program for Public Service, Vice Dean of the School of Arts and Sciences, and Executive Director of the Program for Assessing and Revitalizing the Social Sciences also at Penn. He is currently a consultant to the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development and its Office of University Partnerships.

Harkavy received his doctorate in history from the University of Pennsylvania in 1979. His research has focused on school and community revitalization in Philadelphia and other cities. In recent years, he has written on how to involve universities effectively in democratic partnerships with local public schools and their communities. The West Philadelphia Improvement Corps (WEPIC), a partnership linking the University of Pennsylvania and the West Philadelphia community, emerged and developed from seminars and research projects he directs with other colleagues at the University.
Astin’s, the situation is starting to change. Higher education is beginning to return to its “citizenship responsibilities.” That change was trumpeted in the August 4, 1996 “Education Life Supplement” to the New York Times entitled, “Trying to Build Better Citizens: Universities are Aiming Beyond Academics, with a Focus on Community.” The Times section cites numerous examples of the growth of community service, particularly service learning, over the past decade.

Although we applaud that change, it is occurring neither as quickly nor as robustly as we believe necessary. The kind of changes in “institutional policies and practices” that Astin calls for, involving deep and sustained, full-hearted and full-minded engagement of universities with their communities, is still a long way off. For us, service learning courses, which the Times defines as placing students “in environments in which their experiences are likely to augment their classroom work, and where they can actually do some good for others” [emphasis added], cannot produce the intellectual and citizenship development needed for our society and world. A much more robust approach (one in which students do more than “some” good, but actually contribute to solving community problems) is required.

For the past eleven years, we have been colleagues and collaborators in an effort to develop a comprehensive partnership involving the University of Pennsylvania and local public schools in Penn’s community of West Philadelphia. That partnership, the West Philadelphia Improvement Corps (WEPIC), is a year-round program involving 4,500 children, their parents, and community members in education and cultural programs, recreation, job training, community improvement, and service activities. The program is coordinated by the West Philadelphia Partnership, a mediating organization composed of institutions (including the University of Pennsylvania) and community groups. Other partners include the School District, unions, churches, and city, state, and federal agencies and departments.

WEPIC’s goal is to create university-assisted, staff controlled and managed, comprehensive community schools. In these schools, students are involved in creative work designed to advance skills and abilities through service to their school, families, and community. Penn students and faculty are also engaged in academic work that requires the development and application of knowledge to solve problems as well as active and serious reflection on their service experience. This clearly Deweyan approach has been termed “learning by community problem-solving and real-world reflective doing.”

A question that has concerned us both from the earliest days of our work together is: What are the “citizenship impacts” of “community problem-solving service learning” on the students involved? With other colleagues at Penn and in the public schools, we are designing a large-scale study to answer that question. In the process of designing that study, we decided to gather some initial, tentative findings. We focused on the impacts of a 12-week summer internship program on Penn undergraduates working at summer camps at either the Turner or Shaw Community Schools in West Philadelphia.

Seventeen Penn undergraduates participated in the summer program, which involves working at one of the community school summer camps, participating in a Penn seminar on “Revitalizing Urban Schools and Their Communities,” writing a research paper that integrates work at the community school with the seminar, and living together as a community in a university dormitory. Although the Penn summer internship program has existed for over a decade and has been linked to community school summer camps for six years, the last two summers have seen a marked expansion, thanks in part to support from the Burger King Corporation. The summer camps were organized as follows:

**Turner Middle School Camp**

The Turner Middle School Summer Camp was open from 8:45 a.m. to 2:00 p.m., Monday through Friday. The camp involved 120 young people who attended or will enter Turner Middle School. Each student in the camp participated in activities in one of five small learning communities (schools within schools that create more personal learning environments): Health Promotion; Conflict Resolution; Writing for Publication; En-
As Others See Us

The following excerpts from "Beyond the Ivory Tower," by Meg Sommerfield have been reprinted with permission from the April 24, 1996 Education Week.

At 8 on a recent evening, Shaw's [Anna Howard Shaw Middle School] halls still echo with lively voices. A new community-school program draws nearly 250 adults and children every Wednesday night. In one room, adults study for the General Educational Development Test, and in another, several 8th graders tutor adults in introductory computer skills. Elsewhere, an African American studies class with students ages 8 to 40 meets, and a state representative uses a classroom to chat with constituents.

Principal Albert H. Bichner is still in his office as the long day draws to a close. . . .

... Not long after Bichner became principal in 1994, Puckett, Harkavy, Benson, and Bowman [Penn professors] paid a visit to discuss how to forge strong links between Shaw and Penn.

"We needed to show some tangible victories first," Bichner thought. So they planned a cleanup day. He invited local block captains and neighbors as well as Penn students to pitch in.

The volunteers painted and scrubbed, hammered and sanded. They installed missing stair rails and planted chrysanthemums and tulips. Penn sent over a team of professional graffiti-removal experts to restore the building's exterior.

Today, Bichner and his staff find themselves taking on bigger projects. They're breaking the 830-student school up into four small "learning clusters," each emphasizing different interdisciplinary themes: physical science and environmental studies, health careers, traditional academics, and desktop publishing and humanities.

They are thankful for the contributions of the 130 Penn students who cross Shaw's threshold each week to help out. These volunteers include environmental-studies majors who are training the Shaw students to collect, bag, and label household substances which are sent to Penn labs to be tested for the presence of lead.

So far, the changes seem to be having a positive impact. Student behavior has improved, with suspensions expected to number only half last year's total of 900. Average daily student attendance has increased 2 percent to 86 percent, and parent involvement is also on the rise.

Like many other colleges and universities across the country, the University of Pennsylvania came to realize it could not survive as an "oasis of affluence in a desert of urban despair," as one Penn scholar has written. Over the past decade, hundreds of colleges have forged alliances with local schools and community groups. . . .

What sets Penn's work apart is both its academic focus and the comprehensiveness of its involvement. For many Penn students and professors, community service is not just a way to spend free time, but an integral part of their studies and scholarship. . . .

Under the umbrella of the West Philadelphia Improvement Corps, or WEPIC, Penn offers more than 40 classes where students can study issues facing West Philadelphia, participate in related community-service projects and conduct research aimed at helping solve local problems.

Shaw Middle School Summer Camp

In its first year, the Shaw Middle School Summer Camp served 100 students. The camp operated on Mondays through Thursdays, from 9:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. Three small learning communities were created: Science Alliance, Leadership Institute, and Bridges to Employment, which focused on health promotion and diabetes. Students, parents, teachers, and undergraduates from the University collaborated on projects that contributed to the improvement of both the school and the neighborhood. The Leadership Institute trained upperclassmen as mentors for incoming students. These mentors planned an assembly program, wrote a letter of welcome to each new student, and developed an informational tour of the building. A "Wall of Fame" was constructed by the students to showcase community and student events. Three student journalists chronicled the events of the summer camp in an article for distribution throughout West Philadelphia. Seven teachers supervised the program with assistance from Penn undergraduates.

As the summer camp leader at the site
(Turner) with about two-thirds of the Penn students, one of us (Marie Bogle) was able to see how on a day-to-day basis Penn undergraduates worked with the Turner students and teachers. The other member of this team (Ira Harkavy) worked with all the Penn undergraduates, both those at Turner and Shaw.

Each of us recorded our own "sense" of Penn student behavior over the course of the summer and noticed increased levels of responsibility, seriousness, and socially-positive behavior among most of the undergraduates.

Moreover, Marie Bogle "interviewed" the Turner teachers regularly to determine their assessments of the Penn students. Turner students also recorded their evaluations as part of writing daily journals. Both "sources" indicated an increasingly positive attitude toward the contribution made by the summer interns. Indeed, by the end of the summer, teacher reports were extraordinarily positive.

Penn undergraduates were asked to assess their own experiences and learning. Evaluations were largely positive, with the strongest criticism focused on the need for a stronger connection between the Penn seminar and work at the school. We have read those evaluations with an eye toward the students' assessments of the impact of the internship. Below are three general representative responses.

Dinkar Shenbagamurthi, a senior student who had previous experience working at the Turner school, wrote:

I had never worked with the students so intensely. This experience was truly eye-opening. I was very impressed by how bright the students were. They were genuinely interested in learning as long as they were provided with a little individual attention. This was never more apparent than when James (not actual name) asked me to teach him algebra during the Arts and Crafts Club. I had James do a few problems on the blackboard. It was apparent that he really loved the challenge of doing the problems and was thrilled to be getting the attention. When it was time to go home, he asked for homework. I couldn't believe my ears, an eleven-year-old boy asking for algebra homework in July. He stayed an extra 20 minutes as I quickly developed a worksheet of basic algebra problems. I was even more shocked when he returned the next day with all the problems accurately completed. Although I was pleasantly surprised, I felt so angry that a child with so much potential was not being challenged adequately.

I was also disappointed whenever I probed the students about their future goals and aspirations. I constantly heard basketball player and cosmetologist mentioned as future career goals. I only rarely heard doctor, lawyer, scientist, etc. I know that the students could do so much with their lives if they received the proper encouragement. I am deeply concerned about what the future holds for these children.

I am really glad that I was given the opportunity to participate in this program. All the theory that I have been exposed to in my Urban studies classes has been complemented with real-world experience. This experience has engaged my heart like the way my classes have engaged my mind.

Another senior, Rachel Wright, described her experience as follows:

The Turner teachers I have been working with are amazing and seem to really know how to motivate involvement in the part of the students we are educating. I feel that the importance of this is paramount to creating a sustainable relationship between the West Philadelphia community and the Penn community because the students we are teaching are the future of the West Philadelphia community. I have realized this summer that although the education aspect of this work is extremely important, it is not always immediately realized nor does it always provide immediate signs of success. It is the fact that the relationship has been established that will ensure the success and sustainability of the program; the effects of the education will hopefully follow as a direct result of continued interaction.

More than anything else, however, my experiences from past spring and summer have given me hope for the improvement of our society and have influenced the way in which I would like to interact in society for the rest of my life. I want to be a physician, and I have realized how to incorporate my career goals with community service in a way that ensures lasting effects and positive social change. I want to be involved in this work for the rest of my life, and the experiences I have had this summer have shown me the positive and sustainable implications such work can have.

And finally, Julie Muroff, a Penn junior, described the impacts of working at Shaw during both the spring and the summer.

Besides reinforcing the trite lesson to "count my blessings," my experience at Shaw convinced me to take a different perspective on my experience at Penn. There are so many ways to get involved on Penn's campus that it is easy to forget about life beyond Penn. It is important to realize that we are part of a larger community than that which is dictated by our immediate surroundings. We must learn to act accordingly, as responsible and contributing members of this extended community, rather than trying to alienate our neighbors.

I am not advocating the idealistic notion that one person can single-handedly save the world or reverse the state of the urban crisis. However, I am suggesting that it is our world and our problem. While Penn students cannot be blamed for the plight of West Philadelphia, they can be faulted for their choice to ignore it. It is easy to complain about the problems of our community, but I can personally attest to the fact that it is more challenging, yet more rewarding, to try to solve them.

We are well aware that our interviews, journals, and evaluations are hardly scientific means for assessing the impacts of "community problem-solving service learning" on student civic responsibility. A much more serious, long-term, multidimensional study (which we are planning) needs to be done. Moreover, based on our experiences, we believe that poorly designed, insignificant "noblesse oblige" service experiences tend to have negative impacts on both the recipients and the deliverers of service. A more systematic study will be needed to see whether that belief is supported by "facts." Recognizing these limitations, we are encouraged by our initial findings, which seem to indicate that academically-based community service can cultivate in young people what Benjamin Franklin termed, "an Inclination join'd with an Ability to serve."