

Book Review

Lee Benson, Ira Harkavy, John Puckett, Matthew Hartley, Rita A. Hodges, Francis E. Johnston, and Joann Weeks (2017) *Knowledge for Social Change: Bacon, Dewey, and the Revolutionary Transformation of Research Universities in the Twenty-First Century*. Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press.

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Written in the decade following the publication of Benson, Harkavy, and Puckett's (2007) first collaborative book, *Knowledge for Social Change: Bacon, Dewey, and the Revolutionary Transformation of Research Universities in the Twenty-First Century (Knowledge)* features the voices of four new authors who, along with the original trio, successfully advocate for a transformative system of higher education that implicates the community and public schools in the process of learning, knowledge production, and civic-engagement. The authors view their work as an advancement of Dewey's theory of education and society, a tangible example of higher education's democratic civic and community engagement movement in action. Split into two sections, this text contains a reappraisal of Dewey's theory of education, a history of the University of Pennsylvania's involvement in the community affairs of West Philadelphia, and a justification for how the university's most recent endeavors further improve and advance Dewey's theory. Readers will ultimately find that Benson and his co-authors provide compelling, optimistic solutions—and paths forward—to remedy the growing corporatization of the research university and service-learning.

Considered a mentor by his co-authors, Lee Benson, who passed away before *Knowledge's* publication, was Professor Emeritus of History at the University of Pennsylvania (Penn). Ira Harkavy—a scholar who co-authored Benson's first book, *Dewey's Dream: Universities and Democracies in an Age of Education Reform*—is Associate Vice President and Founding Director of the Barbara and Edward Netter Center for Community Partnerships at Penn. Also at Penn is John Puckett, a Professor of Education and the second co-author of *Dewey's Dream*. Matthew Hartley, a co-editor of *"To Serve a Larger Purpose": Engagement for Democracy and the Transformation of Higher Education*, serves as Professor of Education and Associate Dean in Penn's Graduate School. Like Harkavy, Rita A. Hodges and Joann Weeks work in the Netter Center as Assistant Director and Associate Director, respectively. Francis E. Johnston, another member of Penn's faculty, is Professor Emeritus of Anthropology. Through the academically based community service courses

(ABCS) offered by the authors of this text, and the ongoing service of Harkavy, Hodges, and Weeks, the Netter Center at Penn continues to educate, empower, and aid West Philadelphia's public schools and community members.

The authors' approach to integrating Penn into the community affairs of West Philadelphia is rooted in a neo-Deweyan educational philosophy. A stalwart advocate of participatory democracy, Dewey theorized that public education is at its finest when it empowers individuals to contribute to the decision-making processes of their community through the joint exchange of knowledge. The authors argue that this vision becomes truly plausible when the university, in partnership with the public schooling system, facilitates learning at all levels of America's education system—shifting the school-day curricula towards "solving locally identified, real world, community problems" (p. 67). This argument's realization—evidenced by Penn student and faculty involvement with the Netter Center and West Philadelphia—reflects a service-learning approach that is free from neoliberalism (e.g., Stoecker, 2016; 2017). In fact, the authors believe, "if university-community partnerships are to be mutually beneficial, there must be genuine, democratic change in the conditions in the community," along with student learning (p. 103). With that said, critics might find that the authors overemphasize the community-partnerships formed by the Netter Center, rather than their ability to promote national and global systemic change, a criticism that even the authors extend in the book's later chapters. Yet overall, and perhaps most significantly, Benson and his team provide a meaningful, tangible adaptation to Dewey's ideas regarding education and reveal that partnerships between universities and communities can create a more democratically engaged citizenry that works collectively for the good of all.

The book is separated into two parts: (1) The Advancement of Learning for "The Relief of Man's Estate" and (2) The Netter Center: Higher Education and Civic and Community Engagement. The first section traces the inspiration behind Dewey's ingenuity, serving as a justification for his theory's continued relevancy. Inspired by Francis Bacon, Dewey

subscribed to Benjamin Franklin's views regarding education, which posited that the betterment of all—service to humanity—could be achieved by increasing the public's access to educational resources. For the authors, this vision represents a commendable ideal, but it was only partially achieved by Dewey, whose work in 1896 with the Laboratory School at the University of Chicago ultimately failed to establish community schools that would better the city's conditions. The missing ingredient, they contend, was Dewey's inability to realize the research university's potential to assist public schools in these efforts by creating knowledge that could then inform and democratically electrify the general public. Thus, in the later chapters of the text, the authors use the Netter Center as a case study to show how this slight adaptation to Dewey's theory can allow the university to generate community partnerships that improve living conditions for everyone.

In fact, the Netter Center's growing involvement in the community affairs of West Philadelphia provides an excellent model for other universities to follow, because it exemplifies the most ethical facets of higher education's democratic civic and community engagement movement. From its inception in 1992, the center has grown its number of ABCS courses from four to 65, with the inclusion of 1,600 graduate and undergraduate students as of 2015-2016. A primary form of data within the text, these courses dismiss service-learning that is didactic in nature, prioritizing instead the movement's goal of "producing knowledge that solves real-world problems and results in positive changes in the human condition" (p. 69). The authors argue that changes of this caliber are evident in the Agatson Urban Nutritional Initiative (AUNI), an ABCS program of the Netter Center that began as a nutritional class taught by Johnston—Anthropology 310: "Nutrition, Health, and Community Schools." Over the years, AUNI has changed the landscape of West Philadelphia, beginning with Penn students working with Turner School sixth-graders to reduce schoolwide obesity and culminating in the planting of a community garden, which continues to provide healthy foods to Philadelphia's working poor, unemployed, and homeless individuals. The data collected from AUNI's work in the community shows a neighborly attitude that is often unseen in standard service-learning practices, where community members are too often treated as an afterthought (Stoecker, 2016, p. 23).

In the second section of the text, the authors argue that the Netter Center's participatory service classes truly advance learning by fostering collaboration on a global and national scale between institutions of higher education.

During the late 1990s, these global partnerships began when the center hosted visitors from across Europe, Africa, Asia, and Australia, resulting in the formation of the International Consortium for Higher Education, Civic Responsibility, and Democracy (IC). The IC is a global organization that works with the council of Europe, presently, to "advance higher education's contribution to building democratic societies" (p. 120). Nationally, collaborative initiatives between the center, the Coalition for Community Schools, and Rutgers University-Camden resulted in the creation of the University-Assisted Community Schools Network, a program of over 50 colleges and universities that seek to advance university-community partnerships. Though these partnered institutions of higher education are shown to provide support to schools, students, and families, the authors in this section prioritize these organizational partnerships as evidence over their actual ability to facilitate systemic change that aids every member of the community, not just those within the education system. Regardless, even the authors acknowledge: "While this is a propitious beginning on an international [and national] scale, it is still only a beginning" (p. 122).

George Counts (1932/1978), one of Dewey's contemporaries, argued that educators should prepare citizens to "combat all forces tending to produce social distinctions and classes; repress every form of privilege and economic parasitism" (pp. 37-38). As proponents and augmenters of Dewey's theory of education and society as "dynamically interactive and independent," the authors of *Knowledge* prove unequivocally that institutions of higher education have the capacity to leverage equity for all in the fight for national and global justice (p. 49). However, in order to accomplish this, nothing short of a universal movement is needed, a reimagining of higher education as a whole. Through AUNI's research and education-based initiatives, evidence for this movement is well-represented by the Netter Center's efforts to remedy public health in West Philadelphia's community and public schools. Still, to truly achieve Dewey's dream, there is work to be done, especially as universities begin to shift away from collectivistic thinking and the public good to function competitively as profit-making institutions (e.g., Giroux, 2015). Fortunately, if universities take the turn exemplified by Benson and his contemporaries, knowledge can be treated as a public good that belongs to and benefits everyone.

References

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