This paper suggest that university assisted school-centered community development programs can produce young people, who are not only better students, but also who will mature into caring and engaged citizens, by involving them in problem-based learning activities that are designed to regenerate their neighborhoods.

The Connection: Schooling, Youth Development, and Community Building– The Futures Academy Case

Henry Louis Taylor, Jr. and Linda McGlynn

The development of inner city youth, especially African Americans and Latinos, is not a priority in the United States. As a society, we have chosen instead to pathologize or criminalize many social problems, strengthen the criminal justice system and place the 'jailing' of troubled youth as a higher priority solution than remediation and education, which is much more likely to develop productive citizens.

This policy approach has had a devastating impact on African American and Latino students in particular. In a pioneering study of high school graduation rates, Jay P. Greene found that only 56% of African Americans and 54% of Latinos graduated from high school nationally.[1] Today, the situation is so severe that 1 in 10 high schools in the United States are now considered "Dropout Factories," meaning that these are places where no more than 60% of the freshmen make it to their senior year.[2]

Blacks and Latinos are also overrepresented in prisons and jails. According to the Bureau of Justice Statistics, a branch of the US Department of Justice, 10% of the black male population between 18 and 34 years of age are in jail or prison.[3] It is estimated, nationwide, that the rate at which black youth receive life without parole sentences (6.6 per 10,000) is 10 times

greater than the rate for white youth (0.6 per 10,000). Of black males aged 25 to 29, 8.4% are sentenced inmates, compared to 2.5% of Hispanic males and 1.2% of white males in that age group.[4] These high incarceration and sentencing rates not only reflect the reality that the United States is the world's leading jailer; it more importantly reflects the nation's failure to invest in the development of African American and Latino youth.

Young people of color, who are at the greatest risk of dropping out of school and/or being jailed, most often live in distressed inner city neighborhoods. This suggests that neighborhoods matter in the development of young people and can contribute to negative outcomes such as dropping out of school, drug abuse, crime, unemployment, poverty, and a variety of other socioeconomic problems.[5]

This point is made very clearly in a 1994 *New York Times* article on the deplorable state of Philadelphia public schools. The reporter told of the heroic efforts of Rebecca Kimmelman, a newly appointed principal, to improve instruction and the overall academic environment at Meade Elementary School. Ms. Kimmelman, the reporter said, believed that "…teaching is not Meade's biggest problem….", that distinction belongs to the distressed community in which the school exists. "You could give me $80 billion to improve the school, but it won't make much difference unless you make changes out there (in the neighborhood). If a 6-year old's mother is a drug addict and a prostitute and she's dying of AIDS and she's all but abandoned the child, what can we do to turn that child around?"[6]

Neighborhoods, as this example illustrates, can increase a young person's vulnerability to a host of other problems.[7] Conversely, if neighborhoods are functioning well, this factor can lower a young person's risk by creating a communal environment that is supportive of a healthy life and culture. Thus, depending on the character of the *neighborhood place*; the types of

institutions located in it, the relationships that exist between institutions and residents, and the relations that exist between neighborhoods and government, neighborhoods can either protect or increase the vulnerability of young people. Thus, turning distressed inner city neighborhoods into cosmopolitan, socially functional communities, which are based on the principles of participatory democracy, reciprocity, collaboration, and social justice, will certainly enhance the probability that its residents, specifically the Black and Latino youth who reside in these places, will become caring, productive and engaged citizens, who will not add to the already too high incarceration and drop out statistics.

At this juncture, universities can play a critical role. Because of their vast human and fiscal resources, higher eds can contribute to both youth development and the transformation of inner city neighborhoods. But first, the university must forge *genuine* partnerships with public schools and distressed communities. Using, as an example, a case study of Futures Academy, a K-8th grade public school in the Fruit Belt, an inner city neighborhood in Buffalo, New York, this essay will demonstrate that universities can play a leading role in remediating the problems of public schooling, youth development and inner city distress.

Through the development of *authentic*, democratically-based partnerships among universities, schools, and communities, young people in distressed neighborhoods can become successful students and engaged citizens who work to improve conditions in their neighborhoods, city and nation.[8]

The first section of the paper will provide an overview of the history of university-community partnerships and then a review of pedagogical theories will be presented, and in the final segment, we will discuss the pedagogical model used in our work at Futures Academy.

An Overview of the History of University-Community Partnerships

Today, most universities view civic engagement and the development of university-community partnerships as critical components of university life and culture, although the detached, elite-centered ivory tower model still dominates. University involvement in the affairs of its host community is not a new concept, but its history is a checkered one, which evolved through three distinct periods: the late 19th century to World War 1, the post World War 1 era to the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr., and lastly, 1968 to the present.

The First Period: The Late 19th Century to World War 1

The origin of university and community partnerships dates back to 1862, when Congress enacted the Morrill Act, which led to the creation of a cadre of universities whose mandates were focused on providing access to higher education for the working class, producing and disseminating knowledge and information to help agricultural communities, and establishing extension programs to provide technical assistance to farmers.[9]

Desirous of using a similar model for "urban-based universities" to address problems of the city, Daniel Coit Gilman, in his 1876 inaugural address as the president of Johns Hopkins, America's first modern research university, 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."[10] Other university presidents in the late 19th and early 20th centuries expressed the same desire to advance knowledge to improve the quality of urban life, especially among immigrants and the poor. [11]

This animating mission is found especially in the histories of four of the leading universities at the turn of the 20th century: Johns Hopkins, Columbia, the University of Pennsylvania, and the University of Chicago.

In varied ways, these four institutions led the way in creating an academic environment that encouraged the involvement of faculty and students in the struggle to improve the lives of residents of the urban slums. Seth Low, President of Columbia University, devoted the entirety of his 1890 inaugural address to discussing the significance of the interactive relationship between New York City and Columbia and stressed the importance of faculty and students using their talents and skills to solve the problems of the city.[12]

A staunch believer in liberal education, Low nevertheless stressed the critical nexus between theory and practice. "The real world is not found in books," he said, but in cities, which are "peopled by men and women of living flesh."[13] Within this context, Low argued that scholars must be "men who see humanity, as in a vision, ever beckoning to them from behind their books… The scholar without this vision is a pedant. He mistakes learning as an end in itself, instead of a weapon in a wise man's hands."[14] A weapon, Low mused, which could be used to attack the complicated problems facing American cities.

University of Chicago President William Rainey Harper went even further in formulating his vision of university-community relations. Harper believed that the university could play a leading role in transforming the United States into a socially just and democratic society. The central mission of the university, Harper said, was to help build a truly democratic society by taking responsibility for the performance of the entire school system within its community. He argued that "through the school system every family in the entire broad land of ours is brought into touch with the university; for from it proceeds the teachers."[15]

Harper's viewpoint was based on the notion that neighborhoods were the basic unit for urban development and that schools functioned as the hub around which neighborhood life evolved. Against this theoretical backdrop, Harper created an academic environment that nurtured the pioneering work of John Dewey, who dreamed of transforming the United States into a genuine participatory democracy by turning schools into democratic, problem-solving institutions that collaborated with residents to solve community problems.[16] Dewey believed that school/community partnerships were needed to transform neighborhoods into democratic communities imbued with the principles of reciprocity, collaboration, cosmopolitanism, and social justice. Ultimately, the development of such neighborhoods would lead to the emergence of a worldwide, organic "Great Community" composed of truly participatory, democratic, collaborative, and interdependent societies. This was Dewey's dream.[17]

World War 1 bought this period in the history of university-community partnerships to an end. In retrospect, the visions of Low, Harper and Dewey were ahead of their time, however, this period should not be romanticized. The university-community partnerships in this era were neither participatory nor democratic.[18] Rather, they were based on the 'client' model of operating, in which ordinary people were viewed as 'consumers' of the services provided by university experts.[19] The goal was to help the *disadvantaged*, but not to enlist them as agents of change, participants with whom they worked collaboratively to turn distressed neighborhoods into socially functional places based on participatory democracy, reciprocity, cosmopolitanism, and social justice.[20]

The Second Period: Post World War 1 Era to Assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr.

During the second period, from the end of War 1 up until the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr. in 1968, the university-community partnership was reframed, as higher eds redefined their public mission and their view of the problem of the city. During the late 19th and early 20th centuries, universities were concerned about the plight of the urban poor because unsanitary, unsafe and deplorable living conditions directly threatened the city's growth and development, as attested by the Great Chicago Fire in 1871. In those days, most metropolitan residents lived in highly congested central cities and problems such as disease or violence could spread quickly from one neighborhood to another. [21]

This changed after World War 1 when the mechanization of agriculture combined with the growth of industrialization to usher in a new period of urban development. As the urban population exploded, businesses and people began moving to the suburbs, automobile traffic intensified, and universities built partnerships with community elites to construct the modern, economically rational city.   In this new setting, scholars turned their attention to the problems of city and regional planning, ending the depression, eliminating policy barriers to the creation of mass homeownership, and rethinking the role of higher education.[22]

In this new American metropolis, consumerism and market-based individualism triumphed as materialism defined the "good life" and the middle-classes then began their long trek from the central city to the suburban locale.   In response, scholars, led by the University of Chicago School Of Sociology, sought to construct a theoretical framework to justify the new approaches to city building and the restructuring of the social geography of the urban metropolis. Robert Park and Ernest W. Burgess, for example, argued that the *distress* found in the urban core was "a product of natural forces" and that people would move out of decaying "natural areas," as

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their economic conditions improve.[23] In this increasingly privatized environment, university-community partnerships increasingly meant collaboration with business, civic elites, and the federal government.

From the time of the Great Depression to the post-war years, the university gradually shifted its focus from local to national and international issues, as the realities of war made foreign relations and national security matters of great importance. This trend was accelerated in 1945, when Vannevar Bush's report to President Theodore Roosevelt, "Science and the Endless Frontier," led to the development of a unique partnership between the federal government and the university.

Bush's report called for the formation of an interactive affiliation between the federal government and colleges and universities. To accelerate the rise of the United States to international leadership and to make the world safe for democracy, higher eds were called upon to expand the frontiers of scientific knowledge. The government would aid in this process by dramatically increasing its investments in "pure research," especially in medicine and the basic sciences.[24]

The Bush doctrine not only caused federal funding to turn research in science and technology into the engine that drove the massive expansion of the post World War Two university, but also it enshrined the elitist, Platonic dictum, which placed "pure" over "applied" research, and pushed local issues and the urgent problems facing immigrants, blacks, the poor and working classes, to the margins of academic life.[25]

The Third Period: The Assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr. to the Present

The urban violence of the sixties, which culminated with the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr. in 1968, ended the second period by forcing institutions of higher education to refocus their attention on the problems of the city. Following King's murder, violence erupted across the country as angry blacks lashed out at a society that allowed assassins to kill the nonviolent preacher.[26] To restore hope among African Americans, predominately white institutions of higher education opened their doors to blacks and other people of color. Black student demands for a more *relevan*t curriculum combined with student unrest and protests over the Vietnam War to ignite the process of transforming the *ivory tower* into a *more civically engaged university*.[27]

By 1989, the ending of the Cold War combined with these internal changes and a deepening of the urban crisis to pave the way for the development of a new generation of university-community partnerships. From the 1960s onward the condition of the cities continued to deteriorate. In 1965, when the black scholar, Kenneth B. Clark, referred to Harlem as a *Dark Ghetto*, he was talking about the *emergence* of the inner city built environment as the epicenter of racism, structural inequality, joblessness, poverty, underperforming schools, dilapidation, family instability, crime and violence.[28]

These *real world* issues stood at the door step of universities and forced them to become genuinely concerned about the problems of distressed urban communities, and their poor and working class residents.[29] As a consequence, from the late eighties to the present, civic engagement and the development of partnerships with its host community has become an acceptable practice in most universities, as they became more democratic, people-centered and cosmopolitan. Needless to say, we are still in the very early stages of this transformational

process, and we are still learning how to construct a university-based model of civic engagement that turns schools into democratic, problem-solving institutions that collaborate with residents and stakeholders to solve community problems.

In such a model, the university would assist in the establishment of a school-centered model of community development, which would link schooling to community building and neighborhood transformation. In this way, young people will began to see the connection between the lessons learned in school and their ability to work with neighbors and stakeholders to build a *better* community. Thus, by involving young people in a democratic and collaborative process to transform their community, we will turn them into good students, who will become caring, productive and engaged citizens.

The remainder of this chapter will focus on our efforts to contribute to the development of such a university-assisted model of school-centered community development. However, before discussing the Futures Academy experience, we will provide an overview of the key learning theories that were used in the construction of our pedagogic model. Then, using Futures Academy as the engine that drives the remaking of the Fruit Belt neighborhood, we will illustrate our quest to develop young people by meaningfully involving them in the quest to turn their community into a socially functional neighborhood characterized by participatory democracy, reciprocity, and collaboration.

The Pedagogical Model: Problem-Based Learning, Youth Development and Community Building

Linking students and their schools to the community development process requires the evolution of a theory of learning and instructional strategy capable of developing the student's critical thinking abilities. Such a task demands the transformation of both the teacher and

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student.   Within this context, at the same time that universities began to forge authentic partnerships with distressed communities, it is critical to also create an environment that encourages scholars to develop pedagogical approaches to grapple with this issue. In this sense, the creation of pedagogic approaches that will lead to authentic learning and transform the culture of schools, is a critical first task in the construction of a school-centered model of community development, which makes youth development its focal point.

It is natural to begin with John Dewey, who theorized that education and society were interactive and interdependent. Thus, the only way to build a society based on participatory democracy was to construct an effective democratic schooling system, one informed by a pedagogic approach capable of turning young people into critical thinkers, who are caring, productive and civically engaged citizens.   At the core of this endeavor is the question, "how do you create a democratic classroom, where students become critical thinkers and problem-solvers, who are imbued with the values of reciprocity, collaboration, cosmopolitanism, and social justice?"

The development of our pedagogic model was based on a synthesis of the work of John Dewey, Paulo Freire and other theories of active learning. John Dewey and his concept of the 'Great Community,' provide us with a democratic education model based on "the very same ideals that inspired the Declaration of Independence . . . those of democracy, of the liberty and equality that animated our forefathers."[30] Action is a core principle in the Dewey philosophy and his notion of democracy is rooted in the ideal of racial, social, and economic justice and is conceived as a robust, interactive way of life in which students, on their way to becoming participatory citizens, are continually engaged in the quest to solve complicated neighborhood

and societal issues. This is conceived as an interactive process of problem-solving that will continually re-create and re-form society.

While Dewey's Lab School was an effort to activate these ideals into a real, reproducible educational model, this did not result in an authentic process that translated Dewey's great ideas into action for students. The programs were child focused, involved hands-on activities and fostered problem solving, but they were implemented within the existing institutional framework of academia, where transformative projects and real world knowledge are not core values.[31]

Paulo Freire's pedagogical model, in many ways, builds on the ideas of Dewey. Formed by the concepts of dialogic education and praxis, his approach to education prepares students to "analyze social life through a lens of diversity and social justice and. . . be transformative social agents."[32] Dialogic education honors the knowledge and experience of both students and teachers and seeks to build on both. Central to the learning process is the awareness that unequal power relationships exist and an important goal of transformative education is to give voice to the silenced, while also investigating the cause of that silence, thereby unlocking their critical consciousness and creative powers.

Praxis involves both action and reflection, in a looping fashion with one ever leading to the other. One cannot obtain critical consciousness by only focusing on intellectual pursuits, "reflection, both self and social, coupled with dialogue can foster a critical consciousness by which students and teachers see their experiences situated in historical, cultural, and social contexts and recognize possibilities for changing oppressive structures.[33]" This educational model views student and teacher as equal actors in the learning process, which is ultimately tied to action and community/society transformation.

David A. Kolb's active learning cognition theory also conforms closely to the basic tenants of Dewey, Freire and critical pedagogy. He emphasizes the importance of bringing lived experiences into the classroom for reflection and also believed that simulations and case studies coupled with lectures and reading, would round out the learning process and tie action to reflection. Kolb hypothesizes that there are four stages of learning: concrete experience, observation and reflection, the formation of abstract concepts, and then testing in new situations. These stages create a continuous cycle that can be entered into at any point but must be followed sequentially to create an engaged learning environment. The permeable boundaries between the classroom and the outside world are thought to enhance transmission of key knowledge to the larger community and vice versa.[34]

Problem-based learning (PBL) is also a method developed to produce engaged, active learners. Students are responsible for their learning which involves searching for solutions to issues that occur in the real world. "PBL is focused, experiential learning organized around the investigation, explanation, and resolution of meaningful problems.[35]" Like Kolb's theory, PBL has a learning cycle composed of stages to be followed sequentially. One begins with a problem, real or hypothetical, identifies the key facts and then generates a hypothesis. The self directed aspect comes into play as the student then identifies deficiencies of knowledge in the next stage when trying to resolve the problem. The work is then to acquire and apply new knowledge in the next phase. The last stage is one termed abstraction which is the reflection on the total problem solving process.

Throughout this process students continually negotiate with other students and teachers in a cooperative, collaborative fashion to test out old and construct new categories of knowledge. Teachers serve as guides moving students through the cycle and each should be "an expert

learner, able to model good strategies for learning and thinking, rather than an expert in the content itself."[36] Each problem-solving cycle is intended to further each student's understanding of a self-determined goal that has been set; problem resolution is not an end in itself. The idea is to further the development of metacognitive skills in the students. These involve the ability to plan one's own problem solving process, as well as to monitor and evaluate it.[37]

Engaged, action-based learning and reflection is the core concept that links together these various theories of learning. The guiding principle is that "real life" issues provide opportunities for teachers and students to collaborate, problem-solve, and reflect and this leads to the formation of critical consciousness and authentic participatory democracy. This approach reinforces Dewey's notion that the intelligence and maturity of children develop best when they are involved in the quest to solve the puzzling real-world problems confronting them and their families and when they are given the opportunity to reflect deeply on these problems.[38]

The key to the development of a pedagogic model based on these theories of engaged learning is to structure practical activities, which enable students to use the knowledge and skills learned in the classroom to reflect on neighborhood problems and work collaboratively with residents and stakeholders to solve them. Against this backdrop, we developed a *neo-democratic education* model to guide our work at Futures Academy.[39] In this approach, the goal is not simply to turn young people into good students, equipped the knowledge and skills required to earn a living, but also to imbue them with the desire to build a better, more socially just world.

This type of pedagogical method is critical in an inner city setting, where so many students underperform academically, drop out of school, and make poor choices that sometimes lead to premature death or incarceration. This happens, we argue, because inner city students do not see a relationship between education and the ability to improve their lives and make their

neighborhood a better place to live. Without understanding this vital connection between education and community building, we do not believe students will be motivated to learn and develop fully their talents and skills.[40]   Thus, our pedagogic model is not only a method of teaching, but it is also a community building activity that contributes to the holistic development of young people—good students, engaged neighborhood residents, and community change agents.

The Case Study: Connecting Schooling, Youth Development, and Community Building: The Community Classroom Initiative at Futures Academy

Futures Academy is a struggling K-8th grade public school, which is located in one of the poorest neighborhoods in Buffalo, N.Y. At the same time, because it is situated adjacent to the Buffalo-Niagara Medical Campus, where the University at Buffalo has a strong presence, it is an ideal site to launch a university assisted school-centered community development project.

Futures Academy is a neighborhood magnet school, which draws its students from inside the neighborhood and across the city. Although originally meant to be a magnet school that offered students a curriculum that prepared them for futuristic careers, Futures now uses its magnet school status only as a vehicle for recruiting students citywide. About a third of the 694 students at Futures come from the Fruit Belt, with the remainder being drawn from other low-income neighborhoods in Buffalo.

The school is predominantly African American, with a handful of whites, Latinos, and Native Americans. All the students attending Futures are eligible for free or reduced price school lunches, and the school performs well below New York Standards, at all grade levels, in English Language Arts and Math. Most of the teachers at Futures have more than three years of

experiences and about 19% have a Master's degree or above.[41]   The school is headed by a very progressive, Ph.D. educated African American principal who grew up in the Fruit Belt neighborhood.

The Community Classroom Program

Our school-centered development project centers on an initiative we call the *Community Classroom Program.*[1] Administered by the UB Center for Urban Studies (CENTER), the program involves most 6th – 8th graders in activities that occur both during and after school hours. The *Community Classroom* compliments the school's curriculum, but is not integrated into regular classroom activities. Rather, during the school day, students participating in the program are given release time from their classroom, and for after-school activities, they are required to obtain permission from their parents.   While graduate students from the University at Buffalo drive the program, a number of classroom teachers assist in the development of all program activities, including those that take place after school.

The *Community Classroom Program* uses the Fruit Belt neighborhood as a *classroom*, and engages the students in collaborative activities with residents to solve community problems. The goal is to create opportunities for the students to apply the knowledge and skills learned in the classroom to the goal of making the Fruit Belt a better place to live by working in

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[1] The partnership with Futures Academy is part of a broader neighborhood development initiative that is led by the Center for Urban Studies and the Community Action Organization of Erie County. Futures Academy is situated in the Fruit Belt, a small community of about 3,000 residents, with demographic profile characteristic of distress urban neighborhoods: low-incomes, high poverty rate, high unemployment and underemployment combined with crime and a proliferation of single-parent families and a weak organizational structure. The physical environment is characterized by dilapidation, blight, and omnipresent vacant lots. Although it is one of the poorest neighborhoods in the region, the Fruit Belt nevertheless has considerable assets.   It is home, for example, to the Buffalo-Niagara Medical Campus (BNMC) and St. John Baptist Church.   The BNMC contains the region's top clinical, research, and medical education institutions, while St. John is the largest and most powerful, black church in Western New York.

collaboration with residents and stakeholders. The program seeks to implement the Dewey dictum that individuals learn best when they are involved in the quest to solve the puzzling real-world problems confronting them and their families and when they are given the opportunity to reflect deeply on these problems. *The Community Classroom* consists of four interrelated activities: *Future City Project*, *Community Clean-A-Thon*, *Community Garden Project*, and *the Community Art Program*.

The goal of the *Future City Project* is to show students that a connection exists between public policy and the city and neighborhood development process. The idea is to debunk the notion that conditions in their neighborhood or elsewhere are the products of a *natural developmental process*, rather than the outcome of a human decision-making and resource allocation process. We want the students to understand that agency – the action of residents in partnership with other stakeholders and the government – can improve conditions in their neighborhood by altering the policies and decisions that drive community development.

The Future City Project is a simulated problem-solving activity with real world implications. Each year, as part of a broader national competition, we develop two to three teams of six students, composed of sixth thru eighth graders, who build a futuristic city, based on a specific theme such as nanotechnology, transportation, or alternative energy sources. As part of the competition, the students, using SimCity software, must also develop a computerized city and then construct a scale model of a smaller portion of the city. In this process, they explore various policy choices and decide which ones to apply in the building of their city. The students take field trips to deepen their understanding of the theme and to gain insight into ways that neighborhoods and cities are shaped by the policy and decision making process. Local engineers

and urban planners are always enlisted to work with the students in the development of their project.

Between September and January, the students are involved in the construction of their computer city and a scaled model of a smaller section of the city. After the January competition, the students are required to reflect on their experiences. Not only do they engage in group discussions about lessons learned, but they must also write a short essay on their experiences. After the reflection exercise, they spend the remainder of the school year working on select neighborhood projects. The idea is for them to use the knowledge and skills learned in the Future City competition to work on "real life" problems in their own neighborhood.

The Community Art Project

The community art project involves the students in the struggle to change the visual image of their community by adorning it with a range of art projects. The principle is to show students how they can change the way their neighborhood looks and feels. Dilapidation and a forlorn environment do not have to be the characteristic features of distressed communities. Within this framework, we want students to think aggressively about ways to re-image their community and to imbue it with the energy of youth culture. Over the past five years, the students have produced some rather dramatic projects. For example, working in partnership with the Locust Street Art Class, they produced a mural, which consists of about four hundred small panels, to cover the fence surrounding a small neighborhood park. They also designed and built two benches for the park.

They students produced a unique sign, which consisted of a bench and a decorative archway, for a block-long garden/park designed by Futures students and built by the UB Center

for Urban Studies. Moreover, while Futures was being rehabilitated, the students were permitted to develop a mural, along the wall fronting the entrance to the school. The mural consisted of several hundred small tiles, with a different design painted on each one. Now, the first thing they see when entering the school is the mural, which symbolically proclaims, "This school belongs to you." And the first thing they see when they leave school is the sign and garden the designed, which symbolically says to them, "This neighborhood belongs to you."

They students have also developed art projects designed to get young people to "stop the violence" and to turn derelict old houses into works of art.   The public spaces, on which the community art projects have been erected, have become "sacred" places, which are never vandalized. Thus, the actual work of the students is becoming a real part of their community, not only increasing the aesthetic value of the environment but sending positive, uplifting messages to all who live and work there. This is a real sign of active citizenship.

The Community Garden Project

The goal of the Community Garden Project is to solve the problem of unkempt vacant properties in the Fruit Belt. The project centers on two main activities. First, the students at Futures Academy are involved in the ongoing maintenance and development of the Futures Garden, a passive park which fronts the school. Four years ago, the site occupied by Futures Garden consisted of a series of unkempt vacant lots, which symbolized the powerless of the students, teachers, and neighborhood residents. To the children, these lots seem to say, "You are not worth much and no one really cares."

Futures students, in partnership with neighborhood residents and the Center for Urban Studies, decided to turn this message around. U.B. graduate students assisted the students in

planning a passive garden, acquiring control over the land, and overseeing the physical development of the park. The students learned that even with limited resources, they had the power to alter the visual image of the community through a vacant lot management strategy. Today, their task is to maintain and further develop Futures Garden.

Second, the students are involved in the development of a model vegetable garden with neighborhood residents. Here, they are learning about urban gardening, nutrition, and cooking healthy meals. As part of this project, the children were involved in a bioremediation project in which they learn how to use plants to cleanse the soil of contaminants.

The Community Clean-A-Thon

While in the *Future City Project,* the students are required to solve a simulated problem, in the Community Clean-A-Thon, they are involved in the solution of a real-world problem. The Community Clean-A-Thon is a yearlong program that involves students in the quest to solve the problem of neighborhood blight. In this year's program, students were involved in an analysis of the pattern of rubbish and trash dumping in the community, and the formulation of a strategy for solving this problem.

Between September and December, the students studied the distribution of trash and rubbish in the Fruit Belt. They completed two main tasks during this period. First, they identified the location of clusters of rubbish (old tires, discarded appliances, bottles, etc), and second, they examined the distribution pattern of those clusters of rubbish and trash. The students used the GIS (Geographic Information Systems) method to analyze the distribution pattern. Graduate students in the Department of Urban and Regional Planning teach the students about GIS and show them how to geocode, map and analyze the data. In the winter and spring, the students will complete their analysis of the distribution pattern, generate hypotheses on causality, and

formulate a plan for solving the problem. In the 2009-2010 academic year, the students will implement and evaluate the plan for solving the neighborhood blight problem.

At the end of the school year, Futures Academy holds a Community Clean-A-Thon. The goal of the project is to involve the entire community and stakeholders in a cleanup of the neighborhood. The Clean-A-Thon is organized around the theme, "Collective Work and Responsibility," which stresses the importance of the entire community taking control of the development of their neighborhood. The students, who have been working on the project throughout the year, now join with other teachers, residents, and stakeholders to plan for the Clean-A-Thon. Based on the GIS mapping project, the committee will develop a plan for deploying the participants in cleanup activities throughout the neighborhood.

The morning hours of the Clean-A-Thon are devoted to cleaning up the neighborhood, while the afternoon is set aside for a community celebration. Thus, the morning hours are about work, while the afternoon focuses on a neighborhood coming together to feast and have fun. Most important, the festival creates an opportunity to deepen the bonds betwixt and between teachers, students, residents and stakeholders.

Lessons Learned and Challenges Ahead

The principal at Futures Academy says that students enrolled in the *Community Classroom Program* are not only during well in their classes, but also they are developing into mature youngsters who try to keep their friends out of trouble. Thus, our experiences reinforces the belief that we can turn young people into good students, who will become caring, productive and engaged citizens, by involving them in a democratic and collaborative process to improve their neighborhoods. Within this context, the most important lesson learned is that part of the

task of creating a "democratic classroom" consists of getting the students out of the school building and into the community, where they are involved in collaborative neighborhood problem-solving activities.

Learning activities in the school building, not matter how creative and thoughtful, are limited in their ability to get students to see the critical nexus between schooling and community development. The only way for them to see this connection is by participating in problem-solving activities that takes place in the community. Consequently, every university assisted school should have a *community classroom program* that involves students in community problem-solving activities with residents and stakeholders. Only by embedding students in the community change process can we develop young people who are critical thinkers and problem-solver, imbued with the values of reciprocity, collaboration, cosmopolitanism, and social justice.

The great challenge we face in making this happen is to turn universities and public schools, which are both autocratic institutions, into truly democratic places that believe in the transforming power of critical thinking and participatory democratic. This is a big task, which must start with encouraging the widespread study and discussion of the meaning of democracy. On this point, we want to stress that the study and discussion of democracy cannot occur in isolation from practice. Thus, one of the most important, and difficult, challenges face is how to create activities whereby people learn about participatory democracy through the process of building *authentic* democratic institutions. This is the one of keys to expanding university assisted school-centered community development programs that makes youth development the focal point of activities.

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