

Foundations, Innovation and Social Change
A Quixotic Journey Turned Case Study

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Young Lives Turned Around by Quasi-Military Programs

Cadets in National Guard Youth Challenge Program:

"Our son, Devin...was on the path of self-destruction.... The constant skipping of school (which reflected on his report card straight D's, F's), lying, being disrespectful to authority, sneaking out of the house at all hours of the night, experimenting with alcohol...was getting him nowhere except in a lot of trouble and he knew it." Devin enrolled in the Challenge Corps, the National Guard program for dropouts. When he came home to visit..."We witnessed a young man with respect, dignity and a positive outlook on life.... Devin is now in the top five percentile of his class..."¹

Devin's Mother

"I gave YC (Youth Challenge program) an angry, confused, unhappy child, and you returned to me a not so confused, a happier, and somewhat not so angry young man. You gave me a young man with a purpose, a goal, and foundation to be a man. Also, just as important, I received back a young man who still managed to keep his uniqueness and his weird sense of humor (which I love)." ²

Deborah Hughes of Georgia:

"My son lost interest in school (ADD), because he didn't understand, therefore he was retained to 9th grade for the 3rd time. He was hanging around the wrong crowd, smoking and drinking and had a very bad anger toward me, his mother. Being a single mom I had to work and lost control over him. My son started Youth Challenge in Ft. Stewart, GA, in Jan '04. When I picked him up on his pass for the weekend, I couldn't believe that I picked up the same child that I had dropped off. He was courteous, seemed so grown up, even told me 'mom I realize I'm becoming a man.' And the biggest difference, he was a gentleman toward me and a very helpful big brother."³

Angel of Georgia

Student in Chicago Military Academy (a public school)

When Lavin Curry arrived at the Chicago Military Academy as a freshman in 1999, he was brash. He was wild. As Frank C. Bacon, the academy's superintendent and a retired Army Brigadier General, said of Lavin, "He was a bad little sucker, always into something, always thought he was right."

Lavin couldn't live with his mother and he never met his father. He was raised by his cousin. By the time he got to high school, he was drinking, smoking and ignoring everyone. "I just didn't care about the rules of the school," Lavin recalls. "I didn't think about the consequences of my actions."

One day he got drunk before the first period and passed out in the school bathroom. He was almost kicked out of school. Instead, his instructors and the commandant prodded him to change his behavior and salvage his academic career. Lavin was allowed to stay after he promised to attend a weekend counseling program.

A traffic accident where his cousin was injured proved to be a turning point. Lavin came to realize that his teachers had simply been trying to give him what he needed: some order in his life. The marching, the saluting, the obeying of rules were all part of turning him into someone who deserved respect.

As Lavin acknowledges, "They changed my life. They fought for me to stay in school. They really cared about me."

Now at 17, he has stopped drinking and smoking. He has bumped his grades up to A's and B's and begun talking about college, maybe even law school. He's also a running back on the football team, sketches Japanese animation characters, and holds a part-time job at the Loews Cineplex.

In the halls of the military academy, Lavin Curry feels safe. "I don't have to worry about somebody jumping me in the hallways or someone messing with me." But outside is different. He knows not to look directly at some teenagers in the neighborhood, especially when wearing his uniform.

"I feel proud when I go out in my uniform," Lavin says. "There's something about wearing it. You carry yourself differently."⁴

Executive Summary

For decades, social service agencies, educators, foundations, policymakers, and researchers have conducted a relentless search for program interventions that effectively address the phenomena that imperil the life prospects of at-risk youth. Many initiatives that concentrate largely on education and training have been rigorously evaluated over the years. Lamentably, the results have often been discouraging. The quest for effective, developmentally-oriented approaches has triggered interest in an unexpected source of methods and models, namely the U.S. military. It enjoys a well-deserved reputation for reaching, teaching and training young people who are rudderless, and for setting the pace among American institutions in advancing minorities.

When I served as vice president of the Rockefeller Foundation in the late 1980s, we were instrumental in helping to conceive and launch a quasi-military youth corps for dropouts aged 16 to 18 that came to be known as the National Guard Youth ChalleNGe Program. Launched in 1993, more than 92,000 young people have subsequently graduated from ChalleNGe. Earlier this year, MDRC, the esteemed evaluation outfit, released the interim results of a rigorous evaluation using random assignment. The evaluators called these impacts “impressive,” although the jury obviously remains out until the final results are available later this year.

The promise shown by ChalleNGe and other quasi-military interventions, coupled with favorable public attitudes toward the military these days and the search by frustrated educators for fresh ideas, have all contributed to an atmosphere of openness and experimentation with such approaches as public military academies, expanded JROTC extracurricular programs, ChalleNGe-like and JROTC programs inside juvenile corrections facilities, and utilization of military methods to turn around troubled and disorderly public high schools.

Yet the pursuit of these military-like approaches to address domestic problems has seldom been free of controversy and setbacks. Foundation involvement has waxed and waned over the years. ChalleNGe serves as an instructive case study for examining the role of philanthropy in fostering innovation that ‘looks outside the box’ for unorthodox approaches that may generate apprehension and opposition along the way. This working paper examines the broader implications for the role of philanthropy in fostering innovation in a changing philanthropic landscape.

Unique among American institutions, foundations enjoy unmatched assets – ‘patient’ money, convening power, tolerance for political incorrectness, and capacity to act proactively. The ChalleNGe program and other quasi-military educational initiatives have blossomed into innovative, promising and potentially significant interventions for at-risk youth without the benefit of sizeable investments by major foundations or venture philanthropists. This is an enormous loss to the field of quasi-military interventions and to the broader causes of school reform and youth development. Substantial and sustained engagement would have enabled concerned foundations to learn while the National Guard learned and, as the initiative began demonstrating consistent promise, to ponder and potentially invest in variations on the approach.

As Joel Fleishman, author of *The Foundation: A Great American Secret*, notes, foundations enjoy greater freedom than governments, public companies or nongovernmental organizations to take big risks, go against conventional wisdom, pursue strategies that will only ever pay off in the long term, and pilot risky projects that government can then scale up if they are shown to work.⁵ The quasi-military concepts that I’ve espoused have clearly tested the outer limits of foundation risk-taking over the years. I have encountered aversion to the very idea without any willingness to peer behind the label to examine and test whether there were approaches that might actually help young people in acute need.

Students of philanthropy periodically debate whether and to what extent foundations and, now, venture philanthropists can solve massive social problems or even foster social change.

Some experts argue that given their comparatively modest resources, foundations are peripheral players in the struggle for social change.⁶

Fleishman readily acknowledges the limits of foundation resources, but argues that when it comes to combating poverty:

“Foundations have done and are continuing to do a great deal by focusing public attention on the severity of the problem, by generating empirical research about better ways of tackling it, and by pioneering solutions that governments could implement.”⁷

The dramatic ascent of the Gates Foundation to the top of the philanthropic totem pole coupled with the advent of assertive venture philanthropists have prompted many smaller but nonetheless substantial foundations to reassess their missions and strategic niches. Foundations and venture philanthropists need not be the biggest or even rank near the top in terms of size in order to make manifestly important contributions to furthering social change. Foundations of varying sizes have the resources and cachet to play instrumental roles in spawning, nurturing, testing, evaluating and refining innovative ideas so that they are ready for prime time if and when the window of opportunity opens to scale them up or embed them in public policy.

The window of opportunity for testing, implementing and scaling up the quasi-military ideas that I have espoused has indeed opened wide in the last two years. One opened window is due to the election of Barack Obama as president of the United States, his appointment of Arne Duncan as U.S. Secretary of Education, and his administration’s success in securing an unprecedented appropriation of \$4 billion ‘Race to the Top’ fund to finance innovative efforts by states and school districts to turn around faltering schools and reverse the alarmingly high tide of school dropouts. The other window of opportunity has opened due to the acute pressure on states with staggering deficits to reduce expenditures, even in the criminal and juvenile systems.

Had some foundations and/or venture philanthropists invested in designing, testing, evaluating, refining, and building broad awareness of the kinds of military-inspired initiatives suggested in this paper, then they might have been prime contenders for the ‘Race to the Top’ grants’ being awarded this year by the U.S. Department of Education. Other interventions in juvenile corrections facilities might have appealed to states that are eager to save money by reducing the length of confinement and the rate of recidivism.

These ideas might well have been ready for prime time in 2010 had foundations and venture philanthropists placed riskier bets on these unconventional and ideologically uncomfortable ideas. Investments of this size were -- and remain -- well within the capacity of many national foundations that focus on the education and development of disadvantaged youth.

I am deeply grateful to the Rockefeller Foundation for providing a one-month practitioner residency at its Bellagio Center on Lake Como in Italy. The spectacular and intellectually stimulating venue afforded me the ‘space’ needed to reflect on my experience and write this paper, which I hope will be of interest to the philanthropic sector and help advance the interests of at-risk youth.

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The Chronic Achievement Gap

In 1996 the National Commission on Teaching and America's Future issued a trenchant warning in its report entitled *What Matters Most*:

"There has been no previous time in history when the success, indeed the survival, of nations and people has been tied so tightly to their ability to learn. Today's society has little room for those who cannot read, write and compute proficiently; find and use resources; frame and solve problems; and continually learn new technologies, skills, and occupations.... In contrast to 20 years ago, individuals who do not succeed in school have little chance of finding a job or contributing to society -- and societies that do not succeed at education have little chance of success in a global economy."⁸

A senior executive of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce put it even more bluntly: "If you want a real job, even a blue-collar job, you're probably going to need some postsecondary education, but at the very least you've got to get those skills in high school."⁹

These stark assessments were issued before the U.S. economy imploded in the late 2000s. If anything, the weakened labor market places heightened pressure on poorly educated young people facing competition from more qualified applicants who are desperate to get jobs that they would have shunned in the past.

Demographic trends indicate that the U.S. economy will rely increasingly upon Latinos and African Americans because together they, and especially the former, will comprise a steadily growing proportion of the adult workforce. Yet these economically indispensable population groups, along with low-income youngsters, consistently lag farthest behind academically.

The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) serves in effect as the nation's report card. The exam, which samples student achievement across states instead of testing every pupil, posits three levels of academic competence:

- Basic -- "denotes partial mastery of prerequisite knowledge and skills that are fundamental for proficient work at each grade."
- Proficient -- "represents solid academic performance for each grade assessed."
- Advanced -- "signifies superior performance."¹⁰

In actuality, there is an unofficial fourth level of achievement on NAEP. That is *Below Basic*, where a dismayingly high proportion of American youngsters have languished for years. As measured by NAEP, American students, including minorities, have made some headway academically. This is especially the case in math, but markedly less so in reading. The alarming reality is that as recently as 2009, roughly half of Latino, African-American and American Indian students in the fourth grade performed *Below Basic* in reading.¹¹ The same pictures basically holds true for low-income youngsters.

Less publicized, but no less ominous, is the phenomenon of student disengagement. According to Robert Balfanz and Nettie Legters of Johns Hopkins, many students in low-performing high schools start out poorly prepared for academic success and rarely (or barely) make it out of the 9th grade. Typically they disengage from school, attend infrequently, flunk too many courses to be promoted to the 10th grade, try again with no better results, and ultimately drop out. In the cities Balfanz and Legters studied, 20 to 40 percent of students repeat the 9th grade, but only 10 to 15 percent of repeaters go on to graduate.¹²

According to "Diplomas Count," a special supplement issued by *Education Week*, only half of African-American students and roughly 55 percent of Latinos graduate from high school

compared with more than three-quarters of non-Hispanic whites and Asians.¹³ The Hopkins experts have found that nearly half of the nation's African-American and Latino students attend high schools with high poverty rates and low graduation rates. Roughly 15 percent of U.S. high schools produce close to half of the nation's dropouts. Balfanz and Legters brand these 2,000 dysfunctional high schools 'dropout factories.'¹⁴

Interestingly enough, in some focus groups conducted with dropouts, they were far more likely to say they left school because they were unmotivated, not challenged enough, or overwhelmed by troubles outside of school, rather than because they were failing academically.¹⁵ The most commonly cited changes that the youngsters say would have boosted their inclination to stay in school included: teachers who expected more of them; smaller classes with more individualized instruction; schools that helped them more when they struggled; better teachers and classes that were more engaging; opportunities for real-world learning; increased supervision at school; and closer parental monitoring of whether they were attending school every day. Unbeknownst to them, their recommendations mirror some salient characteristics of military training and education,

The yawning achievement gaps, coupled with the reality that traditional schooling fails to work for many disengaged students and dropouts, suggest it is high time to try starkly different approaches to educating young people at acute risk of school failure. The continuum of need includes:

- Children who perform way below par year after year,
- Youngsters whose disengagement is so intractable that they are unlikely to be reached by conventional schools,
- Pupils who are capable of achieving, but yearn for learning environments that are orderly, structured and safe,
- School dropouts who would profit from a transformative educational and developmental experience that steers them back to school, toward a GED certificate, and into post-secondary education, training or the labor market, and
- Youngsters caught up in the juvenile corrections system.

For decades, social service agencies, educators, foundations, policymakers, and researchers have conducted a relentless search for program interventions that effectively address the phenomena that imperil the life prospects of at-risk youth. According to MDRC, the esteemed evaluation organization, many program interventions for at-risk youth that concentrate largely on education and training have been rigorously evaluated over the years. Lamentably, the results have often been discouraging. This disappointment has prompted experts as well as advocates like me to argue that, instead of focusing on deficits, programs should foster healthy development.

This quest for effective, developmentally-oriented approaches has triggered interest in an unexpected source of methods and models, namely the U.S. military. After all, it enjoys a well-deserved reputation for reaching, teaching and training young people who are rudderless, and for setting the pace among American institutions in advancing minorities. My longstanding involvement with the National Guard Youth ChalleNGe Program, a quasi-military intervention aimed at turning around the lives of school dropouts, convinces me that the military 'way' of education and training holds considerable promise. Interestingly enough, the most compelling core value of the ChalleNGe approach is the very one that the terms 'military' and 'quasi-military' are least likely to bring to mind. I refer to the military's overriding commitment to the education and development of 'whole adolescents,' as reflected by core program components of ChalleNGe.

When I served as vice president of the Rockefeller Foundation from 1988 to 1994, we played a catalytic role in helping to conceive and launch the ChalleNGe program. The documented promise shown by ChalleNGe, coupled with favorable public attitudes toward the military these days, the search by frustrated educators and policymakers for fresh ideas, and the high profile involvement of General Colin Powell in promoting JROTC in public schools, have combined to foster greater openness toward and experimentation with public military academies, expanded JROTC extracurricular programs in schools, ChalleNGe-like and JROTC programs inside juvenile corrections facilities, and utilization of military methods to turn around troubled, disorderly high schools.

Despite the growing receptivity toward these quasi-military approaches, the progress in establishing and expanding them has been anything but linear, let alone free of controversy and setbacks. While public entities like school systems and the Department of Defense supply the bulk of funding for these interventions, various foundations over the years have provided modest support for seeding, assessing, disseminating and advancing these ideas.

Yet traditional foundations as well as so-called venture philanthropists have thus far declined to play a major role or making a sizeable investment in an unconventional, controversial and, by definition, risky idea that may be blossoming into a 'big' idea. Thus, ChalleNGe can serve as an illuminating and instructive case study for examining the role of philanthropy in fostering innovation that 'looks outside the box' for unorthodox approaches that may deliver desired impacts but generate apprehension, indigestion and opposition along the way.

This working paper recounts the origins and evolution of ChalleNGe and related initiatives to utilize military-inspired methods to improve public schools and the life prospects of struggling young people. Given the profound and persistent problems facing at-risk youth, the role of visionary foundations and philanthropists in fueling, nurturing and sustaining the search for new ideas and effective interventions is more indispensable than ever.

Genesis of the Youth ChalleNGe Program

In the mid-1970s, I was a partner in an urban affairs consulting firm in New Haven, Connecticut. Around that time, the Taconic Foundation, a small foundation headed by Yale Law School professor John Simon, gave us a small grant of \$10,000, if memory serves, to examine the nagging issue of why so many black teenagers, particularly males, were languishing outside the labor market. And more importantly, to see if we could come up with a creative and potentially effective programmatic response. I served as project leader for the study.

The problem of chronically high teenage unemployment leaped out from all the data. The theories behind why that was the case ran the gamut from lousy education and stunted social skills, to outright discrimination by employers and structural flaws in the labor market. Abstract theories are fine. Reliable statistics that substantiate the scope of a problem are critically important. The tough question, always, is whether there is program intervention that would make a big enough difference to attract the attention of politicians and justify a sizable public investment.

While my colleagues and I were casting about for ideas about what to propose, I recalled growing up in Washington, DC. When I was a teenager in the late 1950s, some of my male classmates simply weren't into school. Try as the teachers might, they just couldn't turn these fellows on to learning. Some were cut-ups and truants. A few of the boys were what in those days we quaintly called roughnecks, knuckleheads and thugs who barely averted reform school. Perhaps they possessed some of those non-academic 'intelligences' that Howard Gardner of Harvard Graduate School of Education has identified and that made school an unbearable bore. As soon as they could, these aimless adolescent boys would drop out of school and out of sight. I remember encountering several of them a few years later. Somehow they had managed to

enlist in the military, or else they'd been drafted. Either way, they strutted about ramrod straight in their crisp uniforms, full of pride and purpose. Since I never served in the military, I was utterly clueless about just what had happened to them or how they'd been transformed.

The military later went upscale and basically stopped accepting high school dropouts. As warfare and weaponry became more sophisticated strategically and technologically, the Pentagon needed recruits who were better educated. This escalation of recruitment standards nonetheless blocked an important escape route and road to salvation for desperate inner-city and rural youngsters with nowhere else to turn.

As my colleagues and I debated the benefits of military service for wayward boys, I suggested we think about proposing a contemporary equivalent of the military experience. We came up with the concept of a quasi-military domestic youth corps for high school dropouts. Essentially, the idea was that youngsters would enroll voluntarily and be assigned to military bases where they would receive intensive academic training, perform community service and develop self-discipline.

- ***From False Starts to Hopeful Signs***

We were excited by what we thought was a breakthrough idea. I sent a draft description to my mentor at the Ford Foundation, a vice president named Mike Sviridoff, to see if it might pique his interest as well. He replied affirmatively and offered to convene a group of eminent labor economists to hear our case and critique the concept. We trekked to Ford's headquarters in New York City, confident we could persuade these renowned experts that we had discovered the anti-poverty equivalent of nuclear power.

The economists assembled by Sviridoff listened politely, perhaps even indulgently, as we laid out our concept of the quasi-military youth corps. Then they opened fire from every direction. I don't recall a favorable comment the entire time, although I may have been so shell-shocked that I've repressed virtually all memory of this meeting.

How to explain the debacle? No doubt there were flaws in our idea and operational issues we hadn't thought through. But they displayed so little curiosity that I'm persuaded a big part of the chilly reception was dreadful timing. With the nation emerging in the mid-1970s from the politically fractious Vietnam War, policymakers, government officials and foundations simply were in no mood to embrace a military-like or military-lite solution. Many liberals, presumably like some of the economists in the room, recoiled at the idea of anything that smacked of military. When the meeting ended, we zipped up our briefcases, tucked tail, and headed home to New Haven.

By nature I am persistent and patient when convinced the cause is right. So when I joined New Haven City government a couple of years later as Human Resources Administrator (HRA), I saw a chance to rekindle the quasi-military corps idea. HRA ran and/or funded an array of after-school, senior citizen, pre-school and anti-poverty programs. A colleague from the consulting firm joined me as the agency's director of strategic planning. Within weeks of taking office, we approached the head of local public housing authority, which coped with idle teenagers on a daily basis.

Together we devised a variant of the quasi-military youth corps that would operate within the New Haven Housing Authority. Participants would be assigned to various operating units in the agency, from rent collection to maintenance and landscaping, and would be supervised and mentored by fulltime personnel. They would receive training and could climb the ladder of responsibility if they performed well. Those who succeeded might actually land permanent jobs with the agency.

We needed external funding to implement the corps. My plan was to use a combination of CETA (the federal public service employment program authorized by the Comprehensive Employment and Training Act) and other federal demonstration grants. However, my funding scheme came a cropper when I learned that the mayor had other plans for CETA. Thus this second attempt at launching the quasi-military youth corps also proved to be a nonstarter.

Fast forward, two careers and ten years later, to the Rockefeller Foundation. In the fall of 1988, I joined RF as vice president with responsibility for school reform and equal opportunity. A month after arriving, I attended a school reform conference at Stanford University. Sitting in the audience, I perked up when one of the speakers -- Edmund Gordon, the distinguished Yale psychologist and an avowed pacifist -- ventured the provocative opinion that the conditions in which inner-city teens were being reared were so detrimental that it might be time to consider conscripting them for their own good.

I sat bolt upright and muttered to myself: "Have I got a program concept for you!" One of the privileges of being vice president of a proactive foundation like Rockefeller was that I could make modest grants to seed innovative ideas. I decided on the spot to pull the quasi-military corps out of the deep freeze, freshen it up, and try again to make it happen.

As a check against getting carried away with my own idea, further due diligence was the first order of business. The idea needed once more to run the gauntlet of smart and seasoned experts who'd spare no criticism. Eddie Williams, who headed the black think tank known as the Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies, put me in touch with a colleague there named Ed Dorn, a former Under Secretary of Defense who subsequently became dean of the LBJ School of Public Administration at the University of Texas in Austin. Dorn in turn convened a cross-section of people to vet the idea once again.

I emerged from the spirited exchange at the Joint Center encouraged that, while some still questioned the quasi-military approach, others felt it had considerable promise. Interestingly enough, the doubters tended to be child advocates who typically fret the loudest about the plight of black teenagers. Most valuable of all, that session brought me into contact with key players in the Defense establishment, including the noted military sociologist, Charles Moskos, and former Assistant Secretary of Defense, Larry Korb.

By then I'd become convinced that if the concept was to get anywhere this time, it had to be championed, indeed 'owned,' by an entity closely associated with and perhaps even embedded within the national defense establishment. I reasoned that an ostensibly liberal foundation like Rockefeller couldn't carry the water on this one because defense officials and experts would dismiss it almost in a reflex action.

Therefore, in my exploratory conversations, I trolled for someone or some entity in the military sphere that would catch the vision and run with it. I knew better than to allow pride of authorship to impede success. If some appropriately situated organization that could really drive the idea wanted to assume ownership, I considered that an institutional and personal sacrifice well worth making.

- ***Enter the National Guard***

More than a decade after the idea first dawned on me, I finally struck pay dirt when Moskos and Korb suggested I meet with William Taylor of the Center for Strategic and International Studies, a prominent defense policy think tank, and with none other than General Herbert Temple, national head of the National Guard. Both readily agreed to see me.

I approached these meetings in the spring of 1989 with a mixture of anticipation and trepidation. This was the closest I'd ever gotten to the upper echelons of the military establishment. I summoned all of my brief-writing skills to prepare the most convincing case I

could muster for the quasi-military youth corps. This was the best -- and possibly last -- shot I would have.

To my amazement and delight, both meetings went exceedingly well. In a matter of minutes, each said they 'got it.' We quickly started focusing on how to make the youth corps a reality. In fact, I'll never forget General Temple saying in effect that military people basically are youth workers who happen to train their charges to make war, but who can train youngsters to do and be anything. Someone else once told me, although I've never verified it, that the U.S. military invests more money in understanding human development than any other institution on earth. This stands to reason when you think about what's at stake.

The instant enthusiasm created some logistical and sequencing challenges right away. That's because Bill Taylor and I envisioned CSIS creating a study group, comprised of leading military and non-military types, who would vet the concept and, if all went well, issue a favorable report endorsing it. We both felt that a 'good housekeeping seal of approval' by a highly respected defense think tank like CSIS was crucial to credibility of the idea inside Pentagon and Congressional circles. Taylor delivered by establishing a study group, known as the CSIS National Community Service for Out-of-School Youth Project, which was co-chaired by Senator John McCain and Congressman Dave McCurdy.

Since CSIS had no experience working with urban youth, I introduced them to friends at Public/Private Ventures, a highly regarded outfit that operates and evaluates model programs for at-risk youngsters. My thinking was that the complementary expertise and credibility of these two groups would be immensely useful during the feasibility analysis and once it came to marketing the idea, assuming we got that far. Invoking the discretion I enjoyed as vice president of the foundation to provide grants, I authorized disbursements to CSIS and P/PV to work together on conducting the feasibility analysis. The combined grants to these groups over two years totaled a rather modest \$372,000.

If anything, General Temple and Dan Donohue, his head of public information who attended the meeting, were even more gung-ho. Donohue turned out to be one of those truly remarkable people inside mammoth institutions who know how to move bureaucracies and make things happen. He and the General said feasibility studies were fine, but they intended to focus designing and actually launching the program. After all those years of frustration and false starts, I couldn't quite believe my ears.

Both groups forged ahead with their work. CSIS and P/PV completed the feasibility analysis and segued into the consensus building phase for the corps. Meanwhile the National Guard charged ahead at an even faster clip and initiated conversations on Capitol Hill to secure funding for several pilot programs. The Guard reached the finish line first. The reports prepared by CSIS and P/PV helped smooth the way for the youth corps concept in the upper echelons of the military and political establishment.

From Idea to Implementation

The design that Dan Donohue and his team arrived at called for participants, all of whom must be school dropouts, to spend 22 weeks on a military base. They would be immersed in exactly the kind of a rigorous, highly structured regimen that you'd expect of a military operation. As Donohue explained, ChalleNGe would be:

"...an intervention, rather than a remedial program. We would deal with the symptoms and underlying causes in a construct that fully embraced a "whole person" change and readied the students for the post-program environment. We would arm them with the skills and experiences necessary to succeed and we would ensure there was a 'way back' to mainstream society."¹⁶

Drawn from years of Pentagon research and experience, the program design aimed to improve participants' academic proficiency, life-coping skills and employment potential. What's distinctive is the totality of the ChalleNGe approach to turning these youngsters around, not just its academic curriculum and instructional methods per se. In fact, the Guard espoused a 'whole adolescent' approach years before K-12 educators began touting the education of the 'whole child.' The following eight core components of the ChalleNGe program reflect its commitment to educating and developing the 'whole adolescent.'

- Academic Excellence: "All ChalleNGe participants attend daily academic classes preparing them for testing for the General Education Development (GED) credential, a high school diploma, or increased math and reading comprehension. Evaluation of Corpsmembers' grade level progress during the Residential Phase is measured using the Tests of Adult Basic Education (TABE) testing process."¹⁷
- Leadership/Followership: "Identification and application of individual moral and ethical standards is the focus of the various roles and responsibilities as the Corpsmembers live and learn in a structured group environment."
- Responsible Citizenship: "The U.S. Government structure and processes, along with individual rights and responsibilities at the local, state and national level are addressed in the classroom environment, in the student government process, and through practical experiences within local communities."
- Service to the Community: "A minimum of 40 hours of service to the community and/or conservation project activities are performed by each Corpsmember in groups and on an individual basis. These activities provide additional opportunities for career exploration as well as enhancing community needs awareness in Corpsmembers."
- Life Coping Skills: "Increased self-esteem and self-discipline are gained through a combination of classroom activities and a structured living environment. The development of individual strategies and coping mechanisms for managing personal finance and dealing with such emotions as anger, grief, frustration and stress are developed through structured group discussion and in the classroom environment."
- Physical Fitness: "Programs conduct a physical fitness program based on the *President's Challenge*, a test battery based on data collected from a variety of sources including the 1985 President's Council on Physical Fitness and Sports National School Population Fitness Survey, the Amateur Athletic Union Physical Fitness Program and the Canada Fitness Award Program."
- Health and Hygiene: "A holistic approach combines physical and mental well-being as Corpsmembers explore the effects of substance abuse and sexually transmitted diseases on their physical health and well-being. Corpsmembers learn the physical and emotional benefits of proper nutrition through participation in classes and structured group discussions."
- Job Skills: "Career exploration is accomplished through career assessment and interest inventories, job-specific skills orientation and awareness, and training in area vocational centers. Specific classroom activities focus on development of individual resumes, completing job applications, and preparation for, and conducting, job interviews."

Participation is restricted to youngsters between the ages of 16 and 18 who have dropped out of or been expelled from school. There are three phases of ChalleNGe stretched over 17 months. It begins with a two-week pre-ChalleNGe period, typically spent on a military base, where they are preliminarily exposed to the experience that awaits them and screened for

suitability and readiness for the rigors ahead. Those who clear this hurdle then segue into the heart of the program, namely the 20-week residential phase, also usually held on a military base. As the core components imply, this is a highly structured, closely supervised experience, with scant downtime or dawdling. Midway through the residential program, the cadets, as they're known, are paired with mentors, mostly of their own choosing, who stick with them for a year after they graduate. These mentors help the graduates cope with problems that may arise, encourage them to complete their educations, and assist with applying to college or training programs and landing jobs

In 1993 the National Guard Youth ChalleNGe Corps, as my pet idea came to be known, opened for business at pilot sites in ten states, including Camp Ella Grasso in Connecticut. When the first contingent of ChalleNGe Corps youngsters in the nation graduated from Camp Grasso, the U.S. Coast Guard Academy in nearby New London hosted the ceremony. CNN covered the ceremony. Young people who six months earlier had been written off as worthless strode down the aisle proudly decked out in caps and gowns. An audience of nearly 1,000 parents, grandparents, children and other well-wishers cheered them on. Some grizzled American Legion vets bestowed the 'top student' honors on one of the graduates. A chorus comprised of participants who first met at the camp sang several tunes, and rather well at that.

- ***Pilot Initiative Becomes National Program***

Over the years the ChalleNGe Corps became a favorite of politicians whose constituents needed somewhere to send youngsters they couldn't handle or who were adrift. I once introduced myself to President Bill Clinton and Senate Majority Leader Trent Lott at a gala dinner in Washington DC in the mid-1990s. When I mentioned in the next breath my association with ChalleNGe, broad grins crossed their faces as they told me how much they loved the program.

In 1991, I proposed that the Rockefeller Foundation significantly ratchet up its investment by authorizing a major, multi-million dollar grant for this initiative. The money would be used to support CSIS in monitoring the progress of the demonstration, examining the programmatic and policy implications, and maintaining contact with other potentially interested branches of the military. With our support, P/PV was going to assist the National Guard with finalizing the program design and developing an implementation plan; initiate a preliminary evaluation focused on the implementation process and early outcomes for corpsmembers; and institute a management information system to gather and analyze data on the demonstration. In essence, the RF would have positioned these organizations to function as non-governmental evaluators and potential champions of the quasi-military program as it evolved over time.

After a searching debate with me and among themselves, the Board of Trustees voted by a close margin to withdraw from the initiative rather than ramp up the foundation's involvement. While several trustees praised the idea as audacious and out-of-the-box, others expressed serious reservations. Some fretted that any military-like initiative would be too male-oriented and fail to address the needs of female dropouts. Other trustees questioned whether the Pentagon should take on a domestic task like aiding dropouts, adding that if the Defense Department did, it had the wherewithal to bear the entire cost. An undercurrent in the trustee debate was that familiar discomfort with enlisting the military to help address the needs of disadvantaged youth.

Even after Rockefeller withdrew, I continued proselytizing for the program. Dan Donohue and I even appeared on the nationally syndicated 'Montel Williams' television show with a small contingent of ChalleNGe cadets, spiffily dressed in their uniforms. As a Navy veteran, Montel loved the program. The appearance was a hoot, especially when he staged those corny reunions, like the one between a boy who'd joined the program and his father who never thought he'd amount to 'nuthin.'

After leaving the foundation in the spring of 1994 to become CEO of the National Urban League, I arranged a meeting that summer for Donohue and me with U.S. Secretary of Labor

Robert Reich and Undersecretary of Defense John Deutch. Our agenda, plain and simple, was to try to engineer a major expansion of ChalleNGe to more states. Reich and Deutch seemed intrigued by the idea. But our plan soon fizzled when the Republican Party, energized by Newt Gingrich and his Contract with America, took control of Congress that fall. The new Congressional leadership promptly declared that soldiers aren't social workers. It took all of Donohue's deft political maneuvering to keep Congress from killing off ChalleNGe.

The program survived and has grown steadily if not exponentially over the years. At \$14,000 per participant, the budgeted cost remains unchanged since the beginning. To date ChalleNGe has graduated 92,850 cadets. Most states operate 100-bed programs serving 200 youngsters annually in two cycles. Today there are approximately 33 ChalleNGe units in 27 states and Puerto Rico. The number of sites may vacillate slightly depending on how states are coping with the current fiscal crisis. For most of the program's existence, the Defense Department paid 60 percent of the cost, while states covered 40 percent, with some supplemental funding from other federal agencies, like Justice and Labor, as well as a few corporations. Last year, Congress boosted the federal share to 75 percent, presumably to help ChalleNGe weather the economic crisis by reducing the state share.

ChalleNGe owes its existence to a convergence of many factors: intuition and experience; research and experimentation; vision, creativity and out-of-the-box thinking; careful planning and execution; risk-taking by a foundation and by a cautious federal agency; venture capital and operational funding from the same sources; political astuteness and dexterity; individual and institutional zeal for the idea; and patience and persistence. In other words, ChalleNGe blends many of the time-honored ingredients of innovation.

Impact Evaluation

According to MDRC, during the last three decades, various programs focused on disadvantaged youth have undergone rigorous evaluations.¹⁸ The results of so-called second chance programs are mixed. None of the studies that followed participants more than a couple of years found lasting improvements in economic outcomes. In some cases, early gains in earnings faded over time.

Since the inception of ChalleNGe, the National Guard has tracked its performance. The findings of these internal assessments were consistently encouraging. For instance, ChalleNGe graduates in 2004 on average raised their math scores by 1.8 grade levels and lifted their reading scores by 1.7 grade levels.¹⁹ And this during the five-month residential phase alone. The Guard recently reported that of the 2008 graduates:

- Over 60 percent received their high school diploma or GED
- Over half joined the work force
- Fourteen percent joined the military
- Nearly 28 percent continued their education²⁰

Despite these heartening statistics, the limitation of the National Guard's assessment methodology has been the absence of a comparison group. Hence the decision by the Guard to allow MDRC to conduct a rigorous evaluation using random assignment offered a potential boost to the credibility, salience and, indeed, urgency of the ChalleNGe model – provided, of course, that the positive impacts held up.

In a three-stage study spanning several years, MDRC is comparing the effect of ChalleNGe on program participants in contrast to what happened with non-participants. MDRC conducted the first survey of participants and non-participants roughly nine months after the

young people entered the study, namely not long after participants in ChalleNGe had completed the residential phase of the program. MDRC published those results in 2009 in a report entitled *Reengaging High School Dropouts: Early Results of the National Guard Youth ChalleNGe Program*. Among the highlights:

- Participants in the program were much more likely than the controls to have earned a high school diploma or GED certificate. The contrasting ratios were almost half (46 percent) of participants vs. 10 percent of non-participants.
- Participants were much more likely than the controls to be working and also more likely to be attending college. Eleven percent of participants were taking college courses vs. three percent of controls. Just over 30 percent of participants were working full time as opposed to 21 percent of the control group.²¹

These preliminary evaluation results received considerable media coverage, including prominent articles in the *New York Times* and other newspapers. Gordon Berlin, president of MDRC, called the early results quite promising. Without drawing any conclusions about long-term effects, he added, these findings suggest that partway through their ChalleNGe experience, young people in the program were better positioned to move forward in their transition to adulthood. The early results also generated enthusiasm among researchers like labor and poverty expert Harry Holzer of Georgetown. In his view, “the impacts are pretty large. So few interventions have proven to be cost-effective for the out-of-school, disadvantaged youth population when rigorously evaluated.”

The interim findings from the MDRC evaluation were released in May of this year in a report entitled *Making the Transition: Interim Results of the National Guard Youth ChalleNGe Evaluation*.²² These reflect the results of a comprehensive survey administered to about 1,200 young people in program and control groups an average of 21 months after participants entered the study. They had completed the residential and post-residential phases of program by that time. Among the key findings:

- The program group was much more likely than the control group to have obtained a GED certificate, somewhat more likely to have obtained a high school diploma, and more likely to have earned college credits. More specifically, about 61 percent of participants earned a diploma or GED compared with 36 percent of the control group.
- Young people in the program group were more likely to be engaged in productive activities, such as enrolled in high school or a GED preparation program. Participants were also more likely than non-participants to be in college, working, or in the military. In other words, 72 percent of ChalleNGe graduates were working, in school or training, or in the military, compared with 66 percent of the control group.
- Young people in the two groups were equally likely to have been arrested in the year prior to the survey. But the ChalleNGe participants were less likely to have been convicted of a crime and they reported fewer delinquent activities.
- Finally, there were no systematic differences between groups in measures of physical or mental health. Most reported being in relatively good health.²³

The authors of the interim study called these interim results ‘impressive.’ But they also noted that many differences between participants and non-participants had narrowed as of the interim report. This narrowing of impacts is not uncommon. In the authors’ view, the long-term follow-up will be critical to understanding the full effects of ChalleNGe. What’s more, as Berlin observes, it will be important to see how the young people in both groups fare over a longer period because the interim survey was administered at time when unemployment rates nationally for disadvantaged youth have reached crisis proportions.²⁴

As mentioned earlier, several major foundations declined to get involved during the formative stages of the quasi-military concept. In a noteworthy turnabout, though, a consortium of large foundations is now financing the evaluation study by MDRC. While the Department of Defense bears 20 percent of the cost, the remaining 80 percent is divvied up among Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, Charles Stewart Mott Foundation, Edna McConnell Clark Foundation, John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, MCJ Foundation, Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, and William and Flora Hewlett Foundation. They belong to the MacArthur Foundation Research Network on Transitions to Adulthood.

The Brookings Platform

After leaving the Rockefeller Foundation in 1994 to head the National Urban League, I occasionally kept track of how ChalleNGe was faring. But my new position was so all-consuming that my involvement with the program tapered off dramatically. With financial support from Rockefeller, the League did undertake a joint exploration with CSIS into whether there were ways for our organization and the Guard to collaborate on some education initiatives. Henry Thomas, the head of the Springfield (MA) Urban League participated in this study. He saw the potential of the quasi-military method and approached the Massachusetts National Guard about collaborating in creating and operating a charter school patterned loosely after ChalleNGe. The New Leadership Charter School in Springfield opened in September 1998. The school serves youngsters who are disengaged emotionally and failing academically. Although I have not kept up with the school, the early academic returns were quite promising.

I joined the Brookings Institution as senior fellow in early 2006. We secured funds from the Taconic Foundation and Goldman Sachs Foundation to undertake an analysis of the broader potential and applicability of military methods and models to help struggling students and schools. Taconic provided \$52,000. The two grants from Goldman Sachs totaled \$150,000 and supported a second, unrelated project as well.

Aided by a talented research assistant, I wrote a working paper for Brookings entitled *Demilitarizing What the Pentagon Knows about Developing Young People: A New Paradigm for Educating Students Who Are Struggling in School and in Life.*²⁵ Drawing on a reconnaissance of military and quasi-military models, including basic training, JROTC and JROTC career academies, ChalleNGe Program, and public military high schools, I fleshed out the rationale for considering military models and methods, and identified a number of generic attributes that might be worth incorporating in civilian education programs for academically troubled youth. Moreover, I recommended several program interventions that were derived from our research.

My research sought to tap a deep reservoir of knowledge and models possessed by the U.S. military about educating and developing young people which practitioners and policymakers in the K-12 education and youth development sectors seldom if ever consider, much less emulate. The working paper also suggested strategies for going to scale that would capitalize on what the military knows about mounting large-scale operations.

Why the Military?

As indicated earlier, I was initially drawn to the quasi-military youth corps concept by a combination of instinct and recollections of aimless high school classmates. Brookings afforded me an opportunity to step back and examine the case for military-like or, perhaps more aptly, military-lite models more critically.

The U.S. military enjoys a well-deserved reputation for its ability to reach, teach and develop young people who are rudderless, and for setting the pace among American institutions in advancing minorities. The military's strengths include proven competence in such areas as training, team building, organizing small units, conducting large-scale operations, quick

mobilization, managing diversity, and converting rudderless recruits into focused and productive individuals.²⁶ The military clearly knows how to plan, mobilize and operate training programs on a huge scale. This expertise is especially enticing given the persistent inability of the decentralized public education system to boost the academic performance of chronic low achievers, coupled with the travails of scaling up successful programs.

As Dirk Johnson wrote in *Newsweek*, “For many children growing up without a cohesive family, the military model seems to offer a bedrock of stability – a world of clear-cut rules and unmistakable authority figures.”²⁷ Elizabeth Heneghan Ondaatje of RAND goes further:

“The Army’s primary contribution to youth development consists of educating and training its own enlistees, many of whom are from disadvantaged backgrounds. The Army’s success in this regard is well documented and well recognized.”²⁸

Charles Moskos, the military sociologist, argued that the Army in particular has achieved credibility among young minorities and their parents, in large part because it is the rare institution that is not dominated at top levels by whites. “The Army is the only place in American society where whites are routinely bossed around by blacks.”²⁹ Professor Moskos and John Sibley Butler, co-authors of *All That We Can Be: Black Leadership and Racial Integration the Army Way*, contend that black achievement in the armed forces is more pronounced than anywhere else in American society. As of 1998, African Americans made up 29 percent of all enlisted personnel, 37 percent of senior non-commissioned officers, and 12 percent of all officers.³⁰ The reason for the Army’s success, they argue, is that instead of lowering standards to accommodate black recruits, it invests heavily in ensuring that they have the opportunity to meet the standards.

According to Moskos and Butler, the Army operates one of the largest continuing education programs in the world. Of the 50,000 soldiers in the program known as Functional Academic Skills Training (FAST), 60 percent were black, representing a high percentage of black non-commissioned officers. “A level playing field is not enough,” they add. “The Army’s success in producing black leaders occurs because it recognizes that compensatory action may be needed to help members of disadvantaged groups meet the standards of competition.”³¹

Some research suggests that military service may enhance employability. For example, a 1990 survey of 600 employers conducted by the Army Research Institute found that “employers believed Army veterans have more of the characteristics they desire than job applicants in general.”³² As Beth Asch of RAND wrote of this study:

“Among the characteristics considered the most important by employers for success in entry-level positions were dependability, listening to instructions, caring for company property, seeking clarification, efficiency, enthusiasm, respecting others, punctuality, showing good judgment, working as a team member, sticking with a task, and self-discipline.”³³

Interestingly enough, the most compelling core value of these programs is the very one that the terms ‘military’ and ‘quasi-military’ are least likely to bring to mind. I refer to their overriding commitment to the education and development of ‘whole adolescents.’ This is reflected in the eight core components of ChalleNGe described on p. 12 above. These program elements are not commonly associated with public schools. The reasons may range from resource and time constraints to a conviction that youngsters’ non-academic needs fall outside the purview of typical schools. Yet as Dr. Edmund Gordon remarked at a Brookings Institution policy forum:

“One of the things that we can learn from what they do in those (quasi-military) schools, and it is reflected in the ChalleNGe Program, is that they appear to be taking an almost public health approach to education. They recognize that the isolation of educational problems in

the school doesn't make sense when there are so many things outside of schooling that influence both healthy development and learning how to think."³⁴

Another intriguing facet of some military approaches is their departure from traditional pedagogy, which evidently has not worked with youngsters who chronically lag behind and tend to lose interest in school. These military-like programs frequently emphasize learning by doing, sometimes referred to as 'Functional Context Education.'³⁵ True to the military's predilection for fast-track training, FCE is designed to generate swift gains in reading and math skills by teaching academics in the context of learning and actually performing a given task. Military researchers have found that, compared with general literacy instruction, this kind of learning-to-do instruction generates robust and rapid gains in job-related literacy that endure over time.

Attributes Worth Emulating

Military education and training programs exhibit many generic attributes that appear to contribute to young people's success and therefore might be appropriate to incorporate in a new approach to educating youngsters who are falling way behind academically, disengaged from school, or else dropping out. Each has merit in its own right. In combination, they represent a potentially compelling vision on how to design and operate educational programs and schools whose mission is to maximize adolescents' chances for success. It should be noted that these characteristics are not exclusive to military programs. They are found to varying degrees in the Job Corps, Conservation Corps, YouthBuild, and successful public schools and charter schools, among other programs.

- ***Belonging***

Theories abound about why teenagers belong to street gangs. Researchers cite a wide array of reasons, among them low self-esteem, hunger for respect, limited economic opportunity, peer pressure, physical protection, alienation from parents, financial incentives, communal honor and loyalty, and fellowship. In the view of Norman Johnson, a retired Army colonel who helped found the Integrated Design and Electronics Academy Public Charter School in the nation's capitol:

"In order to get the attention of the inner city youth, you must first relate to them in some way. The military structure has (been) successful in relating to them because the military has a belonging atmosphere in which inner city youth feel they can relate. Inner city youth understand the 'gang structure' and the sense of belonging so they can easily adapt to this type of structure at the 8th through 12th grade levels.... The military structure allows faster integration of older students into a more cooperative spirit for learning and therefore greater academic success."³⁶

Given their sheer size and anonymity, conventional schools represent the antithesis of belonging. Schools and other youth programs patterned after the military hold so much promise because, among many other reasons, they epitomize belonging. As David Goodman writes,

"Many students who gravitate to the program (at the Chicago Military Academy) seem to find it a place of belonging. JROTC classrooms often have the feel of a clubhouse, and like any popular club, they offer alluring perks: the field trips, dances, drill competitions, and community service projects build camaraderie and self-esteem."³⁷

Belonging to the right kind of 'gang' can transform the attitude of youngsters like Robert Shores, a student at Chicago Military Academy. His mother was a drug addict and his father a disappearing act. He got into lots of fights. Yet the school managed to reach him.

"If you feel like nobody cares about you, then you feel like a nobody. But there's a lot of people here who really like me. They'll pull me aside and tell me what I did wrong. And they tell me what I've done right."³⁸

- **Teamwork**

Young people who 'belong' become part of teams. As CSIS noted in its report about military culture:

"Cohesion and esprit de corps are the fourth foundation of U.S. military culture. Cohesion is the shared sense of sacrifice and identity that binds service members to their comrades in arms. Esprit de corps is pride in the larger unit and service as a whole. Morale, a close relative, represents the level of enthusiasm and satisfaction felt by individuals in a unit."³⁹

In his description of basic training, General Powell emphasizes the importance of teaching young people to function as team members upon whom others can count, rather than Lone Rangers accountable to no one. In the real world, mutual reliance and interdependence are commonplace since workers routinely function in units with supervisors, peers and subordinates. Success hinges on how efficiently and harmoniously the unit or team performs. By the same token, team members learn that everyone – from their companies and colleagues to their family members and friends – could suffer if they fail to perform or behave responsibly. Absorbing this lesson is one of the keys to growing up and getting ahead. And it's an essential attribute of the military approach to educating and developing young people.

- **Motivation and Self-Discipline**

Many researchers have identified persuasive linkages between lack of motivation and low achievement.⁴⁰ As mentioned earlier, a survey reported in *Education Week* found that high school dropouts themselves were far more likely to say they left school because they were unmotivated, not challenged enough, or overwhelmed by troubles outside of school, than because they were failing academically.⁴¹

This worrisome motivation deficit surfaces especially in low-income and minority youngsters. The explanations for these counterproductive attitudes run the gamut from the chilling effects of socioeconomic disadvantage, to the related inability to see a connection between academic achievement and opportunity for success in life, and to an embrace of so-called oppositional cultures that reject achievement. As Roslyn Mickelson has observed, "Working-class and minority youths have parents, older siblings and neighbors whose real-world experiences challenge the myth that education equals opportunity for all."⁴²

The strict discipline long associated with military training helps instill the motivation that may be in short supply among some young people. As CSIS stated:

"Those who train military recruits, however, along with any experienced parents, will attest that discipline is part of what young people need most. It appears in many forms, whether it makes an athlete rise at dawn to train, drives a writer to spend personal time finishing a chapter, or motivates a military recruit to follow a squad leader's instructions.... Self-discipline, a significant factor of maturity, is what allows parents, tired from a day's work, to still care for a home and children, and it is what makes them go to work in the first place."⁴³

- **Valuing and Believing Every Youngster Can Succeed**

Many young people who struggle academically yearn for adults who genuinely value them and believe they can be successful. Claude Steele, a social psychologist who is provost of

Columbia University, contends that this problem is especially acute among black children. He refers to this phenomenon as:

“...a culprit that can undermine black achievement as effectively as a lock on a schoolhouse door. The culprit I see is stigma, the endemic devaluation many blacks face in our society and schools. This status is its own condition of life, different from class, money, culture.... (I)ts connection to school achievement among black Americans has been vastly underappreciated.”⁴⁴

Devaluation is not limited to black children. Other low-income and minority youngsters, children with Attention Deficit Disorder, and students prone to placement in special education who tend to struggle in school probably are susceptible to being underappreciated by their teachers. “Doing well in school requires a belief that school achievement can be a promising basis for self-esteem,” Steele argues, “and that belief needs constant reaffirmation even for advantaged students.”⁴⁵ In his view, children who are devalued academically may ‘disidentify’ with doing well in school.

In Steele’s view, “Here psychology is everything: remediation defeats, challenge strengthens – affirming their potential, crediting them with their achievements, inspiring them.” The key, he argues, is ensuring that youngsters who are vulnerable on so many counts get treated essentially like middle-class students, with conviction about their value and promise. As this happens, their vulnerability diminishes, and with it the companion defense of disidentification and misconduct. “Where students are valued and challenged,” Steele notes, “they generally succeed.”⁴⁶

The military excels at valuing and challenging young people, and at believing in the potential of every recruit and cadet. Indeed, that is essence of the way it operates. As recounted earlier, the determination of Lavin Curry’s commandant and instructors at the Chicago Military Academy to pull him back from the abyss of academic failure illustrates this philosophy in action. Or as Shelly Garza recounts, when her daughter Kazandra, who attends Oakland Military Institute, landed on probation, the Oakland Military Institute started “doing double time” to help her catch up.

“Her grades dropped because she spent the first two weeks lollygagging, but that tells you in itself something is working, because she used to do the same thing in public school and no one ever noticed.”⁴⁷

- ***Educating and Developing the ‘Whole Adolescent’***

Dismayed by the paramount focus among politicians and policymakers on testing and accountability to the virtual exclusion of other interventions, professional groups like the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD), renowned school reformers like Dr. James Comer, and other respected education experts insist that focusing on education *and* development, i.e. on the ‘whole child,’ will produce better outcomes for youngsters who struggle in school and in life. As Dr. Comer, the noted Yale child psychiatrist who founded the nationally-acclaimed School Development Program, has written:

“...the attention of the entire education enterprise – preparatory institutions, practitioners, students, parents, and policymakers – has been riveted on academic-achievement outcomes, not on developmental issues. Thus, despite a large body of research showing the connection between development, learning, and desirable behavior, supporting development continues to receive inadequate attention, in the preparation of educators as well as in education practice.”⁴⁸

Dr. Comer continues:

“Life success in this complex age requires a high level of development. So, almost all students are adversely affected by this situation. But the students who come from families and primary social networks unable to provide them with adequate developmental experiences are hurt the most. Most of them do not do well. And student, staff, and often parental responses to failure – from acting out, to increased control-and-punishment efforts, to withdrawal and apathy – produce difficult relational environments and underachieving schools. In time, this leads to dropping out of school... Developmental principles are rarely used to guide curriculum, instruction, and assessment content and strategies; school organization and management; or staff and student interactions.”⁴⁹

The National Guard Youth ChalleNGe Program probably gets the ‘whole child’ philosophy more so than most schools. Its mission statement indicates that the purpose of the program is to:

“Intervene in the life of at-risk youth and produce a program graduate with the values, skills, education, and self-discipline necessary to succeed as a positive and productive adult”⁵⁰

- ***Curriculum and Instruction***

The military programs described earlier gear their curriculum and instruction to the academic circumstances of the youngsters they serve. As the NAEP data indicated, large proportions of adolescents perform *Below Basic*. The threshold goal of ChalleNGe, for instance, is to lift its cadets to a level of functional literacy, such as filling out a job application and reading - - and understanding -- an instructional manual that will enable them to navigate the economy and life.⁵¹

To make up for lost time, fast-track approaches to instruction should be a staple of educational programs aimed at youngsters who are far behind academically. Given the sharp rise in reading skills registered by ChalleNGe participants in a matter of five months, the program seems to possess an instructional method for rapidly closing the most fundamental of achievement gaps.

One of the many assets of military training programs is the uniform articulation of what every participant must know and be able to do in order to be adjudged successful. Uniformity and consistency of performance expectations is a decided strength, in sharp contrast to the variegated academic expectations, assessment systems and pass levels that typify public education from one state to the next, at least prior to the recent push for common national standards.

- ***Structure and Routine***

The military is renowned for structure and discipline. Indeed those invariably are the first characteristics cited by many people when they initially learn about my interest in what the military has to offer low achievers, disengaged students and dropouts. The objective of military-inspired programs like ChalleNGe and JROTC is not to whip youngsters into shape for combat. The goal is to negate the culture of the streets and instill in young people the skills and self-discipline needed to function in the workforce and life. For many youngsters who have disengaged from school or dropped out, the antidote for deeply ingrained behavioral problems and dysfunctional parenting is heavy doses of structure and regimentation. As Principal Phyllis Goodson says of CMA:

“In urban societies, negativity is encouraged. You have to come across as not smart to fit into the organized, structured world of gangs. Here, we have a structure but we move in

a positive way, by giving students responsibilities and allowing them opportunities to achieve.”⁵²

Ms. Goodson goes on:

“...putting on a uniform is a focusing device... They know there are certain things they can’t do when they’re in uniform. Similarly, having them march is part of a military context that has a specific purpose: it makes them walk tall. The discipline that we impose on them provides a structure for them to build on. They leave here more independent. They become contributors.”⁵³

- ***Mentoring and Monitoring***

Military and quasi-military programs pay close attention to how participants are faring personally and academically. While this level of attentiveness to students’ overall development clearly requires more intensive staffing and longer days than traditional schools, young people evidently appreciate and profit from the heightened attention. The mentoring and monitoring extends to personal matters. As Heath Seacrest, a senior JROTC cadet at Mattoon High School in Mattoon IL told NPR:

“Down here you can talk to them about anything; personal problems. They’re like your parents, your counselors; they’re like everybody to you. You can come down here and just say, ‘I’m having a bad day,’ and they’ll sit down and talk to you.”⁵⁴

- ***Rewards and Recognition***

In education, the familiar practice is to recognize and reward the top achievers in any given category, whether for exemplary scholastic accomplishments or community service. This is perfectly understandable. The trouble is that students who are struggling academically or disenchanting with school may perceive these traditional forms of recognition as hopelessly out of reach. Thus these methods do little to stoke the motivation of academically marginal students.

The military is particularly adept at demonstrating to the broad swath of their charges that their contributions and accomplishments are valued. It long ago mastered the art of frequent recognition for virtually any contribution of value. As Donohue puts it, in the military, soldiers wear their importance on their shoulders and their worth on their chests.

Ceremonies and rituals affirm that society values the accomplishments, be they monumental or modest, of those who are celebrated. The military ritualistically metes out frequent doses of recognition via ceremonies and rights of passage. This military approach seems to work in high schools as well. As the supervisor of the JROTC program at Lackey High School in Charles County, MD, says of the students who are honored, “it gives many of them an opportunity to do things and be recognized where they might not otherwise receive recognition. The top scholars and top athletes get recognition. This is a place where they’re recognized within their own.” At the Oakland Military Institute, a public high school started over much local opposition by Mayor Jerry Brown, awards assemblies are held twice a week.

Young people appreciate and profit from the kinds of rewards and recognition bestowed by these programs. As Heath Seacrest told NPR, when he started other students mocked his JROTC uniform and called him “green bean.” Seacrest weathered the hazing and now says:

“The uniform’s awesome. Started in July – wearing the uniform – got promoted – got rank and I love my uniform now. I’m like a Christmas tree.”⁵⁵

- **Accountability and Consequences**

One staple of military-style programs is immediate accountability and predictable consequences for misbehaving. This applies to those who foul up, of course, but may also extend to members of their unit, even to those who weren't involved in the misdeed. As Nancy Trejos of the *Washington Post* wrote, the military isn't known for forgiveness, whereas forgiveness is bestowed almost daily in public high schools. Striking the right balance has been a challenge in some public military academies. Eric Lyles, principal of Forestville Military Academy, comments that: "My military instructors are not used to giving and receiving excuses. I'm working with them to remember they're dealing with adolescents."⁵⁶

Military programs take accountability and sanctions so seriously because they want to establish an orderly climate where faculty can focus on teaching and where students need not fear for their safety. The threat of sanctions also transmits a clear message that students are expected to learn or else there will be unwelcome consequences.

- **Safety and Security**

Since the chaos and violence of urban neighborhoods often spills onto school grounds, even inside the classroom, military programs and academies stress safety and security. Military reservists and retirees roam the corridors and classrooms to keep a tight lid on acting out and gang activity. This enables educators to teach and cadets to learn without fear of disruption or danger.

Although some academies have struggled to maintain order in the early going, most succeed in imposing and maintaining order. Students affirm that they feel safer in military settings where the gangs they encounter in their neighborhoods and at other public high schools are not tolerated.⁵⁷ For example, when La'Camii Ross was a 6th grader at Roosevelt Middle School in Oakland, weapons and violence were all-too-familiar realities of campus life.⁵⁸ Some Roosevelt students, she says, were out of control, stole play equipment, and made learning nearly impossible.

At La'Camii's new school, the Oakland Military Institute, the strict codes of behavior and discipline appear to have kept it free of many problems affecting other schools in the city. Seventh graders sporting military-like dress uniforms gather just after sunrise every day on the former parking lot at the Oakland Army Base. This orderly morning ceremony sets the tone for the entire day.⁵⁹ Louis Adams, a savvy 14-year-old at the Philadelphia Military Academy, echoed why safety matters:

"Most people take a look at today's political situation – Iraq and all – and don't want to come.... They don't know this isn't a boot camp but a controlled environment where you don't worry about the kid next to you pulling a knife on you."⁶⁰

- **Demanding Schedule**

The quasi-military programs described above place considerably greater time demands on young people than regular schools. Of course, ChalleNGe is a residential program that keeps participants on military bases around the clock for five months.

Even public military academies operate longer hours. It's commonplace for cadets to line up in formation by about 7:30 in the morning. At the Chicago Military Academy, cadets convene for the band and drill team at 6:30 each morning.⁶¹ Extracurricular activities often run late into the afternoon, while extra help is offered on Saturdays. In addition, CMA students must complete forty hours of community service prior to graduation. The school year may stretch out as well. The Oakland Military Institute holds classes 220 days per year, in contrast to 180 days at other public schools.⁶²

- ***Devotion to Mission***

Arguably one of the most distinctive and indispensable attributes of the programs described earlier may actually be the one least susceptible to replication in a non-military entity or environment. I refer to the zeal inculcated in military personnel to pursue and successfully complete whatever mission they undertake. With the possible exception of firefighters, police officers and civil rights warriors in the movement's heyday, this determination, bred of a profound sense of camaraderie and of duty, is seldom matched by civilian agencies and bureaucracies. Deeply committed to accountability and results, the military sets measurable goals and finite timetables for accomplishing whatever it sets out to do.

This sense of mission matters enormously to the effectiveness of the programs discussed in this paper. Any new education paradigms derived from these approaches that ignore this level of personal commitment risks underestimating or misconstruing the distinctive way that the military works. Put another way, any civilian counterpart that aspires to adapt these military attributes and approaches must endeavor to instill and institutionalize this sense of mission throughout. Otherwise, the enterprise could gradually degenerate into business as usual, crippled by operational distractions and indifference, competition and collective ignorance, and, worst of all, debilitating skepticism about young people's ability and potential.

Problematic Characteristics and Issues

Notwithstanding my conviction that some military models and methods can be adapted to help struggling students and schools, I have obviously learned from experience that this very idea causes indigestion among some children's advocates, educators and people who oppose any military incursions into civilian life and institutions. I understand and respect their misgivings.

Patterning the education of civilian youngsters after the military does raise legitimate anxieties and worrisome issues. The military approach should not be mimicked per se because the ultimate purpose of military training is markedly different than that of public education. The key is to embrace and customize those attributes that strengthen the education and development of children who have disengaged or dropped out of school, while avoiding the characteristics and methods that do not belong in a civilian enterprise like public education.

- ***Constraints on Individuality***

Military service differs from civilian entities in significant ways, including the tension between cohesion and individuality. As CSIS stated in its report on military culture:

"Although civil and military cultures share many values in a democracy, there must be significant differences between the cultures. For example, while our civil culture appropriately emphasizes liberty and individuality, military culture downplays them and emphasizes values such as discipline and self-sacrifice that stem from the imperative of military effectiveness on the battlefield."⁶³

CSIS continues:

"Because the driving imperative behind U.S. military culture is the unique responsibility to fight and win the nation's wars, basic individual freedoms in the military are often curtailed for the sake of good order and discipline, and the armed forces reserve the right to dictate strict rules of behavior that would be clearly inappropriate for a civilian employer."⁶⁴

Educational programs that emulate the military must be mindful not to utterly stifle the individuality and creativity that civilians have every right to enjoy and that especially ought to be nurtured in young people. In designing interventions for young people who have dropped out or

disengaged from traditional schools, striking the right balance between military-inspired structure and cohesion, on the one hand, and opportunities for self-expression and discovery, on the other, will be challenging but unavoidable. This tension should be weighed and resolved at the very outset, and monitored continuously.

On several visits to public military academies, I have been struck by the refreshingly 'kid-friendly' atmosphere, with plenty of easy-going banter between the cadets. Faculty and students interacted effortlessly yet respectfully. At the Philadelphia Military Academy/Leeds, for instance, the JROTC instructors serve as counselors and mentors for the youngsters, who have their cell phone numbers. The principal, whose leadership style is supportive but insistent, always kept his door open and I observed the youngsters streaming in throughout the day to chat with him. While my impromptu survey hardly qualified as rigorous, the atmosphere in the school buildings and classrooms that I visited was decidedly not oppressive or anti-individualistic.

- ***Inappropriate Discipline, Tone or Fit***

Military-style educational programs geared to adolescents can and do mete out punishment and sanctions, but there is a line of physical and psychological intimidation they ought not to cross. After all, these youngsters aren't Army recruits enrolled in basic training. Not surprisingly, some students who try quasi-military programs become alienated by the structure, pressure and threat of sanctions. One father felt the JROTC instructors yelled too much at the teenagers and suspended them too frequently. "Negativity breeds negativity," says Robert Tibbs, "So a lot of times, (students) put a defense up."⁶⁵

Typically the military-like programs try to screen out youngsters who aren't likely to embrace the discipline and thrive in the atmosphere. Some youngsters transfer to other schools. Still others may be expelled if they act out too egregiously and repeatedly. And then there are youngsters who summon the inner-strength to overcome their initial wariness and end up prospering in the quasi-military setting.

- ***Military Content in the Curriculum***

If quasi-military approaches to education ever became more pervasive and served significantly more students, expansion could trigger a debate about whether and to what extent the curriculum and extracurricular activities should contain 'hardcore' military content. The American Friends Service Committee, no fan of using public schools to benefit the military, raises legitimate concerns about exposing civilian youngsters to certain material and methods.

In a survey of JROTC programs, AFSC questioned the inclusion of weapons training and drills, as well as course material devoted to military history and protocol. It also worries that JROTC textbooks disproportionately tout military careers as opposed to civilian ones. The AFSC expressed many other concerns about the curriculum and instruction, alleging that it defines leadership as respect for constituted authority and chain of command, rather than as critical thinking and democratic consensus-building, and that it consistently conflates leadership and followership.⁶⁶

- ***Male Orientation***

As recounted earlier, one of the Rockefeller Foundation trustees expressed concern that, given the predominantly male orientation and composition of the regular military, a quasi-military program would be too geared to boys and possibly ill-suited to girls. The ensuing experience with ChalleNGe bears out that concern. Enrollment in the sample of ChalleNGe participants covered by the MDRC evaluation is 84 percent male and merely 16 percent female.⁶⁷ Dan Donohue acknowledges that ChalleNGe falls short in attracting and serving female dropouts. One of my Princeton students wrote a term paper that addressed this shortcoming and offered recommendations for making ChalleNGe more responsive to the needs of female dropouts by,

among other measures, providing childcare stipends and/or separate residences for female participants with children.⁶⁸ ChalleNGe clearly has ample room for improvement on this front.

At the risk of sounding chauvinistic, I would observe that concerns over the severe difficulties facing minority young people in particular are so acute now that innovative programmers have dared to establish schools specifically geared to African-American boys and programs aimed at black fathers. The thinking these days is that significant progress trumps no progress, even if means gearing some initiatives to one gender or the other. Interestingly enough, gender disparity is far less pronounced in quasi-military programs situated in schools. Forty percent of JROTC participants in public schools are female. In some school districts, girls even outnumber boys in JROTC. Hence the influences shaping gender mix in these programs may be more structural than intrinsic.

- ***Vehicle for Military Recruitment***

The quasi-military programs that operate inside schools or as alternatives to school explicitly disavow recruitment as an objective, let alone the objective. As Sgt. Major Joe Collins, a part-time drill instructor at Madero Military Academy in Chicago, put it: "We're not teaching them to go into the Army. We're just giving them a structured environment to succeed."⁶⁹

Yet the fact remains that the rapid expansion of JROTC in the late 1990s coincided with a difficult recruiting environment for the armed forces. Former Secretary of Defense William Cohen once told the House Armed Services Committee that JROTC is "one of the best recruiting devices that we could have."⁷⁰ The booming economy back then, with its abundance of entry-level jobs, coupled with the increased propensity of high school graduates to enter college, cut deeply into the Army's traditional recruiting market of high school grads that in previous eras tended not to head for college.⁷¹

The very real prospect that these programs serve as an overt or unofficial pipeline to military service could arouse opposition, especially if they grow significantly and given the appeal in an extremely weak labor market of a steady paycheck with health care and housing benefits. Expansion also increases the odds that these programs could attract young people who would benefit from a highly structured and demanding experience, but whose parents and communities oppose the interaction between the military and growing numbers of young people. The design of quasi-military interventions to reach the sizable numbers of youngsters who might benefit requires, then, that any facets of these programs that overtly or implicitly encourage military service over other career pathways should be filtered out so that parents can have confidence that their youngsters will not to be pressured or prematurely tempted to enlist in the military.

The reality is that some proportion of youngsters enrolled in quasi-military programs end up enlisting. This should not be surprising since some youngsters drawn to these programs are predisposed to join. The enlistment patterns vary by program. For instance, surveys indicate that JROTC cadets are five times more likely than their contemporaries to join the military.⁷²

The National Guard reports that 14 percent of the 2008 graduates from ChalleNGe signed up.⁷³ MDRC's interim evaluation registered a lower enrollment figure for earlier graduates that it interviewed. As MDRC indicated in the report of its interim findings, 10.9 percent of program participants had enlisted in the military, mostly the Army or National Guard, as opposed to 6.2 percent of non-participants. MDRC added, though, that more than 30 percent of the research sample indicated at the outset that they were interested in ChalleNGe partly because they wanted to join the military. Thus their interest predated participation in the program.

As with much data, interpretations may lie in the eye of the beholder. The extraordinarily difficult labor market in the last two years may help explain why proportionately more 2008 graduates joined the military than the earlier classes covered by the MDRC evaluation. As for the contrast between participants and non-participants covered by MDRC's study, one obvious way

to read this data is that nearly twice as many participants as non-participants landed in the military. This suggests that ChalleNGe influenced their decision to enlist and therefore could be viewed as a recruitment asset. The other view, though, is that “only” 10.9 percent enlisted and nearly a third of those were as already predisposed. While ChalleNGe may have been a recruitment asset, it wasn’t a terribly robust or effective one because of the low yield. This lends credence to the argument the Pentagon does not invest in ChalleNGe as a recruitment vehicle.

- ***Travails of Implementation***

Despite the military’s deserved reputation for execution, the quasi-military programs it runs or partners in operating face many of the start-up and ongoing implementation struggles confronted by other innovative programs in public schools. Reservists and veterans who are recruited for these programs must be screened carefully and then trained to work effectively with youngsters who have serious academic shortcomings and personal issues. Educational and military personnel working alongside one another need to establish a sensible division of labor and reconcile the civilian and military cultures lest they conflict and foment confusion in the school building and the minds of students.

Leadership turnover at the top of school districts can impede operations in the schools. School superintendents come and go with destabilizing frequency. They may view their predecessors’ priorities and initiatives with skepticism, determined to implement their own and thus undermining the continuity of solid programs already in place.

The Rand Corporation studied the rollout of JROTC career academies and found that they encountered many of the same problems that have bedeviled other efforts to launch new small schools. Although these innovative schools got off the ground, for instance, they often proved less successful in changing their curricula and instructional focus. The school district may lack sufficient funding for common planning time for teachers and the state-mandated curricular guidelines may limit the flexibility they need devote to the occupational focus of the academy.⁷⁴

As with any innovation, these quasi-military programs can be works in progress during their formative years. Col. Charles Fleming is principal of the Chicago Military Academy. He counsels realism, patience and persistence. “It’s going to be more expensive right up front than your everyday high school. Give it time to let it work – at least five to seven years – then the dividends will pay down the road.”⁷⁵ Or as Brigadier General Ralph Marinaro, OMI’s superintendent, put it wryly: “This isn’t instant pudding; you can’t just add water and get a college-bound student.”⁷⁶

- ***Unstable Military Involvement***

While the military branches believe in the education and youth development programs they run, their primary missions must take precedence and may disrupt the continuity of their engagement with these ancillary enterprises. For example, several of the National Guard sergeants assigned to the Oakland Military Institute were redeployed in conjunction with the Iraq War.⁷⁷ As a result, the adults who were supposed to be a reliable presence in the cadets’ lives vanished and the youngsters acted out. The National Guard acknowledges that the war against terrorism has impacted staffing for the ChalleNGe program.

“...more than 35% of ChalleNGe staff members are active in the National Guard or Reserves. More than 85% of these staff...have been activated and deployed to serve for periods of 2 to 8 months overseas. These deployments have required the states to develop plans and procedures for quickly bringing in and training temporary replacements.”⁷⁸

Whether summoned to war or assigned to patrol the nation’s borders, airports and populous public spaces, or take on other OOTW assignments (known officially as Operations

Other Than War), the military's commitment to ostensibly non-core programs can vacillate, for perfectly legitimate reasons. Yet the instability and sheer risk of it can undermine the orderly operation, not to mention significant expansion, of these programs to the detriment of the youngsters being served.

Another source of instability is the ambivalence of the Pentagon and some politicians toward what they view as peripheral programs. Much as politicians and parents appreciate it and as much as it has accomplished for troubled young people, the ChalleNGe program occasionally has been the subject of spirited debate inside the Pentagon and on Capitol Hill about whether soldiers are social workers and whether the military should be in the business of running civilian programs that help dropouts.

Thus, for all its impressive benefits, operational dependence on the military carries risks and uncertainties. Any expansion scenario that is contingent on these military partnerships will run the constant risk of periodic destabilization, indeed of total withdrawal of participation and financial backing. The crucial question facing those who would expand them is how to mitigate or circumnavigate these considerable risks.

Proliferation of Military-Style Programs

A potpourri of military-like programs serving civilian youngsters has emerged in recent years under various auspices, including community colleges, public school systems and/or branches of the military. Several factors explain the gradual, if cautious, thaw in attitudes toward engaging the military and adapting some of its approaches. For starters, the military itself is held in much higher esteem today than it was in the heyday of the Vietnam War. Whatever the public and the media may think of the civilian and military leadership atop the Pentagon, rank and file soldiers are supported and respected today, in sharp contrast to the scorn often heaped upon them in the 1960s and 70s.

The protracted quest to improve public schools and to boost the achievement levels, employability and life prospects of struggling youngsters has prompted educators and parents to peer outside the box for unconventional approaches that may actually help children. Military programs in public schools still generate skepticism and some outright opposition. That negativity is often blunted by the strong demand among parents and students for these opportunities.

In addition to ChalleNGe and an array of other collaborations between military branches, schools systems and other entities, some of the more prominent military-inspired programs launched and/or expanded over the last two decades include:

- ***JROTC Programs and Career Academies***

Congress established the Junior Reserve Officers Training Corps (JROTC) back in 1916 as a vehicle to promote good citizenship and responsibility among young people.⁷⁹ For decades it operated mostly in public high schools in southern states.⁸⁰ That all changed after General Powell, then Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, visited South Central Los Angeles following the riots there in 1992. Declaring that inner-city youth needed the discipline and structure offered by the military, he decided to expand JROTC."⁸¹

All four services sponsor JROTC programs. These days, as many as 3,500 schools and half a million cadets nationwide participate in JROTC.⁸² It is offered as an elective course that combines classroom instruction with extracurricular activities and is taught by retired military officers and noncommissioned officers. The curriculum typically covers citizenship, leadership, physical education and communication.

JROTC took a yet another leap forward when the U.S. Departments of Defense and Education joined forces to implement an innovative vocational education program designed to

keep dropout-prone students in school. They created JROTC career academies, i.e., small schools within schools that keep students together in the same classes and that integrate academic instruction with local business involvement in employment and counseling.⁸³ The Army alone runs about thirty career academies and partners in others.

There is some evidence that JROTC cadets demonstrate slightly better academic performance than their contemporaries in the general school population. According to Moskos and Butler, they have a 10 to 15 percent higher graduation rate than their peers in the same high school.⁸⁴

In Chicago, for instance, the Center for Strategic and International Studies reported that sustained membership in JROTC over several years paid off. Although many of the enrollees were considered at-risk youth, classroom performance and behavioral indicators equaled or exceeded the average in individual schools.⁸⁵ Seventy-one percent of the 2004 graduating JROTC cadets in Chicago continued on to post-secondary education.⁸⁶ Studies conducted by the Army found that their JROTC cadets have lower levels of disciplinary infractions than the overall student population, higher attendance and graduation rates, and stronger grade point averages and SAT scores.⁸⁷

Although JROTC is ostensibly not intended as a military recruitment vehicle and while cadets incur no obligation to serve once they graduate from high school, surveys indicate that approximately 42 percent of JROTC graduates expect to establish some connection with one of the military services and that they are five times more likely than their peers to join the military.⁸⁸

- **Public Military Academies**

Another intriguing innovation is public military academies. A number of school districts have created full-fledged schools and schools-within-schools, not simply extracurricular programs, in the image of the military. As of 2008, only a dozen or so such schools operated nationwide, but the number is slowly growing. Most academies are located in inner city areas, and their student bodies tend to be heavily African American and Latino. All academies have application procedures so that no student is forced to attend. Students at these academies are not obliged to join the military.

What explains this trend? As Robert Cervantes, the military liaison between California's Department of Education and the active armed forces, puts it:

"Districts are desperately looking for something that works. Traditional schools aren't working. Students aren't getting the attention they need."⁸⁹

Cervantes adds that school districts are looking at public military schools because there are clearer expectations for students' conduct, attendance and performance. Also, uniforms and military instructors in the classroom foster a more structured learning atmosphere.

The demand for slots is robust, with 1,300 youngsters applying to one of the Chicago military schools to fill 140 openings and 2,000 applicants for 250 slots in Philadelphia.⁹⁰ Some of these schools steer clear of both the brightest or the most troubled youngsters and instead select what they view as well-rounded applicants. As Brigadier General Frank Bacon, who heads Chicago Military Academy, noted, "They can have been in trouble and still come here. They just can't stay in trouble and stay here."⁹¹ The Philadelphia Military Academy is picky as well. Applicants must be performing on grade level in reading and math, submit two letters of recommendation from school faculty, have good attendance and disciplinary records, and complete a mandatory two-week summer training program.⁹²

Although the evidence of whether and to what extent these military academies work hardly meets the gold standard for evaluation, the sketchy data that's available paints an

encouraging picture of what these kinds of schools potentially can accomplish. For example, the Chicago Military Academy in Bronzeville ranked in the top quarter of all public high schools on a district-wide round of standardized tests. The Test of Achievement and Proficiency administered in high schools showed that CMA's academic performance resembled those of a magnet school, rather than a neighborhood school where the majority of its 150 students were recruited. Fifty-one percent of CMA's cadets performed at or above national norms in reading. The figure was 62 percent in math. These scores exceeded the citywide average in reading by 40 percent and in math by 30 percent.⁹³

In Philadelphia, the attendance rate of 97 percent at the academies surpasses the district-wide average of 83 percent. The graduation rate of 97 percent at the academies easily outshines the district rate of 61 percent. What's more, the teacher absentee rate at the academies of less than one percent, versus the district rate of 8 percent, appears to attest to the teachers' desire to work in this distinctive environment.⁹⁴

- ***Troubled Traditional High Schools***

In at least one instance I know of, namely West Philadelphia High School, the district has deployed the principal from one its public military academies as well as the former head of JROTC for the district to straighten out this severely troubled traditional school. They instituted some of the firm and consistent methods used at PMA, to beneficial effect in the early going. While the attendance and graduation rates have climbed and violent incidents declined, many academic challenges remain.⁹⁵

- ***Army Preparatory School***

Faced with a tough recruiting environment, the Army has begun dipping into the pool of high school dropouts. In 2008 it launched the Army Preparatory School for young people who want to enlist but cannot because they lack at least a GED certificate. They first enlist provisionally and then are assigned to this program. If they earn the GED, they proceed to basic training as full-fledged enlistees. Of the first class of 400 who signed up, 99 percent earned the GED within three weeks. Again, there is strong motivation and self-selection bias built into these results, but the initiative quickly caught the attention of the National Association of State Boards of Education, which forged the collaboration with the Army as described later in this paper.

- ***Bravo Company***

In 1998 operators of the ChalleNGe program in Oklahoma instituted a 16-week program for 12-18 year-olds in the custody of the juvenile correction system that generally mimics the ChalleNGe Program in mission and structure. It is called Bravo Company, or officially known as the Thunderbird Regimented Training Program (TRTP). A companion program called STARS (State Tracking and Reintegration System) keeps close track of adjudicated youngsters who live in the community. Data generated by TRTP indicates that the graduation rate averages nearly 90 percent and that 80 percent do not commit further offenses after graduation. According to the director of youth programs for the Oklahoma Military Department, Bravo saves the state \$22 million in prison expenditures annually.

Next Generation of New Ideas

The working paper that I produced at Brookings contained preliminary recommendations for new quasi-military interventions to help young people who are struggling in school and in life. My interest in these models and methods has never been to expand military programs per se, but to extract lessons and approaches that could be adapted to strictly civilian populations and settings. In addition to my working paper, I also commissioned two other thought-provoking papers that fleshed out two of the recommendations contained in my original paper.

One paper was written by Dan Donohue. The title aptly characterizes its topic: “Designing a ‘ChalleNGe-like’ Non-Residential Program for High School Dropouts and Students Who are Drifting through School, Disengaged, and Repeating Grades.” The other working paper was written by Oliver Sloman, my former research assistant at Brookings. The title of his paper is: “Imagining Nonmilitary Public Schools in the Image of Public Military Academies: Creating Rigorous, Safe and Supportive Schools for Students and Teachers Stranded in Dysfunctional Ones.”

My research at Brookings coupled with the ideas developed in the commissioned papers persuaded me that the promising attributes and approaches of military programs discussed earlier in this paper could conceivably be utilized in public education – and beyond -- to aid young people who are struggling in school and in life. A number of potential applications merit consideration.

For **In-School Youth**, the following initiatives come to mind:

Offer reading and math immersion programs patterned after the military’s fast-track instructional methods and focused on students who are performing below grade level. These could incorporate appropriate features of “Functional Context Education” and be offered during the summer or else for an entire semester if need be. If this alternative to traditional summer school proves effective, it could be sustained by the school district as part of the portfolio of summer-time and supplemental offerings for academically deficient students.

Create/expand public military middle schools and high schools in school districts that are committed to providing small themed and/or charter schools as alternatives to large zoned schools.

Establish middle schools and high schools that emulate those attributes and methods of military education and training that are appropriate for students who do not wish to attend schools with overtly military themes and trappings. Two models come to mind. One might be for youngsters who are academically capable and well-adjusted, and who yearn to attend schools that are orderly, structured and safe. The other could serve higher proportions of low-performing youngsters who nonetheless demonstrate motivation and potential, but who need heavier doses of guidance and encouragement, mentoring and developmental support.

Incorporate military methods, structures and appropriately-trained retirees into troubled middle and high schools plagued by dysfunction and poor performance. In the absence of closing these faltering schools, districts often have no choice but to try to redesign them in flight, so to speak. Thus, a promising alternative to the untenable status quo is to introduce styles of leadership and staffing, operational methods and structure akin to the quasi-military models.

Create a national youth membership organization patterned after JROTC without the military trappings that trouble some parents. While young people clearly benefit from belonging to positive youth groups, urban youngsters in particular have few viable and available options. A new initiative that mimics much but not all of JROTC might be a compelling proposition for youngsters eager to join a positive, well-organized peer group.

Other inventions could be implemented for **Out-of-School Youth**:

Expand the National Guard Youth ChalleNGe Program, which currently operates in over half the states and has graduated more than 92,000 youngsters since its inception.

Assuming that the impressive preliminary results from the MDRC evaluation hold up, ChalleNGe deserves to be extended to every state and offered to exponentially more dropouts who can handle its demands.

Implement civilian versions of the Army Preparatory School for highly motivated dropouts. Link fast-track education and training to occupations and employers in relatively steady sectors like transportation, telecommunications and health care so that, as with the Army program, participants have a reasonable chance of realizing a fairly quick and concrete payoff from their participation.

Create non-residential, intensive “transitional” academies for youngsters who are disengaged from school and dropping out. This alternative program could be based on the concept developed by Dan Donohue and draw heavily on the design and components of ChalleNGe. Its purpose would be to equip disengaged youth and dropouts to return to academic or vocational school, secure a GED, pursue post-secondary training or enter the labor force.

Lastly, for **Incarcerated Youth**, states could:

Establish quasi-military alternatives to incarceration patterned after Bravo Company and/or the JROTC program in juvenile correctional facilities for adolescents who have run afoul of the law but genuinely want to straighten out their lives. Those who squander this second chance would be remanded to reform school or jail. If successful, this intervention should be readily sustainable due to the savings realized from releasing these youngsters early from state custody and from having the bulk of them lead law-abiding, productive lives.

Networking and Proselytizing

The support from Goldman Sachs and Taconic enabled me to disseminate the working papers widely and to present my program and policy recommendations to dozens of strategically targeted audiences over the last three years. We sent the papers to hundreds of ‘influentials’ who ran the gamut from policymakers on Capitol Hill and senior staffers at federal agencies, to leaders of education policy and advocacy organizations, local public school officials, major constituency groups comprised of elected officials, corporate leaders, and members of the news media. We distributed them as well to officials at foundations, youth development agencies, think tanks, academe and civil rights organizations. Moreover, we mailed them to General Powell, senior officials in the Army and National Guard, every chief state school officer, and directors of juvenile correction agencies in all 50 states. The reception was more hospitable and decidedly less hostile this time, as new collaborations between public schools and branches of the military were cropping up around the country.

In conjunction with the release of my original working paper, we staged a policy forum at Brookings. The purpose of the forum was to dive more deeply into how quasi-military programs like ChalleNGe and the Philadelphia Military Academy actually work, how they have impacted participants’ attitudes and academic performance, and what are the implications of these models and methods for K-12 education.

The forum attracted representatives of such agencies and organizations as the U.S. Departments of Education and Labor, American Education Research Association, Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, Academy for Educational Development, MDRC, Job Corps, Office of Congressman Charles Rangel, U.S. Senate Education Committee, Education Writers Association, National Guard Bureau and state Youth ChalleNGe programs, *Employment and Training Reporter* newsletter, National Governors Association, Richmond and Baltimore

public school systems, American Federation of Teachers, Alliance for Excellent Education, National Education Association, and Pennsylvania Department of Education, among others.

I also delivered many speeches and presentations to generate awareness and interest in our ideas and recommendations. A small sampling of those activities includes:

- Alliance for Excellent Education forum – Presentation to Gov. Bob Wise, the CEO, as well as representatives from the National Education Association, National Governors Association, Institute for Educational Leadership, National Center on Education and the Economy, and Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies.
- Annenberg Institute for School Reform at Brown University – Presentation to members of the project team and graduate students at Brown.
- American Enterprise Institute – Featured speaker at the W.H. Brady Social Policy Luncheon before an expected audience of scholars and research assistants at AEI.
- American Youth Policy Forum session on Capitol Hill – Presentation followed by commentary from Karen Pittman, a leading figure in the field of youth development. The event attracted approximately 125 people, many of whom work for members of Congress and federal agencies.
- Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development -- Keynote speaker at the ASCD Leadership for Effective Advocacy and Practice Institute in Alexandria, VA. The annual gathering is held for roughly 50-75 leaders from ASCD's broad constituency of school board members, superintendents, principals and teachers.
- American Educational Research Association and Institute for Educational Leadership – Keynote speaker at an education policy forum that was jointly sponsored by these groups.
- American Association of School Administrators – Keynote address at the annual AASA conference attended by many urban school superintendents.
- U.S. Department of Education -- Rick Mills, the head of military programs for the Chicago school system, and I were the featured presenters at a symposium held at department headquarters in DC. It focused on the military lessons for public schools. The attendees were mostly staff from the department. In addition the symposium was transmitted via closed circuit to the agency's regional offices.
- National League of Cities Institute for Youth, Education and Families -- Keynote speaker at NLC's Second National City After-School Summit before an audience of about 150 local after-school program directors.

I also met one-on-one with many strategically situated officials to brief them on our ideas and try to generate interest in the near term or down the road. These included the National League of Cities, National Association of Secondary School Principals, and National Governors Association.

When I headed the National Urban League, we established a programmatic relationship with the U.S. Army and with General Michael Rochelle in particular. We met occasionally and I kept him briefed on my work. Prior to his retirement, General Rochelle served as deputy chief of staff for the Army, with responsibility for recruitment. He worried that the pool of academically eligible recruits is disturbingly shallow. Therefore he viewed the academic weakness of American students as a national defense risk. Through General Rochelle, I also shared my ideas with

Ronald James, the Assistant Secretary of the Army for Manpower and Reserve Affairs. This networking paid off pretty soon.

In addition to the outreach activities described above, I devoted some energy to cultivating the media on behalf of these ideas. For instance, I have met a senior editor at *Education Week* to try to interest them in doing a major article on what the military has to offer, using my working paper as the point of departure. Although they didn't act on my suggestion at the time, the outreach to that publication was not in vain. I also wrote articles for several prominent publications that are widely read by educators, policymakers, leaders and legislative staffers in the K-12 arena. These included:

- *Education Week* – my commentary article appeared on the paper's high profile back page. It reached the newspaper's readership of 50,000 paid subscribers plus patrons of its on-line edition.
- *Educational Leadership* – my article in this monthly publication of ASCD focused on the benefits of public military academies. The magazine has a circulation of 175,000.

A long-sought coup in media coverage finally occurred when *Education Week* led one of its issues with a story about the new program launched by the Army for high school dropouts who want to enlist. The article was titled "Armed with a GED." After more than a year of trying to interest the editors and reporters there, I was delighted that they finally 'bit.'

The early success of the Army Preparatory School demonstrates, at least preliminarily, the potential of military-style training and education to help school dropouts fulfill their desire to join the Army. In addition to focusing on the preparatory school, the article paid rather prominent attention to introduction of military-lite methods into West Philadelphia High School, a troubled comprehensive high school that has registered some encouraging gains under the new regimen. I brought this school to the author's attention and introduced him to the assistant principal, a military veteran who has helped incorporate the military methods into the school. This section of the article helped to underscore the fundamental point of our project, which is the relevance of these methods and insights to struggling schools and students.

Finally, the article conveyed the enthusiastic reaction of Brenda Wellburn, head of the National Association of State Boards of Education, to the Army Preparatory School and its potential implications for public education. I had met with her and heard firsthand how intrigued she was by the potential applicability of these methods and models. As Ms. Wellburn told *Education Week*, "If we can learn their lessons of accelerated remediation, that's going to be the way we have to go."

In the summer of 2008, my work on this project at Brookings wound down as I prepared to become a full-time faculty member in the Woodrow Wilson School at Princeton University. In all modesty, I believe that we contributed importantly to generating heightened awareness, curiosity, and interest in these military approaches and methods among K-12 educators, and policymakers, as well as military leaders who are deeply concerned about the ill-preparedness of the nation's youth. The message I have been transmitting since the mid-1970s was beginning to register and resonate.

Looking Ahead

Looking to the future, one of the most significant developments is the strategic alliance forged by the U.S. Army and the National Association of State Boards of Education. The leading actors are General Benjamin Freakley, the commanding general of the United States Army Accessions Command who succeeded General Rochelle as head of Army recruitment, and Brenda Wellburn, executive director of NASBE.

In mid-September, 2009, the Army hosted a four-day conference at Fort Jackson in Columbia, SC. It's noteworthy that several national education groups partnered with the Army in staging the conference, namely the National Association of State Boards of Education (NASBE), Council of Chief State School Officers, National Governors Association, Association of Career and Technical Education, and Be the Change. This year's conference built on the first one convened the Army and NASBE in 2008.

Roughly one hundred people attended the conference. The military contingent included General Freakley, the national director of JROTC, and assorted other senior military officers and officials. Among the educators were members of state and local boards of education, school superintendents, representatives of leading K-12 education constituent groups like the National Education Association (NEA) and the National Association of Secondary School Principals, prominent scholars in the field, and an official from the U.S. Department of Education who focuses on fostering military/education collaboration. Fifteen state boards of education were represented. Thirty-eight state boards wanted to send delegates, but there wasn't room for all of them.

The primary thrust of the conference was to expose public education leaders and scholars to how the Army goes about training, educating and 'transforming' raw recruits into effective soldiers. The military speakers were upfront about their need to recruit young people who are academically, emotionally and physically fit, as well as their desire to find ways to collaborate with schools toward that end. They also wanted to involve more high school students in programs like JROTC and public military academies, both of which many educators in attendance considered highly beneficial for participating youngsters and schools.

To repeat, facilitating and fortifying military recruitment in public schools has never been my agenda. The co-conveners knew this. Even so, they invited me to deliver a plenary speech laying out my vision and concrete recommendations for utilizing military models and methods to help in-school and out-of-school youth, including those confined in juvenile corrections facilities.

Aside from addressing the conference, it's also immensely gratifying that several of the national education groups that either co-convened or attended the Ft. Jackson conference were outfits that we corresponded with, shared our work products with, and thus cultivated from the beginning of our project. Given their general wariness at the outset, it was heartening to watch them gradually warm up to these ideas. Between the growing interest of the Army and National Guard coupled with the willingness of K-12 leaders to step forward, there is now discernible momentum behind examining ways that the military and educators can collaborate.

Last spring, NASBE devoted the March issue of *State Education Standard* to the theme of "Partners in Achievement: Education and the Military." The policy journal is distributed to state school board members across the country. The journal led off with an article by General Freakley, who cited my Brookings paper. It also included an article by me laying out essentially same program ideas recommended above on pp 31-32.

Most significantly, General Freakley stated in his article that the Army regards the partnership with NASBE as one of its most significant endeavors. He cited the following ideas as the focus of their collaboration:

- Comprehensive post-secondary planning;
- Dropout prevention, intervention and recovery;
- Applying what Army has learned from its high school JROTC programs as broader tenets that can be implemented in a civilian context to prevent obesity and dropouts;

- Improving student readiness for whatever the next life-stage step they choose after high school; and
- Very early exploration around Army college scholarships that could be applied to address future teacher shortages.

In addition to my interactions with military leaders, I have also met with senior Obama administration officials at the U.S. Department of Education. These include Jim Shelton, the Deputy Assistant Secretary for Innovation; John Easton, the Director of the Institute of Education Sciences at DOE; and Tony Miller, the Deputy Secretary of Education. Thus I have managed to reach deep inside the hierarchy of DOE. What's also promising is that Secretary Arne Duncan was a big fan and defender of public military academies and JROTC when he headed the Chicago school system. At the very least my message has been received, although it is too early to know whether and how DOE will respond to these ideas as well as those advanced by the Army and NASBE.

During the 35 years that I've been on this quixotic journey, interest in these military/education ideas has ebbed and flowed. How ironic then that the receptivity today is the highest I have ever seen, bolstered by the impressive interim results from MDRC's evaluation of ChalleNGe. Yet the crushing fiscal realities facing the federal government, states and local school districts may crimp their appetites for new educational paradigms. Hopefully the fledgling alliance between the Army and key education groups like NASBE will continue to gain traction and help persuade educators and policymakers to peer *inside* the box marked "Educating Whole Adolescents the Military Way."

Implications for Organized Philanthropy

The ChalleNGe program and other quasi-military educational initiatives have blossomed into innovative, promising and potentially significant interventions for at-risk youth even without the benefit of sizeable investments by major foundations or venture philanthropists. Given the deep engagement of organized philanthropy in school reform over the two decades, this absence is rather anomalous. What if any are the implications of this story for the role of foundations in fostering innovation?

- ***Foundation Roles***

Some foundations primarily support worthy causes, while others aspire to advance, and arguably even engineer, social change. Several years ago Joel Fleishman of Duke University published an illuminating and insightful book, entitled *The Foundation: A Great American Secret*, about the segment of the philanthropic sector that is largely devoted to social change.⁹⁶ He asserted that foundations typically play one of three roles:

- *Driver* -- "When a particular social, economic, or cultural goal can be visualized clearly and a practical strategy can be developed to attain it, a foundation may choose to play the role of Driver. In this case, the foundation itself maps out and directs the change effort, making grants to organizations that will simply carry out the strategy devised by the foundation."⁹⁷
- *Partner* -- "Here, the foundation shares the power to shape a strategy and makes crucial decisions together with other partner organizations, making grants to support those organizations as well as others that simply implement the strategy."⁹⁸
- *Catalyst* -- "When tackling a problem for which a strategy is either inconceivable, inappropriate or premature, a foundation may make grants to organizations that generally deal with the problem, without specifying or expecting particular outcomes. Here the foundation acts as a kind of 'Johnny Appleseed,' broadcasting resources in many

directions knowing that most of the grants are unlikely to produce lasting change, but hoping that a few at least will take root and grow.”⁹⁹

Fleishman notes that many foundations of late have sought a hands-on role in specific initiatives that is midway between the controlling role of *Driver* and the less powerful role of *Partner*. He characterizes this approach as ‘venture philanthropy.’

Putting aside any ideological misgivings about the military, one reason for the comparative isolation of foundations from this work may be that neither ChalleNGe nor the other quasi-military interventions in schools ever fit neatly into these categories. The conceptualization, financing and operation of ChalleNGe utterly depended on the intellectual capital, leadership, bureaucratic and political dexterity, enthusiastic engagement and faithful implementation of the military, i.e., the National Guard and other branches willing to collaborate with public schools via JROTC. In this school reform arena, foundations could never play the dominant role of *Driver*.

The role of *Partner* described by Fleishman does not quite fit either. During the formative stages of ChalleNGe, the Rockefeller Foundation was in no position to share the power with the National Guard in designing and/or implementing the program. Nor did the recipients of the foundation’s modest grants – CSIS and P/PV – exercise that level of influence over the Guard. Had Rockefeller’s trustees approved the proposed multi-million dollar allocation to these groups for monitoring and assessing the implementation of ChalleNGe, then these groups and the foundation might eventually have been positioned to exert influence in the design and modification of the program due the value and transparency of the independent implementation and performance data to be collected and analyzed. Plus they could have become valued collaborators in suggesting and supporting promising offshoots of the basic approach. At least those were my goals in seeking the grants for them.

Thus the foundation bypassed an opportunity to play a potentially consequential role in what may turn out to be a significant and successful intervention. The absence of major foundations as *Partners* is a loss to the field of quasi-military interventions and to the broader causes of school reform and youth development. Substantial and sustained engagement would have enabled concerned foundations to learn while the National Guard learned and, as the initiative began demonstrating consistent promise, to ponder and potentially invest in variations on the theme, such as those that I outlined earlier. Valuable years were lost and opportunities delayed because the philanthropic sector missed out on the action, so to speak.

The third foundation role posited by Fleishman is that of *Catalyst*. This comes closest to the role I actually played at Rockefeller in the late 1980s and early 1990s. I trolled for a branch of the military that might want to launch a youth corps for dropouts. I also searched for a highly respected organization in the defense establishment that would, if it embraced the basis, help provide political cachet and protective cover for it. I fully accepted the fact that if my quest was successful on either or both fronts, then we would have to cede ownership of the concept to organizations with the political and financial horsepower to take it from there. By initially planting the conceptual and financial seeds, the roles that the foundation and I played in the early going perfectly fit the definition of *Catalyst*.

In their book entitled *Philanthrocapitalism: How the Rich Can Save the World*, Matthew Bishop and Michael Green note that the first known reference to ‘venture philanthropy’ occurred in 1969 when John D. Rockefeller III characterized it as an adventurous, risk-taking approach to funding unpopular social causes.¹⁰⁰ The authors describe the propensity of venture philanthropists to get deeply involved in the strategic planning, program design, and operations of their grantees.¹⁰¹ They routinely sit on the boards of their recipients. Like a good venture capitalist, the authors explain, a good venture philanthropist spends a lot of time mentoring those who are running the organizations they bankroll.¹⁰² Fleishman observed as well that these philanthropists tend to operate in closer and more intense partnerships with their grantees. They pride themselves on getting their hands dirty and providing grantees with continual advice on

management, strategy, and organizational development.¹⁰³ As one such investor explained, “I test, probe, listen, observe, adapt, and try again, and this goes on as a continuous loop process.”¹⁰⁴

The creation of ChalleNGe predated the advent of venture philanthropy. Actually, the program as operated is basically incompatible with this mode of philanthropy. Indeed, it's probably incompatible with any of the more recent interventions where branches of the military are actively and deeply involved. After all, the very *raison d'être* of these initiatives is to draw heavily on the intellectual capital and operating methods of the military and to capitalize on their capacity for taking initiatives to scale. It is highly likely that military entities would view the heavy-handed involvement of venture philanthropists as intrusive and probably even as deal-breakers.

The design and implementation of interventions that draw on military methods and utilize military retirees, but do not depend operationally on military programs like JROTC, may be a different story. The nature of a foundation or venture philanthropist's method of operation matters enormously when it comes to collaborating with the military in bringing their methods and models to bear on improving the achievement levels and life prospects of at-risk youth. For philanthropists who see the potential of these approaches, flexibility in how their funds are used and how they relate to prospective grantees and collaborators will be a key to success.

In his book, Fleishman describes some familiar strategies that foundations have pursued over the years. As might be expected, this includes creating and disseminating knowledge by establishing institutions to, among other things:

- Support basic research
- Promote public policy awareness
- Promote specific reforms
- Research and solve a specific problem
- Launch a new field of scholarly study or professional practice and/or sustain a traditional field of scholarly inquiry¹⁰⁵

The consortium of foundations that have joined with the Department of Defense in supporting the MDRC evaluation of ChalleNGe are contributing importantly to creating and disseminating knowledge about this specific intervention and, by implication, about the potential utility of trying military-like interventions with other at-risk target groups. Of course, the crystallization of knowledge generated must await the final impact results later this year.

Hopefully the completion of the study will spur this consortium and/or additional foundations to support rigorous evaluations of other military-like interventions that are ripe for assessment. Public military academies, JROTC, and the Bravo and JROTC programs situated in juvenile corrections facilities come to mind. Deeper, more detailed and nuanced knowledge will help policymakers, educators, correction officials and policymakers determine whether these interventions hold sufficient promise to justify widespread expansion and greater investment of public resources, especially in an era of severely limited resources.

Other strategies mentioned by Fleishman that foundations traditionally pursue include: public policy advocacy; changing public attitudes; creating blue ribbon commissions; and building models through pilot programs. The modest grants that we gave to CSIS and P/PV served some of these purposes. Those that I received from the Goldman Sachs and Taconic foundations a decade and a half later aimed to inform public policy, change public attitudes, and advocate for pilot programs to test various models of quasi-military interventions for other target populations.

Welcome as these foundation resources were, what's been missing throughout is the coherent strategy, sustained commitment, engagement and support, and curiosity to explore programmatic variations on the original ChalleNGe theme that by now might have built a truly robust body of knowledge as well as a potent constituency on behalf of this genre of interventions.

- ***Taking Risks***

Foundations, be they traditional or venture philanthropists, routinely tout their appetites for taking risk. For some, taking risks translates into a willingness to make mistakes. For others, it means investing in ideas that politicians who must run for election and corporate leaders who fret about shareholders would eschew. Philanthropists, the argument goes, answer only to themselves and are not hamstrung by time constraints.¹⁰⁶ As a result, Fleishman contends, they are freer than governments, public companies or nongovernmental organizations to take big risks, go against conventional wisdom, pursue strategies that will only ever pay off in the long term, and pilot risky projects that government can then scale up if they are shown to work.¹⁰⁷ He adds that foundations and philanthropists using this approach may indeed take risks, but only after considering whether they can succeed in managing it.¹⁰⁸ On this latter point I would only observe that the more persuaded they are that they can successfully manage the risk, they less risky these endeavors are likely to be.

The quasi-military concepts that I've espoused have clearly tested the outer limits of foundation risk-taking over the years. I encountered indifference or aversion to the very idea without any willingness to peer behind the label to examine and test whether there were approaches that might actually help young people in acute need. I understand the visceral reaction. More than a decade after the launch of ChalleNGe, I still witnessed puzzlement and reticence, even after sharing the promising in-house data on ChalleNGe. I briefed several major foundations about my ideas for applying quasi-military approaches to help in-school, out-of-school and incarcerated youth. But to no avail.

I understand the hesitancy about embracing or exploring politically incorrect ideas. Granted, my 'sales pitch' may have been flawed, incomplete and/or unconvincing. Yet based on 20+ years of urging youth-focused and education-oriented foundations to consider these concepts, I cannot help wondering how truly risky are the risks that foundations and venture philanthropists say they are prepared to take. Needlessly constricted views of risk could blind foundations and venture philanthropists to opportunities for true innovations and breakthroughs.

The robust demand for quasi-military programs raises an interesting dilemma for elites who get indigestion at the very mention of the word 'military.' Since its inception in 1993, more than twice as many young people have applied for ChalleNGe as have graduated from the program.¹⁰⁹ Demand by parents and students for slots in the public military academies in Chicago and Philadelphia approximates or even exceeds supply by 10 to 1.¹¹⁰ Given this enthusiasm at the grassroots level, it's arguable that at least some foundations and philanthropists with an appetite for risk should cast aside their qualms and invest in discovering whether, for whom, and under what circumstances quasi-military approaches could indeed work.

Any discussion of risk-taking triggers the related question of who within a foundation is empowered to take risks by committing its money and by using its cachet and convening power. When I was vice president of Rockefeller, senior officers like me could make grants up to a prescribed ceiling per grantee per annum, within the budget of the division. I invoked this authority to provide support for CSIS and P/PV. My title and association with one of America's iconic institutions easily opened doors to the Pentagon and prestigious think tanks in the military establishment. My presentation to the head of the National Guard unquestionably helped spur the creation of ChalleNGe.

In retrospect I can only wonder whether ChalleNGe would ever have been conceived and launched had I not had the institutional license, cachet, entrée, and resources to play a catalytic role. Further, given the board's rejection several years later, I doubt whether, had I needed their approval at the very outset, they would have countenanced my activities, much less authorized the initial investments in this risky and potentially controversial idea.

I certainly do not mean to suggest that my instinct and judgment are infallible when it comes to novel ideas. At the Rockefeller Foundation I was approached in the early 1990s by a determined young woman named Wendy Kopp who had recently graduated from Princeton. She was prospecting for support for a new organization she wanted to create based on her senior thesis. What was her goal? To recruit freshly minted college graduates to teach in public schools. Since we were wedded to a strategy of trying to make traditional teacher's colleges more attuned to the needs of urban and minority youngsters, I failed to grasp Ms. Kopp's vision fully or to foresee the extraordinary impact that Teach for America would eventually have in attracting energetic young people into the teaching profession, let alone on popularizing community service.

- ***Patience and Persistence***

Foundations and venture philanthropists are of varying minds about how long they should stick with a strategy, area of concentration, or particular grant. Needless to say, the timeframe depends on the nature of the initiative. As Bishop and Green observe, many grantors provide start-up support lasting only a few years. The expectation from the outset is that if the approach works, then other, presumably public funding will take over. Some initiatives are intentionally time-limited. The grantor's goal is to achieve impact early and then exit quickly.

Comparatively short time horizons have their virtues. They ratchet up pressure on both grantee and grantor to define goals sharply and achieve discernible results. They free funders from the expectation that they will devote their resources to a sector or recipient interminably. And they enable funders to deploy their resources as the world evolves, entering new high priority fields as they exit others when their mission is basically accomplished. In many instances, grantees who grasp that they cannot and ought not to be permanently dependent on a given funder learn and as a result become more dexterous and entrepreneurial. While this can destabilize and indeed threaten weak organizations, it can be energizing and liberating for nonprofit groups, compelling them to modernize their organizational missions and sustainability strategies.

Yet the reality also is that obsession with short-term results can cause premature evaluation and exit. Truncated time horizons by grantors and grantees can shortchange the potential reach, scale and impact of potentially important ideas and interventions. Some initiatives of necessity have 20-year time horizons, or even longer. As Fleishman noted, time is required, in the early stages of a project, for thorough background research and methodical strategic thinking. Time is also required in the latter stages, when persistence, experimentation, adjustment, and refinement of tactics are required.¹¹¹

Patient money also enables grantees to pursue promising tributaries that would go unexplored in the absence of funding. It assures continuity of inquiry and effort, building crucially important knowledge, credibility and constituencies among 'influentials' en route. As I suggested on pp 31-32 above, there are many intriguing programmatic offshoots of ChalleNGe, JROTC and public military academies worth exploring. But they cannot be if the discovery process proceeds by fits and starts due to episodic funding or is terminated prematurely. Patience and persistence on the part of foundations as well as grantees can produce important breakthroughs that were not anticipated in the beginning.

- **Leverage**

According to Bishop and Green, one powerful insight that financiers can bring to philanthropy is a sophisticated understanding of leverage, which is essential if what the authors call 'philanthrocapitalism' is to live up to its promise.¹¹²

"In philanthropy, leverage means increasing the returns on an investment by targeting money where it has a disproportionate impact. This requires rigorous analysis of the conditions and systems underlying social problems in order to find tipping points or bottlenecks where more money generates a significant multiplier effect, often as a result of philanthropies partnering with other organizations, from nonprofits to the state."¹¹³

"To achieve leverage," the authors continue, "philanthropists should not be competing with or substitute for government money; they should be trying to improve the way it is spent."¹¹⁴

In strictly financial terms, the initial, extraordinarily modest grant of \$10,000 by Taconic and the investment of \$372,700 by the Rockefeller Foundation achieved exponential leverage. Coupled with my own involvement as an officer of the foundation, these modest investments clearly contributed directly to the creation of ChalleNGe. The annual budget of ChalleNGe is approximately \$126 million. Since its inception in 1993, the cumulative expenditure comes to at least \$1.3 billion (92,850 graduates x \$14,000 per participant).

These early foundation investments also leveraged, i.e., triggered, the sustained involvement by the National Guard and the support of other federal agencies like Labor and Justice, along with the significant cost-sharing, initially 40 percent and now 25 percent, borne by participating states. In my obviously biased view, this is an eye-catching ROI (Return on Investment) by any measure.

The leverage generated by the also modest Goldman Sachs and Taconic grants to Brookings is less quantifiable, but hardly inconsequential. With their support, we:

- Contributed to the knowledge and understanding of why military-like approaches merit consideration.
- Developed and disseminated new ideas about potential applications of military models and methods.
- Generated awareness and interest in these approaches among policymakers, educators, key constituent groups, the media, and other 'influentials.'
- Published articles in journals and trade newspapers that reach literally tens of thousands of educators, including superintendents, organizational leaders, school administrators and department chairs, teachers, and state and local school board members.
- Cultivated the interest and engagement of senior military officials and contributed to their thinking about how military methods can help struggling students and schools.

It is tricky to measure this type of leverage, so I won't even try. Suffice it to say I have every confidence from the response to our papers, articles, speeches, presentations and meetings with influential players in the military and K-12 education sectors that our contributions have registered with them and were appreciated. The fact that a number of groups we cultivated initially were hesitant but ended up co-convening and/or attending the Army/NASBE conference at Fort Jackson affirms that we helped to pique their interest, influence their thinking, and potentially leverage their involvement in this arena.

- **Impact**

In Fleishman's view, impact is not about inputs, namely money, time, energy, and effort expended effort. Nor is it measured by outputs, i.e., buildings erected or scholarships awarded. Rather, he argues, impact is the extent to which such inputs and outputs have actually changed society, created viable new institutions, generated knowledge, created opportunities, and improved human welfare generally.¹¹⁵ To measure the impact of a foundation initiative, he argues, one must find and record the ripples it creates in society – the broader and deeper the better. He cites the following examples of the kinds of impacts associated with the most effective foundation initiatives:

- Major benefits to the public
- Outputs and benefits created
- Expansion of knowledge
- Helping to launch a movement
- Catalyzing an urgent social change
- Taking an initiative to scale¹¹⁶

Since many years have elapsed between the original grants by Rockefeller and Taconic and the impressive interim evaluation results reported by MDRC, it would be a stretch to claim there is a linear relationship between those grants and the ensuing impacts. The National Guard and Defense Department, combined with the program's federal and state backers, deserve all the credit.

Yet it is appropriate to note that the impacts achieved by ChalleNGe meet several of the Fleishman criteria. The interim conclusion by MDRC that ChalleNGe has generated impressive results thus far is an impact in its own right. Assuming the results hold up in the final assessment, the program will serve as an existence proof that dropouts' lives can indeed be turned around. This alone is an important contribution to policymakers, practitioners, advocates and scholars in the education and youth development fields.

Better yet, tangible benefits accrued to the more than 92,000 cadets who have graduated and presumably to their families and communities, as well as taxpayers. ChalleNGe has proven to be a durable and sustainable institution that, in addition to helping young people, has generated important and useful knowledge about effective interventions for dropouts. The program provides documented hope that second chance programs for dropouts are not naïve or fruitless pipedreams. In addition, ChalleNGe now serves as a critically important repository of seasoned program managers, operating systems, grateful alumni and parents, and inspirational real world examples that will fuel interest among educators, military officials and policymakers in the potential use of military methods to help struggling students and schools.

- **Scaling Up**

At the Rockefeller Foundation, my colleagues and I along with our peers at other foundations agonized from time to time about how to take effective interventions to scale. What was the recipe for pushing beyond a handful pilot efforts serving the few to widespread initiatives that benefit a broad swath of those in need?

With sites in more than half of the states, ChalleNGe has already progressed partway down this path. There are several impediments to further expansion. One obviously is cost in a

tough fiscal climate. Another barrier may be the ongoing ambivalence of the Pentagon, indeed within the hierarchy of the Guard itself. Despite genuine enthusiasm for the program, even the Guard leadership has occasionally questioned how large the program should become and how deeply it ought to get involved in a fundamentally domestic mission.

At Brookings I wrestled as well with the issue of how to scale up ChalleNGe and other promising quasi-military initiatives. One method that's familiar to foundations is creating an intermediary organization that functions as a repository of knowledge, expertise, models, technical assistance, and program monitoring and assessment. Mind you, its role would not be to operate these quasi-military programs, but to facilitate their growth by supporting school districts and/or states that take the lead in establishing or expanding these programs. The responsibilities and requisite capabilities of an intermediary would depend on whether it is the engine driving the national effort or an indispensable source of support to help other entities propagate new quasi-military programs at scale. For a more thorough discussion of what an intermediary might do, please see my Brookings working paper, *Demilitarizing What the Pentagon Knows about Developing Young People*.¹¹⁷

I contemplated trying to establish such an intermediary from scratch, but decided that I did not want to launch and operate a sprawling national organization on the heels of the grueling job of running the National Urban League. Instead, I floated the general idea by some major foundations involved in education reform and youth development. I detected no interest, so I stopped broaching the idea. To this day, I remain convinced that it is viable and timely.

The other strategy for scaling up that I examined was going straight to the source, namely proposing that the National Guard be tasked by governors, who partly control the Guard's operation, either to operate or else collaborate with interested school systems in operating myriad quasi-military programs akin to those proposed on pp 31-32.

I elaborated on this scenario as well in my working paper for Brookings. In it I argued that a logical, practical and straightforward strategy for taking this military knowledge and these quasi-military models to scale is for America's governors to deploy the National Guard in their states to do the job.¹¹⁸ The National Guard scenario I envisioned might unfold as follows:

- The governor assigns to the National Guard unit in that state the job of implementing the kinds of quasi-military interventions suggested earlier.
- Furthermore, the governor prevails upon the state legislature to finance the Guard's involvement in these new youth initiatives entirely out of state and, where appropriate, local funds so that these are strictly domestic functions that cannot be diluted, destabilized or otherwise impacted by national defense needs. Funding from federal domestic agencies could be added to the mix.
- To ensure that the division of labor and line of demarcation between these domestic educational programs and other customary National Guard functions is crystal clear and impenetrable, perhaps each state should establish and fund a separate administrative department under the aegis of the Guard whose sole mission is to implement and oversee these new initiatives.
- The National Guard then undertakes to launch and operate either or both of the two interventions that transcend local school districts, namely quasi-military public boarding schools and residential programs for youngsters under supervision of the juvenile justice system. At the behest of the governor, the Guard could also work collaboratively with interested school districts to operate fast-track immersion programs, quasi-military middle schools and high schools, and/or schools that embrace the desired military attributes.

- To assure that these programs are genuinely civilian in nature, military history courses, weapons training, and military recruitment should be forbidden in the curriculum and daily regimen.

Thus far there have been no takers for my admittedly unorthodox proposal to scale up these programs by expanding and insulating the domestic role of the National Guard. Time and resources will tell.

- ***Limits of Foundation Power***

Students of philanthropy periodically debate whether and to what extent foundations and, now, venture philanthropists can ‘solve’ massive social problems or even foster social change. Kenneth Prewitt, a former executive vice president of Rockefeller, is skeptical, arguing that there is a mismatch between the mammoth problems that foundations often tackle and the comparatively modest resources they bring to bear on the task. He characterizes foundations as ‘peripheral players’ in the struggle for social change.¹¹⁹

For his part, Fleishman readily acknowledges the limits of foundation resources and, therefore, power. Let me quote his argument at length instead of clumsily paraphrasing it:

“When a social problem is not *discrete* and well-bounded, when it permeates large segments of society, or when it is created in part by dug-in interest groups, a foundation can usually do little to solve the problem beyond ameliorating some of its symptoms and suggesting, through research or pilot programs, some directions in which ultimate solutions may be found.”¹²⁰

Apropos of the topic of this paper, he adds:

“Consider, for example, the problems of elementary and secondary education in the United States. For years foundations have struggled to improve the quality of American schools, and they have made a positive difference in some areas.... But attempts to create more comprehensive solutions have been thwarted by a combination of factors, including the massive social and psychological burdens created by poverty and the opposition of teachers’ and administrators’ unions to fundamental changes in incentives.”¹²¹

He continues:

“That is not to say that foundations can do nothing about poverty. Foundations have done and are continuing to do a great deal by focusing public attention on the severity of the problem, by generating empirical research about better ways of tackling it, and by pioneering solutions that governments could implement.”¹²²

Fleishman then describes several prominent, foundation-led efforts to tackle poverty. Yet he hastens to add the caveat that none of the initiatives cited:

“...represent anything close to a full-scale solution to our nation’s poverty problem. That solution waits on government action, which in turn is dependent on the public will to act as expressed through the political process. When the people are ready to take the steps needed to eradicate poverty – including steps that will inconvenience the majority and cost money, then and only then will those steps be taken. It would be naïve to expect foundations (or any array of nonprofit organizations) somehow to wave a magic wand and solve so massive a problem.”¹²³

I concur completely.

Evolving Philanthropic Landscape

The dramatic ascent of the Gates Foundation to the top of the philanthropic totem pole coupled with the advent of assertive venture philanthropists have prompted many smaller but nonetheless substantial foundations to reassess their missions and strategic niches. As Bishop and Green note:

“Many observers of the philanthropic world think that when Gates shows interest in addressing a problem, others who have been addressing that problem, or are considering doing so, back off. This may be because of the ego of the other philanthropies who perhaps justifiably think their giving will not get as much attention when it is (almost inevitably) far smaller than the sums dispensed by Gates. Or it may be that they simply believe the problem is being dealt with so their money can be better used elsewhere.”¹²⁴

Perhaps so. But As Michael Bloomberg, the mayor of New York City and an enthusiastic philanthropist, puts it:

“One of the beauties of private philanthropy is you get a diversity of agenda. If everyone colludes and agrees what is good, you lose the advantage private philanthropy has over government spending.”¹²⁵

Foundations and venture philanthropists need not be the biggest or even rank near the top in order to make manifestly important contributions to furthering social change. Foundations of varying sizes have the resources and cachet to play instrumental roles in spawning, nurturing, testing, evaluating and refining innovative ideas so that they are ready for prime time if and when the window of opportunity opens to scale them up or embed them in public policy. Of course, the window may never open. Or the window may open for ideas that are diametrically opposed to those championed by a foundation. Nor is the time frame in which the window may open predictable. It may conveniently coincide with the conclusion of diligent research, piloting and evaluation work. Or it may open years later.

Windows Open Wide

Returning to the quasi-military ideas that I have espoused, the window of opportunity for testing, implementing and/or scaling them up actually has opened wide in the last two years. One opened window is due to the election of Barack Obama as president of the United States, his appointment of Arne Duncan as U.S. Secretary of Education, and his administration's success in securing an unprecedented appropriation of \$4 billion for its 'Race to the Top' fund to finance innovative efforts by states and school districts to turn around faltering schools and reverse the alarmingly high tide of school dropouts. The other window of opportunity has opened due to the acute pressure on states with staggering deficits to reduce expenditures, even in the criminal justice and juvenile corrections systems.

The Army and NASBE have teamed up to try to take advantage of the first opening. They are seeking substantial funding from DOE to introduce and/or expand JROTC in faltering high schools (aka dropout factories) in an effort to help turn them around. This proposal was crafted by General Colin Powell; General Freakley, General George Casey (the Army Chief of Staff); and Brenda Welburn, the Executive Director of NASBE.

Had some foundations or venture philanthropists invested in designing, testing, evaluating, refining, and building broad awareness of the kinds of military-inspired education initiatives suggested on pp. 31-32, then they too might have been prime contenders for the 'Race to the Top' grants to be awarded this year.

Had some foundations or venture philanthropists invested in designing, testing, evaluating, refining, and building broad awareness of interventions in juvenile corrections facilities

like Bravo Company or JROTC, then we might know by now whether they can safely help states save money by reducing the length of confinement and the rate of recidivism.

These ideas might well have been ready for prime time in 2010 had foundations and venture philanthropists placed riskier bets on these unconventional and ideologically uncomfortable ideas. Investments of this size were -- and remain -- well within the capacity of many national foundations that focus on the education and development of disadvantaged youth.

Conclusion

The U.S. military figured out how to nurture and unleash the potential of young people like these generations ago. By demilitarizing and deploying what the Pentagon knows about educating and developing aimless young people, these troubled and troublesome young Americans can be transformed into valued social, civic and economic assets for our nation.

Unfortunately, many of these young people and society writ large have lost out because organized philanthropy by and large missed this boat. Putting aside my fascination and fixation with quasi-military approaches, let us hope that foundations will take their sector's rhetoric about risk-taking and patience truly to heart so that in the future they will explore all promising avenues -- inside as well as outside the proverbial box -- for helping at-risk youngsters enter the American mainstream.

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