

## Jane Addams and the Origins of Service-Learning Practice in the United States

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*This article uses primary and secondary research on educational, social, and political theory in the late 19th and early 20th centuries to argue that the history of service-learning must be revised to include Jane Addams' pioneering work. A full consideration of Addams significantly revises understanding the origins of service-learning, suggesting service-learning has its origins as a practice, not a theory; in the community, not the university; and among women, not men. Further, Addams' work counterbalances the contemporary effort to justify service-learning largely on its scientifically verifiable outcomes.*

"The settlement is a protest against a restricted view of education."

—Jane Addams

In a 1904 essay titled "The Humanizing Tendency of Industrial Education," Jane Addams asked her readers to imagine what public schools would look like if they followed the educational practices of Hull House, the social settlement that Addams had formed with Ellen Gates Starr 15 years before. "We could imagine the business man teaching the immigrant his much needed English and arithmetic," she wrote, "and receiving in return lessons in the handling of tools and materials so that they should assume in his mind a totally different significance from that [which] the factory gives them." In the same place, Addams argued, one should see Italian women learning English in the kitchen while they teach their instructors "how to cook the delicious macaroni, such a different thing from the semi-elastic product which Americans honor with that name" (Addams, 1904/1994, p. 120).

Had Addams written "The Humanizing Tendency" in 1994 one would see in her remarks a creative but typical description of service-learning. But the date of her writing, 1904, and the location of the service-learning, Hull House, suggests that Addams' work was much more than a standard application of service-learning practice. It was, instead, pioneering work, the understanding of which should reframe thinking about the history and significance of service-learning.

Though the service-learning movement has paid more attention to its history than most movements

for educational reform, the history it has crafted has taken an unusual form. It has focused overwhelmingly on John Dewey as the intellectual forefather of the movement (Giles, 1991; Giles & Eyler, 1994; Saltmarsh, 1996). In this, the history of a movement about community-campus partnerships for action has been written largely as a history of ideas emerging from a university. Of course, John Dewey's work is enormously rich and his role in creating a system of education responsive to community interests should not be minimized. Nonetheless, if the movement is to learn from its origins, it needs to take a fuller look at them.

There have been attempts to expand the early history of service-learning, including efforts to include Jane Addams among the early pioneers of community service in American culture (along with Dewey and Dorothy Day) from Keith Morton and John Saltmarsh (1997). Ira Harkavy and John Puckett (1994) use Hull House as a model for contemporary urban universities, especially the partnerships at University of Pennsylvania. Jane Addams School for Democracy uses the legacy of Hull House to inspire a long-term community-university partnership between the University of Minnesota and the West Side neighborhood of St. Paul, Minnesota (Longo & Wallace, 2000; Wallace, 2000). In addition, Charles Stevens (2003) has done pioneering work on the African-American origins of service-learning (Stevens, 2003). This article builds upon this work and proposes that Jane Addams' work and writing are essential to such a re-examination of service-learning's history. Addams allows us a glimpse into the origins of service-learning as a practice, as opposed to a theory.

A history of service-learning that takes account of Addams also locates the origins of service-learning not in the university, but in the community, with institutions (including institutions of higher education) playing an important supporting role. And it places the origins of service-learning squarely in the movement for the expansion of the role of women in public life. These three expansions of service-learning's history alone should make Addams of interest to contemporary practitioners. But in addition to adding gender, practice, and partnership to service-learning's history, Jane Addams' work is a valuable reminder that service-learning may be understood not only as an educational technique, but also as an agile approach to learning whose greatest value is the unpredictable creativity that it brings to public life.

### Gender and the Origins of Service-Learning

Jane Addams was born in 1860 and came of age during a time of social, political, and intellectual upheaval. The assumptions that undergirded pre-Civil War America—that there ought to be rough economic equality between citizens, that agriculture was central to American economic life, and that women were principally responsible for raising and training their children—were all shaken after the Civil War. Industrialization opened huge gaps between the rich and poor even while it drew rural and immigrant families to America's burgeoning cities. Once there, women found that the possibility of factory work dismantled traditional assumptions about their proper work. Factories often recruited female workers, who could be paid lower salaries than their male colleagues. In turn, many women found factory work essential for their family's economic well-being.

In the industrial cities of the American North, then, women found their roles in flux. On one hand, traditional social and family expectations were weakening. But on the other hand, political and intellectual stereotypes of women held fast. Women were forbidden to vote, a move justified in part by the intellectual position that men were, by nature, public beings, while women were naturally more concerned with the private, domestic sphere.

The divergence between social roles and political expectations of women was most obvious in education. More girls attended school, more women became teachers, and more women entered college. But for college educated women in the late 19th century, schooling was a mixed blessing. They were certainly pleased to have access to college, but a college education in a nation unprepared to open the public realm to women left them primed for public work that they were not permitted to do (Addams, 1893/2002; Addams, 1898/1994; Whipps, 2000).

Jane Addams was among this generation of col-

lege educated women. She attended Rockford Female Seminary, which was in the process of transitioning from a finishing school to liberal arts college when Addams was there. When Addams graduated from Rockford she went to medical school, and then, after a prolonged illness, to Europe. Her travels marked a period of deep dissatisfaction, both because they followed on the death of her father and because they highlighted the gap between her training and the possibilities available to her as a middle-class woman with a higher education (Lagemann, 1994).

Like many of her cohorts, Addams eventually rebelled against the separation of women from the public sphere. She did this by asserting that in industrial society, the domestic, private work of women was inevitably public, and the public sphere inevitably influenced the quality of family life. No matter how spotless the home, urban women could not keep their children well if sewage ran in the streets; women forced by poverty to work in factories could never guarantee the virtuous upbringing of their children. Addams' urge to connect the public and private, domestic and political, is at the center of her work and thought (Elshtain, 2000). It led Addams (1899/2002) to argue that charity, by making service to others a private affair, was insufficient to the challenges that the community faced. It drove her to found Hull House, a place that was at once a home and a political center. And it determined the process by which she carried out her work. Addams constantly measured her practice against both the stories of individual women and the most significant political and educational trends of her time (Seigfried, 2002). It was through this reflective practice (Schon, 1983) that Addams and her colleagues developed the programs and ideas that form the core of today's service-learning practice.

### Practice, Culture, and Reflection

When Jane Addams and Ellen Gates Starr founded Hull House in Chicago in 1889, they saw its work to be largely about providing cultural uplift to the immigrant families who lived in the surrounding neighborhoods. To this end they began, among other things, an art lending program, wherein Hull House loaned copies of paintings by European masters to families for display in their tenements.

Addams was originally quite pleased with the lending program, bringing, as it did, some beauty to run-down homes. Upon reflection, though, Addams and Starr decided that uplift alone was not sufficient. Uplift imagined that immigrants carried no culture with them, an assumption that became immediately false once Hull House's workers spent much time with their neighbors. Hull House quickly revised the way it made decisions about programming, rejecting a top-down model for a collaborative one. Addams noted in 1895 that, "All the details were left for the demands of the neighborhood to determine, and each department has

grown from a discovery made through natural and reciprocal relations” (Quoted in Lagemann, 1994, p. 23). Uplift also included false assumptions about the people providing the charity. By defining them as culturally outside the community, it erected unnecessary barriers between service-providers and recipients. Addams (1899/2002) put it this way,

We find in ourselves the longing for a wider union than that of family or class...but we fail to realize that all men are hoping; and are part of the same movement of which we are a part. Many of the difficulties in philanthropy come from an unconscious division of the world into the philanthropists and those to be helped. It is an assumption of two classes, and against this class assumption our democratic training revolts as soon as we begin to act upon it. (p. 62)

Finally, uplift privatized the effort to improve human life. A copy of a Rembrandt hanging in one apartment uplifted only those few people who entered the apartment; a public lecture on Rembrandt could reach hundreds.

Hull House maintained its art lending program. But as Addams, Hull House workers, and their neighbors worked to improve the whole community, they added to the lending program a huge list of other cultural events lectures, plays, concerts, and museum exhibits. These additional cultural activities made Hull House one of the preeminent cultural centers in Chicago. Of course, Hull House’s work was not limited to hosting cultural events. On the contrary, it was involved in service, politics, and research over many years. Hull House created the first public playground in Chicago, the first kindergarten, citizenship classes, English classes, and Labor Museum. Hull House residents and neighbors fought for clean streets, child labor laws, and campaigned against corrupt politicians. And the women of Hull House worked with the University of Chicago to conduct the first sociological investigation of a neighborhood with *Hull House Maps and Papers* in 1895, which is also pioneering work in the area of community asset-mapping (McKnight, 1995).

All of these activities, by their natures, aimed to do good. But Addams also understood them as a way for participants to have the experience of working with people unlike themselves (Seigfried, 1999). This storehouse of experiences, and the stories that resulted from them, were, in Addams’ eyes, the social basis of democracy. They reminded individuals, whoever they were, that the stories of their individual lives were valuable, and they reminded those same people that their lives were not full without real experience engaging in the lives of others.

### Partnership: Education in the Community

Addams’ belief, that personal experience formed

the basis of democracy, was not confined to Hull House’s cultural and social activities. It extended also into Hull House’s educational work. Addams was always intensely interested in education, and in the 1890s and 1900s served on several formal and informal city-wide education commissions (Whipps, 2000).

Addams argued that education, like service, needed to be seen broadly, relationally, and publicly. She deliberately chose a community-based institution, outside the university, to be the hub for these efforts. In part, this decision came because Hull House provided enormous flexibility for educators. It sponsored all sorts of learning—a kindergarten for immigrant children, music school, drama training, citizenship courses, courses on social science and cooking, and general adult education courses.

Addams’ choice of Hull House for her educational activities also grew out of a critique of higher education, not unlike that offered by service-learning practitioners. This is not to say that Addams despised higher education. She lectured regularly at the University of Chicago and the University of Wisconsin, and welcomed faculty and students from local schools to join with Hull House in carrying out research on poverty, working conditions, and health issues in Chicago. But Addams resisted all attempts to get her to join any university and remained at Hull House for her entire life (Davis, 1973).

Addams’ unwillingness to join a university grew out of her understanding of the unique role that settlements could play in the creation of knowledge. Addams (1899/1994) wrote,

As the college changed from teaching theology to teaching secular knowledge the test of its success should have shifted from the power to save men’s souls to the power to adjust them in healthful relations to nature and their fellow men. But the college failed to do this, and made the test of its success the mere collecting and disseminating of knowledge, elevating the means into an end and falling in love with its own achievement. (p. 90)

Addams argued that the settlement, on the other hand, stands for “application as opposed to research; for emotion as opposed to abstraction; for universal interest as opposed to specialization” (p. 78). For Addams, who believed so strongly in the significance of personal experience, any institution that gave itself over to research, abstraction, and specialization was an institution that failed to support democracy. She worried that the university would “swallow the settlement and turn it into one more laboratory: another place in which to analyze and depict, to observe and record” (p. 88).

Hull House provided a learning model outside the school for children and adults that crossed the lines of race, class, language, and educational achievement. Addams (1902/2002) wrote, “If we

admit that in education it is necessary to begin with the experiences which the child already has and to use his spontaneous and social activity, then the city streets begin this education for him in a more natural way than does the school” (p. 83).

Hull House’s reputation as a center for social work has led many to overlook its role as an educational institution. Part of that role consisted of offering classes. But an equally important part consisted of acting as a mediating institution or community connector. Hull House connected the community to schools, colleges, and universities. Addams often described this work as bringing into the circle of knowledge and fuller life, men and women who might otherwise be left outside. She (1892/1965) wrote:

Perhaps the chief value of a Settlement to its neighborhood, certainly to the newly arrived foreigner, is its office as an information and interpretation bureau. It sometimes seems as if the business of the settlement were that of a commission merchant. Without endowment and without capital itself, it constantly acts between the various institutions of the city and the people for whose benefit these institutions were erected. The hospitals, the country agencies, and State asylums are often but vague rumors to people who need them most. This commission work, as I take it, is of value not only to the recipient, but to the institutions themselves. (p. 54)

The relational “commission work” of the settlement house led residents to connect with local politics, lead reforms in city hall, work with public schools and universities, and connect immigrant residents to other much-needed community institutions. Settlement workers recognized the need to “be local” (Smith, 1994) and aware of neighborhood needs and assets. Addams claimed that their settlement house residents’ unique role in the neighborhood allowed them to see institutions from the perspective or lived-realities of ordinary neighborhood residents.

Partnership with her fellow community members took on a deep meaning for Addams. She learned early on that outsiders often made assumptions about Hull House’s neighbors, referred to as “those people.” While Addams might refute those assumptions by herself, she preferred giving “those people” an opportunity to speak for themselves. Thus, Addams (1906) never addressed a Chicago audience about the settlement and surrounding community without inviting a neighbor to go along so that she “might curb any hasty generalization by the consciousness that I had an auditor who knew the conditions more intimately than I could hope to do” (p. 14).

Hull House’s model of education, based in the students’ experiences and own voices, was perhaps best evident in the Hull House Labor Museum. The Labor Museum employed aged women to practice

the skills they had developed as young people in their homelands. By so doing it recognized and celebrated the talents and crafts of immigrants in the neighborhood surrounding Hull House. It was a revolutionary idea that attempted to create an alternative to the alienating labor forced upon new immigrants in the United States. It also provides a model of how to structure intergenerational programs that help children see their immigrant parents’ contributions and talents. Addams often told a story to this end: “Angelina Discovering Her Mother’s Talents—and Her Own Heritage.” Addams wrote:

I recall a certain Italian girl who came every Saturday evening to a cooking class in the same building in which her mother spun in the Labor Museum exhibit; and yet Angela always left her mother at the front door because she did not wish to be too closely identified in the eyes of the rest of the cooking class with an Italian woman who wore a kerchief over her head, uncouth boots, and short petticoats. One evening, however, Angelina saw her mother surrounded by a group of visitors [teachers] from the School of Education [of the University of Chicago], who much admired the spinning, and she concluded from their conversation that her mother was “the best stick-spindle spinner in America.” When she inquired from me as to the truth of this deduction, I took occasion to describe the Italian village in which her mother had lived, something of her free life, and how, because of the opportunity she and the other women of the village had to drop their spindles over the edge of a precipice, they had developed a skill in spinning beyond that of the neighboring towns...

It was easy to see that the thought of her mother with any other background than that of the tenement was new to Angelina and at least two things resulted; she allowed her mother to pull out of the big box under the bed the beautiful homespun garments which had been previously hidden away as uncouth; and she openly came into the Labor Museum by the same door as did her mother, proud at least of the mastery of the craft which had been so much admired. (Elshtain, 2000, p. 145)

We can imagine that Angela’s experience was quite normal for people coming to the Labor Museum; like Hull House itself, the Labor Museum brought people who were not able to fully participate in democracy-immigrants, poor people, young people, women, and even academics-and widened the circle of enlightenment by “freeing the power” within and connecting them to public life (Addams, 1902/2002).

Addams and Dewey

One of the people who Addams helped bring into

that circle was John Dewey, who is often seen as the founding figure of service-learning. Addams' educational practices had a profound impact on Dewey, who visited Hull House in 1891, before he joined the faculty at the University of Chicago. This was early in the days of Hull House, and the young Dewey, then 32 (Addams was 31), came away impressed. After that visit, Dewey (1892) wrote to Addams,

I cannot tell you how much good I got from the stay at Hull House. My indebtedness to you for giving me an insight into matters there is great. . . .Every day I stayed there only added to my conviction that you had taken the right way. (personal communication, January 27)

Dewey concluded by predicting that other community institutions would apply the experiential educational approach being used by Hull House. "I am confident that 25 years from now the forces now turned in upon themselves in various church and c[ommunity] agencies will be finding outlet very largely just such channels as you have opened." This cemented a life-long friendship and reciprocal partnership. Dewey became a regular visitor, lectured at Hull House's Plato Club, and to the University extension classes taught there. He also became a member of Hull House's original Board of Trustees in 1897 and later named his daughter after Addams.

In some ways it would be counterproductive to claim that Addams was more important than Dewey, or that her work preceded his. They saw themselves as part of the same circle, working on the same problems from different angles. Christopher Lasch (1965), Addams' first posthumous academic champion, wrote that "It is difficult to say whether Dewey influenced Jane Addams or Jane Addams influenced Dewey. They influenced each other and generously acknowledged their mutual obligations" (p.176). Nonetheless, it is worth pointing out that two of Dewey's major works of educational philosophy, "The School as Social Centre" (1902/1976) and *Democracy and Education* (1916), were heavily influenced by his experience at Hull House. In his most direct attribution to Hull House as a model for educational practice in "The School as a Social Settlement," Dewey (Dewey & Dewey, 1915/2003) wrote, "Closer contact with neighborhood conditions not only enriches school work and strengthens motive force in the pupils, but it increases the service rendered to the community" (p. 205-206). The philosopher Charlene Haddock Seigfried (1999) tellingly notes that Dewey's ideal community, a "mode of associated living, or conjoint communicated experience" (p. 213), was first made real at Hull House before he put its essence on the page.

### Applications

Hull House went on to become the most famous

settlement house of its time. Addams became a national spokesperson for this movement, and, based on that renown, an international activist for peace. The settlement idea spread rapidly. In 1891, two years after the founding of Hull House, there were 6 settlements in the United States; by 1897 there were 74. The number quickly jumped to 100 in 1900, doubled to 200 in 1905, and doubled again to more than 400 by 1910 (Davis, 1973). Settlements addressed serious societal issues at the turn of the century, including rapid industrialization, urbanization, a large increase of non-English speaking immigrants from Europe, poverty, child labor, sickness, and political corruption. They created the opportunity for upper-class women to see for themselves the "objective" issues in low-income immigrant communities. Settlements also gave a practical outlet for addressing the "subjective" need for young, idealistic women to work for social change. They built rich partnerships between communities, activists, and academics.

The partnership between Addams and Dewey was but one such relationship that emerged between women who ran settlement houses and (mostly male) university faculty members. If the authors are correct in asserting that these partnerships were one of the origins of service-learning practice, then it follows that service-learning researchers need to pay close attention to service-learning's gendered origins. Gender is particularly important for understanding Addams' views on democracy. Addams and her cohorts in the settlement house movement were among the first generation of college-educated women in the United States. They understood their educations as placing upon them the obligation of improving the public sphere. But in a system where women were not enfranchised with the right to vote, their influence on the formal aspects of democracy was blunted.

In response, Addams developed an understanding of the public sphere significantly different from that emerging from America's universities. Progressive-era academics increasingly described education, society, and democracy in a formal way, as scientific systems: predictable, classifiable, understandable through experimental study, and best led by experts. Addams rejected this notion entirely. Instead, she understood education, society, and democracy as creative systems: unpredictable, understandable through experience and reflection, and open to leaders of all sorts. This is what Addams (1910/1998) meant when she described the settlement as a "protest against a restricted view of education" (p. 175).

Tensions between scientific and creative understandings of education, society, and democracy continue to the present in the service-learning movement. While much of the movement's rhetoric mirrors Addams' views, much of its work is closer to her adversaries in the universities. Service-learning researchers increasingly seek quasi-scientific

ways to assess service-learning, while practitioners look for techniques that will produce predictable outcomes. The authors understand the appeal and contribution of scientific conceptions of education. But we suggest that examining Jane Addams' role in the origins of service-learning leads to several lessons that can only be learned through conceiving of service-learning as creative and relational, not formal and scientific.

Addams is more than an important historical figure in shaping service-learning practice; revisiting the work of Hull House can help address some of the most difficult issues for service-learning work: the problem of time, space and place, service vs. activism, and the apolitical and disempowering tendencies in the practice and language of service. Because Addams comes at each of these issues from the community, rather than the university perspective, she is able to see the issues differently. Addams' example can provide much guidance to contemporary service-learning practice.

### *The "Problem" of Time*

University education is built upon numerous artificial constructions of time. Students take classes in credit hours, courses are offered in terms, students take final examinations and graduate after amassing enough hours over enough terms at the university. These ways of thinking about time grow out of a scientific conception of learning. John Tagg (2003) suggests that common conceptions of time in higher education result in a limited "time horizon," that is, students and teachers think they will have to live with the consequences of their actions at school for only a brief time.

University-based conceptions of time and students' limited time horizon have long been problems in service-learning. They manifest themselves in questions about how many hours of service-learning are sufficient, and in efforts to assess the outcomes of service based on the number of hours volunteered. University-based time constraints also show themselves in the difficult work of establishing a long-term partnership when students will be cycling through short-term service assignments at partner organizations on a regular basis (Wallace, 2000).

Responses to the problem of time often take two paths: to encourage students (often through incentives such as pay or university credit) to continue to serve once a particular course is over, and to create partnerships that can endure after they leave. Both of these approaches work within the university's model of time. Addams' work suggests a third, complementary approach, one that uses a different model of time. Her model is at once attuned to very brief and very long periods of time. For Addams, important insights came from events—brief moments that exemplified significant facts. Addams used these events as the basis for narratives, such as "Angelina Discovering Her Mother's Talents," related above, or the "Devil Baby" at the

core of *The Long Road of Woman's Memory* (1916/2002). These event narratives in turn were the basis for programs, which changed regularly, and conceptions of society, which, for Addams, were quite stable. Service-learning could profit from Addams attention to brief events and their long-term implications.

Events were central to the way Addams learned, but her own endurance at Hull House was central to its success. Once she was completely committed to Hull House in 1889, she lived there until her death in 1935. Hull House's success depended on her endurance there; the partnerships Hull House built relied both on good structure and the long-term commitment of core staff to those partnerships. Today, where service-learning offices are often grant-funded, nonprofits face tenuous existences, and staff turnover is high, Addams' example is a reminder of how important long-term personal commitments are to the work in a particular place.

### *The "Problems" of Place and Space*

Service-learning is increasingly program-driven. That is, funders, universities, nonprofits, and their staffs work to create programs that effectively respond to problems. Though in their application, programs can be localized, in their conception they tend to be generalized—sets of practices or principles that can, in theory, be applied anywhere. Addams' work was not program-driven. Certainly she and her coworkers organized many programs, as discussed in this article. But these programs emerged from a particular place, Chicago. And the programs emerged from a particular space, the open, welcoming, experimental, permanent location of Hull House. Hull House could hold all sorts of activities, and teach all sorts of classes. It could withstand changes in staff and program. Its permanence held practical and symbolic importance in the community. People came to Hull House when their own homes burned down; organizations looking to be born found shelter there. If Hull House is an example today, it is of how important a physical space can be for collaboration and service, especially in pursuit of civic education.

### *The "Problem" of Activism vs. Service*

One of the fiercest debates during the past two decades in service-learning has been the question of whether educators should encourage and support charitable service or political activism (sometimes referred to as social change) among students. Many argue that direct service is an important place to start, but not enough in itself: service must lead across a hierarchical continuum to political activism. The Corporation for National and Community Service, on the other hand, has made this continuum difficult to pursue by notably excluding political activism from an acceptable activity that can be supported with its funds. Morton (1995) argues that charitable service and political activism are both important pieces, but what mat-

ters most is the integrity and movement toward depth in either approach.

Hull House also made it possible for Addams to bridge the divide between service and activism. Being anchored in a neighborhood made face-to-face service possible. Moreover, as a civic space and a mediating institution, Hull House was a constant reminder that service was inseparable from political action.

While Addams (1899/2002) was an outspoken critic of charitable service even in the work at Hull House, service vs. activism was a non-issue there precisely because of the long-term commitment to democratic practice. Hull House was involved in direct charity addressing the needs of neighborhood individuals (English classes, day care, food) and involved in political activism (protesting child labor, hosting organized labor, campaigning against corrupt politicians). It was never an “either-or” choice, partly because decisions were not made on university calendars, grant cycles, or funders’ interests. Hull House was committed to addressing neighborhood problems, whether they were essential needs or structural reform. In terms of a long-term commitment, all issues were seen in a larger democratic context of public problem-solving. Addams often said that Hull House was about creating a vibrant democracy, with a diverse group of people contributing their talents to the common lot. As she states in *Democracy and Social Ethics*, “this is the penalty of democracy: that we are bound to move retrograde or forward together. None of us can stand aside” (1902/2002, p. 112).

### *The “Problem” of Service*

Some of the harshest criticisms of service-learning have come from public intellectuals who, like Addams, approach campus-community partnerships with a community perspective and political orientation. Harry Boyte, (forthcoming, 2004) codirector of the Center for Democracy and Citizenship at the University of Minnesota, for instance, contends that service-learning routinely “neglects to teach about root causes and power relationships, fails to stress productive impact, ignores politics, and downplays the strengths and talents of those being served” (p. 12). Moreover, the paradigmatic stance of service, Boyte argues, is the “outside expert.” Likewise, John McKnight (1995) of the Asset-Based Community Development Institute at Northwestern University, critiques the professional nature of service provision which views people in communities for their deficiencies, rather than their assets.

Addams (1899/2002), who worried about the “problems of a charitable orientation,” would certainly be sympathetic to these criticisms. Addams was a generalist, and a critic of the trend towards professionalization that progressives bequeathed to higher education in the early 20th century (Lasch, 1995). Addams was also suspicious of expert-driven solutions; for instance, Addams was more critical of

middle class progressive reformers than corrupt ward bosses she fought all of her life, because the ward bosses were at least democratic in method, not leaving government to the “experts.” And, unlike the reformers, the corrupt politicians were “engaged in the great moral effort of getting the mass to express itself, and of adding this mass energy and wisdom to the community as a whole” (Addams, 1902/2002, p. 118).

Hull House allowed ordinary people to contribute their talents and skills to the common lot, as is evident in the Labor Museum, which celebrated, honored, and utilized immigrants’ skills. Addams’ philosophy did not view service-learning as a program to deliver services to the less fortunate; service-learning, Addams believed, was the obligation of citizenship being co-created by those with mutual interests. Addams took this lesson from her early visit to Toynbee Hall in London. Canon Barnett, who founded the first settlement house, described the distinguishing feature of Toynbee Hall and the settlement movement as, “the absence of program and the presence of men and women who recognize the obligations of citizenship” (Barnett & Barnett, 1909, p. 286).

Again, it is important to see the response to these critics in the creative and relational elements of the work at Hull House. Just after starting Hull House in 1892, Addams (1893/2002) said:

The one thing to be dreaded in the Settlement is that it lose its flexibility, its power of quick adaptation, its readiness to change its methods as its environments may demand....It must be hospitable and ready to experiment....It must be founded on the solidarity of the human race....[Its residents] must be content to live quietly side by side with their neighbors until they grow into a sense of relationship and mutual interests....In short, residents are pledged to devote themselves to the duties of good citizenship and to arousing of the social energies which too largely lie dormant in every neighborhood given over to industrialism. (p. 26)

The by-products of industrialization from the turn of the 20th century are more pervasive today than ever, manifesting themselves in the commodification of society and spread of marketplace values in education. Moreover, the “scientific” civic and educational assumptions born in the industrial age remain largely in force. Addams, whose work responded to these conditions with flexibility and creativity, thus continues to provide good guidance today. Her emphasis on narrative and relationship over statistics and programs, and her ability to make good on the promise of collaboration among diverse people should impel others to greater agility and wisdom in service-learning work, and provide hope that service-learning can be more than a program and contribute greatly to building a vibrant democracy.

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