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Jane Addams, Hull-House, and the "Danger" of Women's Work

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Abstract: In this paper, we investigate the work of Jane Addams and Hull-House, through Cornel West's (1999) ideas of prophetic pragmatism. In accordance with West's writings, we consider the importance of investigating the historical underpinnings of what we believe to be true, while at the same time questioning existing practices, and considering where and from whose work these practices originate. Addams and Hull-House were revolutionary during their time and their work resulted in major neighborhood and community reform. Additionally, through the open forums and frequent visitors to Hull-House, the work there influenced many of Addams' contemporaries, including John Dewey. Yet, historically, women like Jane Addams and their work have been marginalized as being less than the work of men. We contend that this practice needs to be changed. We pay particular attention to the relationship between Addams' and Dewey's ideas, chiefly in *Democracy and Education* (1916). We pull from and suggest that social work, feminism, community-based research, and pragmatism should be "informing disciplines" for 21st century art education. Expanding West's notion of prophetic pragmatism, we suggest a feminist prophetic pragmatist lens (Hamington, 2009) through which to view Addams' work, the work of the residents of Hull-House, and their situation within the histories of Art Education.

Cornel West's (1999) ideas of prophetic pragmatism highlight the importance of critically investigating histories of art education, embracing the strong practices from the past and revolutionizing the field for the future. We suggest that informing disciplines for 21st century art education should include social work, feminism, community-based research, and pragmatism as we look back at ideas that emanated from Jane Addams and Hull-House to, "keep alive the sense of alternative ways of life and of struggle based on the best of the past" (West, 1999, p. 161). Addams and Hull-House were revolutionary during their time in history and their work resulted in reform as well as influence on others including John Dewey. Historically, women, like Jane Addams and their work have been marginalized as being less than

the work of men; we strongly feel this practice needs to end. Further, we expand on West’s notion of prophetic pragmatism by suggesting a feminist prophetic pragmatist lens (Hamington, 2009, 2010) through which to view Addams’ work, the work of the residents of Hull-House, and their place within the histories of Art Education.

Hull-House

We began this research as a result of a visit to the Jane Addams Hull-House Museum in Chicago, Illinois. The nurturing and playful approach to both the museum design and the stories and history of the settlement were indicative of the loving, caring, and respectful relationships among the residents and the community. Further, the significant role of the arts, education, and the ties built between and among settlement house residents and the community enabled their work to proceed in a symbiotic manner. Through the programming at Hull-House, Addams and others worked in a responsive, collaborative fashion. They approached their work as an experiment and, rather than the top-down approaches common at that time, they utilized working with and learning from others. Through this work across difference, they sought to change the mindset of middle and upper-middle class women who first lived at Hull-House as well as the working-class residents of the neighborhood not through charity and support alone, but by living, working, and researching together. During our visit, we learned that not all of her contemporaries were impressed with her work. Due to her peace activism during World War I, her battle for women’s rights, and commitment to Hull-House as a space for democratic debate, the FBI maintained a file on Addams. The Daughters of the American Revolution named her, “the most dangerous woman in the United States” (Hull-House Museum text panel, April, 2015).

Hull-House was a settlement house, modeled after the English versions including Toynbee Hall in London that Addams and her partner, Ellen Gates Starr, visited together. Addams and Starr met at the Rockford Female Seminary in Illinois in 1878. Starr later taught in Chicago for 10 years where she and Addams rekindled their friendship (Brown, 2004). They traveled together through Europe in 1888 and during their time in London, they were very impressed by how the residents at Toynbee Hall worked with neighborhood residents toward the amelioration of poverty. Still functioning today, Toynbee Hall maintains its early goal of bringing “future leaders to live and work as volunteers in London’s East End, bringing them face to face with poverty, and giving them the opportunity to develop practical solutions that they could take with them into national life” (Toynbee Hall, 2016). Addams’ and Starr’s interest in Toynbee Hall led them to consider founding a similar institution in Chicago. When searching for a location for their settlement house, Jane Addams enlisted the help of many people in and around the Chicago area. Through these contacts, she learned about the neighborhood, its history, and the people who lived there. After viewing different properties and considering various possibilities, on September 18, 1889 Jane Addams, Ellen Starr, and Mary Keyser moved in to Hull House, a rundown mansion in an immigrant neighborhood that was being used as a warehouse.

Within days of its founding, the programming at Hull-House began with a reading group for women started by Ellen Gates Starr. The work of Hull-House expanded quickly, responding to the needs of those in the community by offering a kindergarten and child-care that was available for working mothers in the neighborhood. In the coming months and years, the

programming at Hull-House expanded rapidly and included classes for boys and girls, cooking classes, theater classes, art classes, physical education, bookbinding, among others. Hull-House also functioned as a site for community meetings with trade union meetings, various lectures, women’s suffrage groups, and others utilizing the space. Within just a few years, Hull-House expanded its physical incarnation with the first building addition—Butler Art Gallery. Dedicated in 1891, this gallery adjoined the main Hull-House building. Its programming, modeled after a similar program at Toynbee Hall, included lending pictures to people in the neighborhood (Chicago’s Toynbee Hall, 1891). The expansions of Hull-House continued over the years with many new building projects and programs coming as a result of neighborhood needs. Rather than view their work as a transmission model, Addams, Starr, and the residents at Hull-House believed they could simultaneously be learners and teachers. In 1904, Addams wrote about a cooking class at Hull-House in which the Italian women were learning English from their instructors who, in turn, were learning to cook pasta from the Italian women. This reciprocity existed throughout the work of Hull-House and extended to programming decision-making (Daynes & Longo, 2004).

Efforts at social work and the amelioration of social problems in the late 19th century often involved an overt emphasis on Christianity and the moral failing of the people who needed assistance (Addams, 1927). Such an approach was in marked contrast to the work done at Hull-House. It included a de facto medical clinic to assist women whose circumstances, including physically abusive relationships, childbirth out of wedlock, or extreme poverty, rendered them invisible or undesirable within the dominant medical system that directly related to Christian morals of the time. Thus, rather than impose or enforce a particular religious doctrine upon the neighborhood residents, the workers at Hull-House chose to develop programs that worked with the needs of the people while recognizing and accepting them, their nationalities, their professions, and their family structures. In 1895, Addams, stating the importance of reciprocity in Hull-House programming, noted that after a few years of Hull-House programs, they realized the need to change their thinking from a model of “uplifting” people toward a collaborative model that addressed needs expressed by the neighborhood residents (Daynes and Longo, 2004).

Research at Hull-House

An especially inspiring feature of the Hull House Museum is the research map installation. The maps show the neighborhood streets, residencies, and shops color-coded according to resident nationalities, occupations, and wages. Jane Addams insisted upon the fact that the investigators who gathered the data and contributed to the maps and research papers were Hull-House settlement residents. She felt strongly that no dissociated scholar from a university or governmental agency could convey the neighborhood story as genuinely and sincerely while at the same time cast a critical glance on ways and needs to improve the lives of those who actually lived and worked there could (Schultz, 2007). The maps included such information as numbers of tenements, number of persons, family members’ names, and their relationship to head of family. Researchers gathered information related to gender, race, schooling, English skills, and daily work hours along with such personal information as conjugal conditions. The number of stories and privies in each house and the state of ventilation and cleanliness were included in the data as well. Agnes Sinclair Holbrook (1895), a resident of Hull-House, designed the nationalities map and described the occasional dwelling houses “tucked in like

babies under the arms of industry" (p. 53), though sweet, served as a gentle and palatable (if possible) introduction to some of the squalid conditions in which many of the people lived. From "piles of garbage fairly alive with diseased odors" to the "numbers of children filling every nook, working and playing in every room, eating and sleeping in every window-sill, pouring in and out of every door, and seeming literally to pave every scrap of yard" (p. 54), her account of the neighborhood was detailed and purposeful. She wrote, "The possibility of helping toward and improvement in the sanitation of the neighborhood, and toward and introduction of some degree of comfort, has given purpose and confidence to this undertaking" (p. 57). Although modeled after Charles Booth's (1889) Poverty Maps in *Life and Labour of the People of London*, Holbrook recognized that their study of one-third of a square mile of Chicago did not carry the same weight or significance as Booth's study of the whole of London. Published in 1895, the maps included in *Hull-House Maps and Papers* were very detailed and the "minuteness of this survey will entitle it to a rank of its own, both as a photographic reproduction of Chicago's poorest quarters on the west, and her worst on the east of the river, and as an illustration of a method of research" (p. 57).

Throughout their research, numerous different people played a role and studied aspects of the neighborhood related to their expertise. For instance, Florence Kelley, State Inspector of Factories and Workshops for Illinois, researched and shared conditions in what was called the "sweating-system" or garment shops. Kelley, along with Alzina P. Stevens, also reported on wage-earning children. Isabel Eaton studied the receipts and expenditures of cloak makers in Chicago and Julia C. Lathrop described the Cook County Charities. Though the majority of the researchers were women, Charles Zeublin, Josefa Humpal-Zeman, and Alessandro Mastro-Valerio reported on the different ethnic groups living near Hull-House. The work of Jane Addams and the Hull-House residents went beyond the basic concept of the Settlement house movement that brought upper and middle class people into lower-class neighborhoods to live and work together as well as provide education and social aid (Marshall, 1996).

Recognizing that laws needed to be changed if poverty was to ever end, the residents and workers lobbied together with Addams to study the juvenile justice system, child labor laws, and factory working conditions, as well as protection from exploitation for immigrants, limitations of women's working hours, schooling for children, labor unions, and safety. The research conducted and shared by the Hull-House residents served as impetus for a number of reform projects and movements including the Immigrants' Protective League, The Juvenile Protective Association, the first juvenile court in the nation, and a Juvenile Psychopathic Clinic, later renamed the Institute for Juvenile Research (Hansan, 2010).

Besides the important fact that settlement residents were the researchers involved in these studies, of utmost value are the ways the findings informed the work of the Hull-House itself. For example, Hull-House offered a range of kindergarten classes and other supervised programs such as art, crafts, culture, and physical activities for children in the neighborhood. Similarly, in response to research showing that women were not represented in labor unions primarily due to the sites of their meetings—saloon halls, the cloak makers union organized at Hull-House in the spring of 1892. Although Jane Addams championed unions, she strongly cautioned against the ideas that employers should care of and protect their workers because they were less fortunate somehow (Bronk, 2009, p. 143). Addams echoed the ideas of the workers who considered themselves free citizens of a free state who needed not class

protection, but the political rights of all those living in a democracy. According to Addams (1895):

> The settlement is pledged to insist upon the unity of life, to gather to itself the sense of righteousness to be found in its neighborhood, and as far as possible in its city; to work towards the betterment not of one kind of people or class of people, but for the common good. (p. 148)

The goal of working for the common good connects directly to the practice of democracy with citizen engagement and interest in their own and their community members' well being a crucial goal. Through her work at Hull-House, Addams developed a range of approaches to community needs.

John Dewey and Jane Addams: Ideological Intersections

A contemporary of Jane Addams, John Dewey was well aware of Hull-House, its programming, and its effects on the neighborhood. He often visited Hull-House and ate together with Addams and other residents and guests in the Hull-House dining room. He taught a Greek philosophy class to some of the male residents. Thus, he was well aware of and connected to the work of Hull-House. After Dewey left Chicago, he and Addams corresponded through letters and sometimes discussed and debated philosophical concepts (Menard, 2001). Over time, philosophies have circulated attributed mainly to Dewey and the influence of Jane Addams, Hull-House, and the women there has not been as clearly articulated as his connections to the Lab School and male philosophers in Chicago at that time. Many of Dewey's ideas are ones he built based on the work at Hull-House. For example, both Addams and Dewey were proponents of pragmatism and believed that knowledge was achieved through human experience (Kaag, 2009). According to Kaag (2009), Dewey, Addams, and other contemporaries believed that, philosophy should be viewed as, "the result of human beings thinking through the meaningful questions of living as embodied thoughtful organisms" (p. 63). Dewey believed that when people think about any aspect of life, "as an organic, contextually embedded whole, it becomes meaningful and useful for life, learning, and growth" (Leffers, 1993, p. 70). The focus on the holistic aspect of an entity (a neighborhood) and the attention to the importance of art in daily life (the lending library and various art classes at Hull-House), and the idea of the interconnectedness of various aspects (living conditions, health issues, labor laws, mortality rates) reverberates the ideas embedded in the work of Addams and Starr. Granted, we are aware that Dewey acknowledged Addams (Dewey, 1902). The problem is that more recent art education literature does not significantly address Addams' role in the development of Dewey's ideas or her contributions to our field. While some scholars in art education have addressed Addams' work in a significant fashion (Packard, 1976; Stankiewicz, 1989), other scholars limit their discussions of her work to cursory mentions (Buffington, 2009; Collins & Sandell, 1984; Efland, 1990; Funk, 2014). Therefore, we believe that her contributions deserve deeper and renewed attention within art education.

Siegfried (1996) argued that that Dewey's *Democracy and Education* (1916) drew directly from his experience at Hull-House and that Dewey's ideas regarding democratic community were instantiated at Hull-House. In fact, it was Hull-House's practices of bringing people together, experiential learning, empathy building, and inquiry-based problem solving that Dewey found particularly significant (Dewey, 1902). Addams' beliefs in the importance of experience and

shared knowledge were echoed in Dewey's *Art as Experience* (1934) when he claimed that "vital experience is something more than placing something on the top of consciousness over what was previously known. It involves reconstruction which may be painful" (p. 42). There is little doubt the impact on the field of art education was great from *Art as Experience*—a text whose foundational structure can be traced to the work of Jane Addams and Hull-House (Siegfried, 2010).

Investigating Addams' work at Hull-House and its influence on John Dewey involves looking to the past and how it informs 21st century education. Through a critical lens, we explore Jane Addams' and John Dewey's contributions to art education as well as consider the direction that pragmatism may take in the 21st century, looking to the prophetic pragmatism of Cornel West as radical trajectory.

Prophetic pragmatism theory asks one to be mindful of history as living, as subject to interpretation, and celebratory of the best of the past. Because of this, the philosophical approach could be situated within a productive postmodern approach to historical research. That said, it is important to consider how we need to interpret the past so that we do not, inadvertently, repeat the inequities that were present there. Consequently, as we consider the importance of Dewey's work, it is important to consider the range of influences, including Addams, on the development of Dewey's pivotal ideas.

Cornel West (1999) claims prophetic pragmatism is pragmatism at its best for its ability to promote "critical temper and democratic faith" (p. 186) without fetishizing criticism or democracy. Prophetic pragmatism encourages new interpretations of history based on the past and a building of new ideas based on foundational knowledge. Such prophetic pragmatism might provide the necessary openings through which to view the work of Jane Addams and Hull-House and insert those histories into an established canon whose focus has traditionally been on the work of men. Like Hamington (2010), we contend that it is not history that is male dominated, but rather the portrayal of history that excludes the importance of the work of such women as Addams. We also agree with Hamington (2009), that West's notion of prophetic pragmatism needs to be challenged to include Jane Addams and other concerns of a feminist prophetic pragmatist approach.

We recognize that Cornel West's claims are not without criticism. Prophetic pragmatism, some say, appeals to those who already occupy spaces of power because prophetic pragmatism does little to disrupt established control (Wood as cited in Hamington, 2009, p. 83). Others problematize prophetic pragmatism and its rootedness in religion (Tunstall as cited in Hamington, p. 83). Most compelling, however, are the critiques that West's reliance on Dewey misses an opportunity to address a gendered history of pragmatism and that "women's voices and ideas are erased in West's formulation of prophetic pragmatism" (Hamington, 2009, p. 84). Hamington introduces the notion of *feminist prophetic pragmatism* as a way to engage with tradition while maintaining a critical distance necessary to unfold the histories of overlooked and underrepresented persons. Feminist prophetic pragmatism and postmodern, intersectional concerns of feminism (Crenshaw, 1989; hooks, 2000) provide a framework for the retelling of Jane Addams as a significant historical figure, on who Hamington (2009) claims "used the media even more effectively than Dewey" (p. 86). Unlike Dewey, Addams was unbound by institutional academic politics and "able to maintain a critical perspective and experiential integrity" (p. 87). Hamington goes on to say that Addams "prefiguratively adopted West's call

for prophetic pragmatist philosophers" (p. 87) and yet, West has largely ignored her work and contributions. Feminist prophetic pragmatism recognizes an historical Jane Addams not in spite of her gender, but because she is a woman. Art education and its history, we posit, stand to benefit from a similar rethinking of documented histories, their retelling, and a more significant inclusion of Jane Addams as a Mother of Art Education.

Conclusion

Jane Addams and the other residents, researchers, teachers, and learners took an obvious pragmatic approach to their work and lives at Hull-House. Indeed, their ideas and goals to work with the each other toward better lives through social and political action influenced most every aspect of Hull-House. Addams' own deep sense and value of democracy was tantamount in the planning, development, programming, research, and everyday occurrences at the settlement. The problem, as Hamington (2009) put it is that Addams' contributions to pragmatism and Dewey's work have not been clearly articulated by Cornel West (1999) and others. We recognize that in his lifetime, Dewey mentioned Addams and the influence of Hull-House (Siegfried, 1996). We found, too that in his teaching, he often utilized her book, *Democracy and Social Ethics* (Siegfried, 1996, p. 74). However, in our own art educational experiences and research, this connection has not been made. We believe this element of the past has been lost over time and we wish to rectify that through this discussion. We are concerned that the tendency has been to tell histories by focusing on the contributions of men, even those who acknowledged the contributions of women who were their contemporaries. We question how much we can possibly reinterpret the past if we're still running it through a male-dominated history. According to Marilyn Fischer (2001), "Addams' herself often analyzed "ethically troubling situations, not in terms of right and wrong or good and evil, but in terms of maladjustment, where values and codes of earlier times have not been readjusted with changing social conditions and newly emerging values" (p. 280). It appears that now more than ever, values are expanding, norms are being questioned, and social justice is at the forefront of our practice in art education. So, too should our view and reinterpretation of history be expanded and indeed, questioned through a lens of purposeful inclusivity, even if that is deemed "dangerous."

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