

“Socializing Democracy”: The Community Literacy Pedagogy of Jane Addams

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This article reclaims Jane Addams as a community literacy pedagogue and explicates her pedagogical theory through an analysis of her social thought. Addams’ goal of “socializing democracy” through education led her to both encourage immigrant students to associate across difference and to assimilate into dominant literacies—tensions present in today’s community literacy contexts. The article includes suggestions for rhetorically redeploying Addams’ pedagogy in contemporary writing instruction.

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—Jane Addams, 1902

The closure of Jane Addams’ Hull House in 2012 was a milestone in the history of community literacy. For over 120 years, the Hull House had provided literacy instruction, along with a wealth of other human services, to the diverse neighborhoods on the West Side of Chicago. Much has been written on Jane Addams’ role in founding the American settlement house movement, influencing the philosophy of famed education scholar John Dewey, shaping modern social work theory, and catalyzing progressive-era social reforms (Peadar Kirby, Robbins, Deegan), yet Addams’ significant historical role as a community literacy pedagogue has often gone unrecognized.

As a community-literacy forerunner in the early 1900s, Addams led the Hull House in hosting a wide range of innovative community-literacy activities, from literature and political theory reading clubs to place-based adult ESL classes, community theatre, and social-action writing groups. In her twelve books and over five hundred articles, Addams had quite a bit to say about teaching literacy in community contexts. Her writings, along with memoirs of Hull House clients and student texts, provide a portrait of a literacy worker who challenged existing ideas about educating underserved populations, invested in teaching language as a form of social action, and developed a broad notion of literacy that extended beyond functional literacy to include cultural, workplace, and political literacies.

In this article, I work to reconstruct Addams’ community literacy pedagogy: first to reclaim Addams as a community literacy theorist, exploring how her social

thought based in the concept of “socialized democracy” and symbolic interactionism might be enacted as a pedagogy; and second, to use the Hull House as a case study for assessing related challenges and opportunities in today’s community literacy contexts. In particular, insights from Addams’ work may resonate with instructors, both inside and particularly outside the university, who see literacy instruction as a path to civic engagement for students. While civic engagement is a notoriously contested term, I follow the Coalition for Civic Engagement and Leadership in defining civic engagement as “acting upon a heightened sense of responsibility to one’s communities,” which includes a variety of activities that allow “individuals—as citizens of their communities, their nations, and the world—[to be] empowered as agents of positive social change for a more democratic world” (qtd. in Jacoby 9).

Addams upheld many of these aims through her pedagogy as she linked reading and writing to social action, encouraging the mostly immigrant student population she taught to use literacy to become involved in the issues impacting their Chicago neighborhood. Her pedagogy serves as a case study of ways of approaching differences—such as race, class, language, and nationality—in the engaged community-literacy classroom. In particular, her civic engagement pedagogy both assimilated students into dominant literacies, emphasizing American language and taste, and encouraged association across social differences, promoting relationships between people of different backgrounds. I will explore how these strategies both supported and undermined her goal of social equality.

I begin by reconstructing Addams’ social philosophy, discussing how this philosophy was grounded in George Herbert Mead’s concept of symbolic interactionism. Mead theorized how people develop in interaction with others through symbols, a framework Addams expanded by emphasizing the role of emotion in this process. She combined this expanded version of symbolic interactionism with an ethic of democracy to create a framework for how to build a better society—and consequently, created a philosophy of education. I explain how Addams’ social thought led to twin literacy pedagogies of assimilation and association. Next, I detail how each of these pedagogies was enacted at the Hull House, and I conclude with suggestions for a more rhetorical redeployment of Addams’ pedagogy in contemporary community literacy programs to avoid some of Addams’ pitfalls. We turn first, then, to a key term in Addams’ work that I argue serves as the basis for her philosophy: socializing democracy.

Socializing Democracy

Jane Addams’s autobiography, *Twenty Years at Hull House*, ends with a culminating sentence asserting that the ultimate aim of education is “to socialize democracy” (*On Education* 55). Understanding Addams’ pedagogy, then, requires a journey into her social philosophy. For Addams, democracy is more than a political system; it is a set of values and a way of living. She holds to “a conception of Democracy not merely as a sentiment which desires the well-being of “all men [sic]”, nor yet as a creed which believes in the essential dignity and equality of all men, but as that which affords a

rule of living as well as a test of faith” (*Democracy* 7). That is, she lifts the ethics that permeate the political idea of democracy, such as equality of all citizens and access to participation, and applies these values to all of life. A belief in the dignity of all people was not a passive ideal for Addams; it required striving so that everyone could develop to full potential. Added to this ethical ideal is a “test of faith”—a pragmatic commitment to evaluating ideas solely based on their consequences when they are put into practice. Democracy is thus an attempt to manifest the concept of equality in all sectors of life through revisable practices.

How, then, is democracy “socialized?” Jane Addams never explicitly defines “socialized democracy,” but one approach supported by her essay “Socializing Education” is to bring democratic ideals to social relations in the United States. This approach, which I term *association*, seeks to foster inclusiveness in social activities and encourage interaction between classes and races. Addams writes that learning “has to be diffused in a social atmosphere, information must be held in solution, in a medium of fellowship and good will” (*Twenty Years* 427). This fellowship extends to a diverse range of fellow humans; education should “connect [the student] with all sorts of people” (*Twenty Years* 436) and promote relationships across cultural and class boundaries.

I would like to suggest that symbolic interactionism, a line of thought developed by University of Chicago professor George Herbert Mead, may illuminate the connection between association across difference and democracy in Addams’ philosophy. Mead was a close friend of Addams, often sharing meals at the Hull House and collaborating with her on reform efforts. This mutual influence extended to their philosophy; historian Mary Jo Deegan writes that links between their epistemological ties are “overwhelming” (121). Mead’s symbolic interactionism posits that the self develops in interaction with others through communicative symbols. A self is comprised of an “I” who acts and a “me” who sees the self as an object and reflects on how others interpret the “I.” In essence, we develop as we learn to see ourselves through the eyes of others. Therefore, the self develops the most richly when it has the opportunity to interact with a wide range of people. Diverse interaction also leads to a stronger society as it teaches people to better understand the perspectives of others—in Mead’s words, to rationally “take the role of the other” (254). Echoing Mead, Addams discusses the importance of learning about the experiences of a wide range of people, asserting that “social perspective and sanity of judgment come only from contact with social experience; that such contact is the surest corrective of opinions concerning the social order, and concerning efforts, however humble, for its improvement” (*Democracy* 7). In particular, she highlights how time spent with people from different cultures plays a role in “upsetting” assumptions about the universal validity of conventions and helps people realize the situated nature of their viewpoints (*Democracy* 21).

Addams’ version of symbolic interactionism parallels Mead’s focus on the intellectual ability to understand the perspectives of others, but she expands his theory by emphasizing how communication allows shared feelings and an emotional understanding. Scholars have noted that Addams anticipates Carol Gilligan and Nel

Nodding's concept of an "ethic of care" (Leffers; Hamington), in which ethical motive is based not primarily on abstract conceptions of justice but on a sense of emotional connection. In *Newer Ideals of Peace*, Addams explains that ethics are grounded in compassion, and her social ethic involves extending identification beyond one's immediate group to more distant groups. Addams vividly emphasizes the crucial nature of empathy for democracy, which is developed by interacting with a range of people:

We are learning that a standard of social ethics is not attained by traveling a sequestered byway, but by mixing on the thronged and common road where all must turn out for one another, and at least see the size of one another's burdens. To follow the path of social morality results perforce in the temper if not the practice of the democratic spirit, for it implies that diversified human experience and resultant sympathy which are the foundation and guarantee of Democracy. (7)

Associating with a variety of people fosters a sense of emotional connection with others and offers insight into different experiences and cultural logics, ultimately developing a self who is committed to the common good rather than individual interests (*Democracy* 9). Therefore, socializing democracy through association involves using interaction across social barriers to foster an expansion of perspectives and affections that leads to a wider investment in equality. The fact that this interaction occurs through language and symbols, following symbolic interactionism, holds significant implications for literacy pedagogy, as I will demonstrate in the following sections.

While the associational sense of "socialized democracy" appears to be the most common understanding of the term when it is used by Addams scholars, I suggest that another reading of "socialized democracy" is possible, especially when the term is considered in context. This understanding reads "socializing" as implicitly or explicitly training people in dominant cultural values and behaviors—teaching people to *assimilate*. Consider Addams' famous culminating sentence about socializing democracy in context of the paragraph that precedes it in *Twenty Years at Hull House*:

The Settlement casts side none of those things which cultivated men [sic] have come to consider reasonable and goodly, but it insists that those belong as well to that great body of people who, because of toilsome and underpaid labor, are unable to procure them for themselves. Added to this is a profound conviction that the common stock of intellectual enjoyment should not be difficult of access because of the economic position of him [sic] who would approach it, that those "best results of civilization" upon which depend the finer and freer aspects of living must be incorporated into our common life and have free mobility through all elements of society if we would have our democracy endure.

The educational activities of a Settlement, as well its philanthropic, civic, and social undertakings, are but differing manifestations of the attempt to socialize democracy, as is the very existence of the Settlement itself (452-3).

Here, in a departure from earlier parts of the essay that focused on association, Addams explicitly states that the goal of the settlement is to spread "finer" culture to new immigrants. Pierre Bourdieu's theory of habitus illuminates the dynamics of this type of socialization in relation to power. Bourdieu defined "habitus" as the taste of a particular group—their style, wit, etiquette, discriminatory ability, and expected patterns of discourse and behavior. He explains that the habitus of the dominant group, as the site of production for social normativities, becomes equated with power and refined culture and creates a designation of this habitus as "superior." Therefore, socializing democracy in this sense means equalizing society by providing underserved people access to the dominant habitus and insisting they adopt it, which, according to the logic of assimilation, allows them to stand on more equal footing with "cultivated" Americans. Of course, assimilation also enacts profound inequality by pressuring people to abandon their original cultural habitus, a form of institutional racism.

Returning to the tenets of symbolic interactionism clarifies Addams' particular version of assimilation. If the interaction needed for societal and individual development is dependent on symbols and language, it follows that a high priority will be placed on inducting immigrants into dominant American language as soon as possible. Assimilation through the lens of symbolic interactionism becomes a matter of providing access to the symbolic community, and thus opportunities for personal growth, cross-cultural understanding, and greater democracy. Yet the danger of this approach is the implications of erasing the immigrants' own symbols and language. Limiting nondominant forms of interaction alters the personal and communal development of immigrants—there is access to more than one symbolic community at stake. Addams at times recognized these dangers, and her writings are fraught with contradictions as she worked out her views on assimilation.

These two understandings of socializing, association and assimilation, reinforce and resist each other in Addams' pedagogy. We will never know which sense she intended in *Twenty Years at Hull House*. Both senses of "socializing"—relating to social activities and training in refined culture—were in circulation during her lifetime (OED), and both are present in her teaching, as I explore below. In addition, Addams herself was not a stable identity, and disconnections occurred between her philosophy and practice, between her different books and articles, and between her perspective on her teaching and what her students experienced. The interaction between these two forms of socialization and democracy is especially complicated because in some ways, assimilation is the logical underside of association given the need for common cultural codes for interaction. Yet in other ways, association positions difference as a resource to self and societal development, refuting assimilation into a single culture. The following case study of Jane Addams' pedagogy, at heart, is an inquiry into the

tensions within the term “socializing democracy”: how the “socializing”—assimilation and association—supports and undermines the “democracy”—social equality writ large.

Thus, these two versions of socialized democracy offer a frame for parsing out the methods and results of Addams’ pedagogy and provide a starting point for exploring how a pedagogy of socialized democracy might further what many contemporary teachers, along with Addams, consider the ultimate aim of community literacy instruction: facilitating social change for a more democratic and equal world.

Association

The clashing of cultures becomes a powerfully generative force in the effort to socialize democracy through association. Such “situations of tension,” for Addams, can become sites for revising attitudes and assumptions, which spur self and community growth as people encounter other ways of interpreting the world (*On Education* 210). Therefore, defying the cultural-deficit model of immigrants common at the turn of the century—and still common today—Addams writes, “We may make foreign birth a handicap to them and to us, or we may make it a very interesting and stimulating factor in their development and ours” (*Twenty Years* 410). Her pedagogy worked to create spaces for groups to co-mingle across difference through face-to-face interaction, student writing assignments, and readings about the experiences of others.

At the Hull House, opportunities for association were merged with literacy activities—often in a political context. Addams facilitated diverse English classes in conjunction with shirt-maker union meetings and coordinated discussions on current events with immigrants from a range of cultures. She emphasized the social nature of literacy learning by hosting parties for students and their families to create a sense of community in the classroom and to provide a social medium for education: “And so they learned to use English in order to play with it, so to speak. I believe that we never know a language until we have used it for social, for non-useful, non-essential purposes” (*On Education* 208). This spirit of play also brought Hull House to teach language through theater and music classes in order to develop pronunciation, reading, and fluency skills through lively performances and rehearsals.

Social association also extended beyond the Hull House neighborhood, as Addams worked to arrange cross-cultural, face-to-face exchanges between recent immigrants and upper-class Americans. For example, the Americans tutored Italians in English while learning how to cook Italian macaroni—“such a different thing from the semi-elastic product which Americans honor with that name” (*On Education* 120). This approach led to social, nontraditional spaces and postures for learning. Americans taught English to immigrant women in the kitchen, because “to learn to speak English would be a comparatively easy thing for an Italian woman while she was handling kitchen utensils and was in the midst of familiar experiences, [instead of] in the cramped, unnatural position which sitting at a child’s school desk implies” (*On Education* 121). Through the power of human discourse, these social exchanges

offered opportunities not only for properly *al dente* noodles and improved English conversation, but for affective relations and greater understanding between classes and cultures.

Writing offered another crucial medium for symbolic interaction across difference—an opportunity for students to present the cultural logics behind their perspectives as well as to express their emotional experiences to build bonds with the audience. Writing projects therefore at times followed what we might today term *expressivism*, as students detailed their “hopes and longings” in plays, wrote essays “outpouring sorrows,” and told stories of why they decided to immigrate to America (*Twenty Years* 436). These expressivist pieces, though, were often written with a strong sense of audience and persuasive purpose. Student papers invited the audience to understand the worldview of the writer. Addams describes an essay that resonates with a pedagogy of association:

I remember a pathetic effort on the part of a young Russian Jewess to describe the vivid inner life of an old Talmud scholar, probably her uncle or father, as of one persistently occupied with the grave and important things of the spirit, although when brought into sharp contact with busy and overworked people, he inevitably appeared self-absorbed and slothful. Certainly no one who had read her paper could again see such an old man in his praying shawl bent over his crabbed book, without a sense of understanding. (*Twenty Years* 437)

Pathos played a key role in bending judgmental attitudes toward a “sense of understanding” through writing, as students wrote with the goal of describing their interpretive lens and experiences to invoke emotional and intellectual comprehension. Writing served as a medium for sharing experiences and mixing on Addams’ “thronged and common road,” thus building democratic spirit (*Newer Ideals* 7).

Political essays written for Hull House classes also sometimes centered on explaining the experiences of people, and specifically the injustices they faced, because a purpose of mixing on the common road was to “see the size of one another’s burdens” (*Newer Ideals* 7). A popular genre at Hull House, political essays covered topics such as trade unions, the single tax, and the collection of garbage (Polacheck 94). As Van Hillard explains, these essays sometimes followed “the methods of critical description associated with progressivist reform texts” (115), using sharp sensory detail to help audiences smell and brush up against the injustices that were part of poverty.

For example, Hilda Satt Polacheck authored a piece calling for food market sanitation reform during a Hull House writing class taught by Henry Porter Chandler, and she included the essay, titled “The Ghetto Market,” in her autobiography. She reaches out to an audience different than her, one unfamiliar with urban street markets, writing, “Few people whose work does not take them into the neighborhood have any idea what the Ghetto market is like” (78). She proceeds to narrate her own journey to the Ghetto market, beckoning the audience toward the line of gasoline lamps that light the market, which are “nailed to the houses in an irregular line . . . like a poorly-

organized torch-light parade” (78). She describes a fish merchant wearing clothing of a color now indistinguishable because of years of fish drippings as he weighs fish on a dirty scale without washing his hands. Next she visits a cake stand, where “the flies seemed very much at home . . . from the constant buzzing,” a situation which Polacheck notes is a likely source of typhoid fever (79). Polacheck’s call to reform at the end of the essay comes after offering her audience a tour of the market, giving them a chance to understand the experiences of people in her neighborhood. Here, Polacheck is striving to open lines of communication across class barriers, and to turn knowledge about the daily lives of people that shop at the market into empathy and motivation for social change.

Addams’ pedagogy of association thus anticipated what we today might call public pedagogy. She challenged the common practices of writing instruction of her time, as a majority of classroom writing occurring at the turn of the century was meant for instructors’ eyes only as a private exchange and did not have the public sense of Polacheck’s work (Brereton 439). Addams’ philosophy of socialized democracy, in its effort to position writing as a medium for community interaction, encouraged student writers to actively wrestle with the views of a public audience.

Similarly, Addams brought the writing of others into the classroom to challenge her students to consider unfamiliar experiences and perspectives. One tactic she used to accomplish this was to spark discussion through provocative current events. She writes of how the Scopes trial prodded her students to consider the opinions of rural, religious farmers who opposed evolution, which fostered association beyond the city limits of Chicago. For Addams, placing students in conversation with prominent current events brought “into the circle of [students’] discussion a large number of people who had hitherto been quite outside their zone of interest” (*On Education* 386). Current events—which Addams describes as “molten”—melt borders and provoke association across national, and potentially even international, boundaries (*On Education* 386).

Symbolic interaction and socialized democracy also combined powerfully in the study of literature at Hull House. Addams’ theory of pedagogy was implemented in the reading of fiction, as narratives offered a medium for listening to other situated perspectives and empathizing with people who have lived very different experiences. Addams writes that works of literature “satisfy an unformulated belief that to see farther, to know all sorts of men [sic], in an indefinite way, is a preparation for better social adjustment—for the remedying of social ills” (*Democracy* 8). Reading about diverse experiences can generate “a new affinity for all men [sic]” (*Democracy* 8), and Addams presents teaching literature at Hull House as one response to the violence that broke out among her neighbors (*Twenty Years* 434). Literature pedagogy thus provided a space for symbolic association and, ideally, the realignment of values to incorporate the common good.

Addams’ pedagogy of association, then, focused on connecting people from diverse backgrounds so that they could interact to describe their experiences, form affective bonds, and share the reasoning behind their perspectives. As this interaction occurred through the symbolic medium of oral language and printed text, people developed

their selves in response to a more diverse set of others. Therefore, ideally, they moved toward a social ethic that transferred compassion and commitment from immediate family and similar social groups outward to a widening circle of associations, and they absorbed a richer understanding of social problems through the perspectives of various social actors. Ultimately, Addams hoped to create a citizenry more equipped for effective deliberation, motivated for public problem-solving, and open to the constant revision of beliefs and practices needed for active experimentation toward the ideals of democracy.

While there are many hopeful and helpful aspects of Addams’ pedagogy of association, the limitations of this approach reveal themselves with a contemporary lens attuned to the impact of power. Addams’ view did not adequately take into account the highly asymmetrical power dynamics that shaped associative interaction or the ideologies that produced the experiences people described to each other. Furthermore, the fact that this utopian vision hinged on a *shared* medium of symbolic interaction pushed Addams into the highly problematic project of maneuvering Hull House participants into dominant symbolic discourses and modes, creating a twin pedagogy of socializing democracy through assimilation.

Assimilation

According to Addams, immigrant children can apply their school knowledge by “teaching the entire family and forming a connection between them and the outside world, interpreting political speeches and newspapers and eagerly transforming Italian customs into American ones” (*On Education* 81). In this quote, we see Addams’ familiar commitment to association as families form connections with the outside world, and immigrant parents are able to interact with the views of others through newspapers and speeches. Yet in the same breath, Addams reveals the cultural implications of her pedagogy of socialized democracy: students are to “eagerly” change home customs into dominant ways of living—a focus on assimilation that constantly disrupted Addams’ valuing of difference as a resource for self and social development.

In order for immigrant families to have access to the social sphere for association and interaction, they had to share American symbols—the English language—and have the cultural literacy necessary to make meaning of these symbols. This stance led to a Hull House emphasis on standard English, even striving “that the ‘th’ may be restored to its proper place in English speech” (*On Education* 152), and providing cultural literacy in the “great works” of American and British culture in reading clubs, with a special reverence reserved for Shakespeare.

Addams’ focus on building democratic exchange through assimilation also led her to strongly oppose the local parochial schools, immigrant-run institutions that emphasized home language and customs as a way to keep cultural identity alive for students. For Addams, public schools were crucial sites for association between cultures and acquisition of the language necessary for interaction—a need that took precedence over the wishes of many in immigrant communities to have culturally-

relevant and fully bilingual education for their children. Rivka Shipak Lissak traces Addams' multi-year battle against these parochial schools, as her tactics shifted from subtle to more overt in the attempt to redirect students toward public schools. In a particularly complex move, Addams championed home language classes in public high schools, an action that in some ways appears to be anti-assimilationist, yet in actuality was motivated by the goal of convincing parents to move their children from parochial to public education.

A generous portrait of Addams might suggest that her emphasis on dominant language and culture stemmed only from the goal of providing symbolic access. However, there is some evidence that this stance was indicative of a deeper belief that American culture was superior. Some passages of Addams' writing, especially from earlier in her career, are deeply paternalistic toward immigrant cultures. For instance, in *Democracy and Social Ethics*, Addams seems to express a view that Italian culture is less ethically "evolved" than American culture. When discussing an early stage of child morality, Addams suggests, "Primitive people, such as the South Italian peasants, are still in this stage" (101). Many Addams scholars, however, vigorously defend her against charges of cultural arrogance, dismissing passages such as this as early naiveté that Addams eventually outgrew (Deegan; Elshtain; Seigfried). As Mary Jo Deegan argues, Addams frequently expressed a strongly asset-based view of immigrant cultures, and several of her writings and actions actively resist assimilation (293).

A close examination of Addams' pedagogy reveals that she both promoted *and* resisted the assimilation of her students. Addams' conflicted approach toward assimilation makes more sense when placed in the context of symbolic interactionism. Just as Addams understood the importance of shared symbols with the wider American culture for the development of the self, she was also aware of the crucial nature of shared language and culture *within* immigrant groups for the construction of identity. She was especially "distressed" by the children of immigrants "who repudiated the language and customs of their elders" as a result of attending public school (*Twenty Years* 37). In Addams' analysis, this inability to connect with parents led to problematic self-development and juvenile delinquency (*On Education* 137). Therefore, she encouraged teachers to "take hold of [immigrants'] handicrafts and occupations, their folk songs and folk lore, the beautiful stories which every immigrant colony is ready to tell and translate . . . [and] get the children to bring these things into school" (*On Education* 140). This same impetus led Addams to develop the Labor Museum, a living showcase of immigrant craft demonstrations designed to help youth appreciate the cultural knowledge of their parents.

For Addams, then, a primary purpose of education was to integrate young people into their own culture and give meaning to their daily experiences. Though she was not aware of Gramsci's notion of local leaders as "organic intellectuals," Addams highly valued the development of educated people that stayed integrated with their families and communities. According to Addams, "The educational efforts of a Settlement should not be directed primarily to reproduce the college type of culture," but rather to increase an immigrant's ability to connect with people (*On Education* 176). Addams

painted murals on the Hull House walls of leaders "who have become great through identification with the common lot, in preference to the heroes of mere achievement" (*Twenty Years* 396).

To this end of fostering leaders who identified with their home communities, the Hull House actively sought ways to bring student cultures into classes and activities. Music classes worked to transcribe and sing traditional folk songs, plays were performed in the home languages of the students, some reading classes revolved around immigrant and working class literature, and the Hull House hosted cultural celebrations.

In short, Addams' writings and actions in regards to immigrant culture are a thick tangle of contradictions; she appears to both encourage and fight the assimilation of her immigrant neighbors. Perhaps this tension lies partly in her liberal, progressive roots. As Lisa Duggan argues, one problematic aspect of liberalism is the tendency to over-compromise in seeking a third way between radical change and reactionary forces. Addams was resisting both conservatives that claimed immigrants would degrade American culture and radical socialists calling for a comprehensive restructuring of American economics. Striving to navigate between these two poles led her into the compromise of assimilating her students.

As a reflection of her liberalism, Addams' third way involved assimilating her students into more than just pronunciation guidelines and knowledge of Shakespeare: she worked to assimilate them into dominant *political* literacies that mirrored her restraint and compromise. Ellen Gates Starr, Addams' life companion who later became a radical Christian socialist, became increasingly frustrated with Addams' emphasis on mediation. During a brutal garment strike in Chicago, Starr claimed, "Jane, if the devil himself came riding down Halsted Street with his tail waving out behind him, you'd say, 'what a beautiful curve he has in his tail'" (qtd. in Lagemann 36). In this sense, we might wonder at the version of social action Addams taught her students. To some extent, they were assimilated into habits and tastes of engagement that aligned with conservative dominant agendas. For example, in one political reading group, Addams taught Tolstoy's theories of nonresistance in response to the horrific oppression of Jewish people in the Kishinev massacre. Rather than exploring resistance, students discussed restraint.

One of the most interesting case studies of Addams' conflicting affinities with liberalism, assimilation, and democracy occurred in her attempt to turn assimilation into forms of agency for her female immigrant students. Addams sought to "teach the girls to be good mothers" by having them "study household conditions in relation to the past and present needs of the family," which is "the best possible preparation for [their] future obligations" (*On Education* 139). Furthermore, she states that young women must learn to keep house in the light of American knowledge, because immigrant mothers often hold false cultural beliefs about, for example, the reason why milk can cause disease. Addams was socializing young women into dominant American gender roles. Yet she continues in the same passage to assert, "If that girl can be taught that the milk makes the baby ill because it is not clean and be provided with a simple test that she may know when milk is clean, it may take her into the study not only of milk within

the four walls of the tenement house, but into the inspection of milk in her district” (*On Education* 139-140). Here, Addams uses an identification with dominant ideals of gender to catapult immigrant women into the public sphere. Catherine Peaden claims that Addams’ rhetoric that framed womanhood to include civic participation offered new forms of agency, but did so at the cost of essentializing women and submitting to the dominant frame. In other words, Addams enacted liberal feminism by arguing that women should also participate in the status quo. For Addams, assimilation and democracy were in paradox within civic engagement.

Socializing Democracy in Contemporary Community Literacy: Slowing Our Gait

Addams’ pedagogy—and its complications—has many echoes in today’s approaches to community literacy. Perhaps the most direct descendent is the work of the Community Literacy Center (CLC) in Pittsburgh, where Linda Flower, Wayne Peck, and Lorraine Higgins have developed an approach to teaching writing and critical thinking focused on community problem-solving dialogues. They trace their approach to the pragmatic social thought of John Dewey, who was heavily influenced by Addams (Flower). Their pedagogy brings together urban youth and college students from Carnegie Mellon University and asks them to work together to create rival interpretations of events or practices, question how different people may view the same situation, and share these interpretations in written documents and public forums. For example, participants demonstrated that while police may frame curfew laws as a safety measure, urban youth may feel unsafe in poorly supervised detention centers with adolescents from other neighborhoods, and the youth shared these perspectives at a meeting with community stakeholders including police chiefs (Deans). The Community Literacy Center uses the creation of rival interpretations as an Addamsian strategy of association, building democracy by fostering interaction between people of different social positionalities and teaching people to take on the perspectives of others. Yet as Elenore Long, David Fleming, and Linda Flower self-reflexively note, the literacy center also often encourages urban youth to take on dominant modes of reasoning such as evidence-based citation rather than the exploration of concepts through fiction (267). Also, as Tom Deans discusses, the CLC allegiance to Dewey restrains their Freirean drive toward transformative social change, as the pedagogy aims mostly toward dialogue (116). This stance—reminiscent of Addams’ liberal progressivism—is illustrated in the community meeting about the curfew, which took place at the same time as a large-scale protest about police violence, drawing youth into conversation rather than political demonstration.

While the Community Literacy Center offers a remarkably robust vision of what a pedagogy of socialized democracy might look like today, we can also hear resonances with Addams’ pedagogy in many aspects of contemporary approaches to literacy and civic engagement. For example, trends within rhetoric and composition call for public pedagogy and writing on public topics, and service-learning scholarship frequently

celebrates the aim of fostering empathy with those who may come from different social positions.

A return to Addams’ focus on association through symbolic interactionism might challenge us to reinvigorate these engaged pedagogies. She calls attention to the social and playful aspects of literacy learning, a perspective that is often overlooked in our serious attention to pressing public problems. As Addams reminds us, a key reason we learn language is to play with it and build friendships. She argues for recognition of the deeply emotional nature of linguistic and ethical development and the need to intentionally foster relationships both within the classroom and across contexts. Her theory of socializing democracy through symbolic interactionism also frames engagement with difference as an asset to self and societal development, rather than just an opportunity to develop tolerance or a chance to learn the view of the opposition so as to better refute it. In addition, she offers a strong historical precedent for incorporating home cultures and languages into community literacy instruction, and she may push us to consider nontraditional spaces and postures for education, given her drive to move students out of cramped desks and into interactive learning spaces like the labor museum or kitchen that position community members as teachers as well as learners.

Reflecting on Addams’ goal of association may also prompt us to reconsider the problems of assimilation—the logical underside of associational approaches. Like Addams, today’s community-literacy practitioners live in the tension between providing access to symbolic communities and defending home cultures, and the field of community literacy is as full of contradictions, shifting priorities, and unstable assertions as is Addams’ work. We also may have tendencies to socialize students culturally, into dominant discourses like academic prose and standard English, and politically, into restraint and over-compromise. Yet with today’s attention to power dynamics and critical theory, we may be able to rhetorically redeploy aspects of a pedagogy of socialized democracy in order to create a more empowering approach. I conclude by offering some brief thoughts toward such an endeavor.

First, a rhetorical redeployment of Addams’ pedagogy requires teaching the rhetorical situation surrounding assimilation to students. Instead of simply presenting the standard discourse or offering restrained dialogue as the preferred form of civic engagement, instructors can highlight the role of power in establishing certain forms of discourse and political engagement as dominant. This path is well-trod by literacy pedagogues like Lisa Delpit, who urge us to teach standard English language and culture while positioning it in a “political power game” for students (292).

Second, a rhetorical redeployment would ask us to teach available means for persuasion beyond the dominant cultural and political methods. Culturally, instructors might bring in persuasive texts that code-switch or that are written in the home habitus of students, such as Anzaldúa’s *Borderlands*, now a popular text in many composition courses. Or, community literacy practitioners might follow the lead of Martha Demientieff, a Native Alaskan teacher of Athabaskan Indian youth who teaches the vocabulary and beautifully concise style of the “heritage language” alongside formal

English phrases and lengthy academic exposition. She hosts both formal dinners, where students speak standard English, and informal potlucks, where only the home language is allowed (Delpit 293).

In addition to addressing cultural assimilation, teachers also need to address political assimilation to avoid socializing students solely into forms of civic engagement that center on restrained dialogue—such as the ubiquitous letter to the editor assignment. Instead, teachers might position the civic engagement activities of the class as just one approach to social change alongside others. Minnesota Campus Compact's "social change wheel" might be a helpful tool as it depicts spokes of change that range from volunteering, to protests, to participatory action research, and to community organizing. Teachers can ask students to locate the class assignments on the wheel and discuss the merits and limitations of other approaches. Phyllis Ryder has also done work toward resisting a singular view of political engagement, suggesting that students in service-learning courses be paired with a variety of organizations to bring different views of how publics function into the classroom and to teach students to interact effectively with a variety of political logics instead of assimilating them into one approach.

In essence, the goal of a rhetorical redeployment of Addams' pedagogy would be to capture the hopeful aspects of association while better equipping students to move rhetorically within pressures to assimilate—providing a stronger sense of the rhetorical situation of assimilation and increased access to a variety of means of persuasion.

Addams recognizes that "there is no doubt that residents in a Settlement too often move towards their ends 'with hurried and ignoble gait,' putting forth thorns in their eagerness to bear grapes" (*On Education* 184). Civic engagement teachers might also be occasionally guilty of bearing thorns, especially instructors in rhetoric and composition with a "hurried gait" to join the growing movement of public composition. This is why I feel that slow, rigorous examination of our engaged pedagogies, and efforts to make these pedagogies more rhetorical, is necessary for those of us active in community literacy and civic engagement to move forward responsibly.

Addams identified her settlement house pedagogy as "a protest against a restricted view of education" (*Twenty Years* 275), and instructors who teach engaged pedagogies are part of this historic protest. It is my hope that with increased awareness of theories and precedents of pedagogies that strive toward democracy, increased attention to the associational potentials of literacy education, and increased responsibility in using symbolic interactions to address the dynamics of assimilation, we can carry on our protest with more vigor and efficacy.

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Investigating Adult Literacy Programs through Community Engagement Research: A Case Study

Jaclyn M. Wells

This article presents findings from a case study of an adult literacy program. The author conducted this IRB-approved study as part of a three-year, research-based, community-engagement project that partnered the literacy program with a writing center at a large public research university. The author argues that the participatory methods afforded by community-engagement research can allow researchers to achieve insight into particular programs while contributing to local literacy. The author also argues that understanding the characteristics of particular programs can contribute to knowledge of the field of adult literacy education and help collaborators develop engagement projects that support adult literacy.

Introduction: The Complexity of Adult Literacy

In "The Challenges Facing Adult Literacy Programs," Daphne Greenberg describes the complexity of adult literacy. She writes: "This complexity is reflected by the heterogeneity of the people who are served, the skill levels addressed, the contexts in which literacy is taught, and the settings where the programs are housed" (39). Such complexity, Greenberg argues, creates many challenges to adult literacy programs. More research about adult literacy programs could provide educators, community and university partners, and other stakeholders a better understanding of such programs and ultimately drive improvements to adult literacy education. However, the very complexity of adult literacy programs may present challenges to designing and conducting in-depth studies. Many of the characteristics Greenberg cites, such as the part-time and temporary status of instructors and students, may challenge research design and implementation. The limited resources, time, and staff of adult literacy programs may also make research difficult.

These challenges may explain the dearth of research about adult literacy programs, as well as why so much existing research relies primarily on quantitative methods that do not require long-term or significant relationships with research participants. Unfortunately, common types of research methods, such as quantitative program assessments, may not capture the full story of adult literacy education. In *Back to School: Why Everyone Deserves a Second Chance at Education*, Mike Rose argues that