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The Community of Inquiry: Insights for  
Public Administration from Jane  
Addams, John Dewey and Charles S.  
Peirce

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**The Community of Inquiry:  
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**INTRODUCTION**

The "community of inquiry" is a concept developed by early pragmatists Charles Sanders Peirce, John Dewey and Jane Addams. The power of the "community of inquiry" notion became apparent to me when I began incorporating the idea in a graduate research methods class.<sup>1</sup> My Masters of Public Administration (MPA) students are assigned a formal empirical research paper as a capstone project. I encourage them to see themselves as part of a larger community that is exploring similar questions. The bibliography is no longer viewed as names on a piece of paper, rather it represents the community exploring their topic/question. Students sometimes contact people listed in the bibliography. Generally, this has been a positive, energizing experience. In addition, I try to create a 'community of inquiry' within the class. Their common problem is figuring out how to do the paper and graduate. During the oral examination, students echo a common experience --they have been in constant communication. In many cases the paper was successfully completed partly because there was so much support from fellow classmates.

The 'community' in "community of inquiry" is not defined by time or space. A common question, problem, or interest helps to forge the connection. In addition, the 'community of inquiry' conceptualization appeared adaptable enough to be easily applied to the every-day-life of a public administrator.

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\* I wish to thank George Weinberger, Vince Luizzi and Audre McKinney for comments on earlier drafts.

<sup>1</sup>See Shields (forthcoming) for an extended discussion of how pragmatism as a philosophy of science was used in this class.

The purpose of the paper is, first, to clarify the meaning of the “community of inquiry” concept. In the discussion which follows the development of the concept is explored. The idea is traced from its origin in the works of Charles Sanders Peirce as it evolved through the ideas of John Dewey and the writing and experiences of Jane Addams at Hull-House. Secondly, two works, one written in 1895 by the residents of Hull-House (*Hull-House Maps and Papers*) and the other written in 1998 by and for Alskans (*Helping Kids Succeed - Alaskan Style*), are examined as manifestations and products of PA relevant “communities of inquiry.” Finally, this paper shows how the community of inquiry concept is applicable to Public Administration (PA).

## OVERVIEW<sup>2</sup>

The “community of inquiry” is a fundamental notion in the philosophy of pragmatism.<sup>3</sup> This subsection is a brief overview of the key people and their ideas. Charles Sanders Peirce, a scientist, is generally considered the founder of pragmatism. He developed a formal logic of inquiry that applied to science. He believed that a distinguishing feature of science was its social nature. Communication and community were key factors in scientific discoveries. William James, medical doctor and psychologist, popularized Peirce’s pragmatism (James, 1907). He developed the mediator aspect of pragmatism and showed how it was useful in settling disputes.

John Dewey, educator, philosopher and social activist extended Peirce’s original scientific logic of inquiry and applied it to a broader social context.<sup>4</sup> His ideas about community (“experiments in cooperation” (Seigfried, 1996, p. 92)) were developed in

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<sup>2</sup>Many of the works cited were reissued after their original publication date. In order to make clear that original material is used, the earliest publication date is used in the internal referencing.

<sup>3</sup> The pragmatism discussed here is also known as Classical American Philosophy. It is distinct from modern pragmatism which is associated with philosophers such as Richard Rorty.

<sup>4</sup> The application of Peirce’s ideas is most explicit in Dewey’s 1938 *Logic the Theory of Inquiry*.

his writings about education and democracy.<sup>5</sup> Many of his ideas about community and inquiry were spawned through both his activities at Hull-House and friendship with the social activist, Jane Addams. The action component of pragmatism is most visibly demonstrated in Addams' life and writing. One might describe Hull-House (which she founded) as a living "community of inquiry." In addition, many of the residents of Hull-House worked for governmental units (including Jane Addams). Hence, the relevance of the "community of inquiry" notion to Public Administration is most apparent in the publications of Jane Addams and the residents of Hull-House. The next section contains an extended discussion of the ideas of key pragmatists (Peirce, Dewey and Addams) as they apply to the "community of inquiry."

### **Charles Sanders Peirce**

Charles Sanders Peirce originally conceived of pragmatism as a philosophy of science with a logic of inquiry at its center. He introduced the early concepts of pragmatism in "The Fixation of Belief," an 1877 article written for *Popular Science Monthly*.<sup>6</sup> In "Fixation," Peirce defines inquiry. He begins by criticizing ways of thinking which 'fixate' belief systems; thus making them impervious to fresh evidence. Peirce (1877) draws a distinction between doubt and belief and the impact each has on action.

"Doubt is an uneasy and dissatisfied state from which we struggle to free ourselves and pass into the state of belief; while the latter is calm and satisfactory state.... The irritation of doubt causes a struggle to attain a state of belief. I shall term this struggle *Inquiry*" (p. 99).

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<sup>5</sup>Aside from the obvious *Democracy and Education*, (1916) Dewey wrote the *Public and its Problems*, (1927) *Schools of Tomorrow*, *The Schools and Society*, (1900) *Experience and Education* (1938)

<sup>6</sup> From a public administration perspective, what is also interesting about Peirce, is his thirty year employment with the US government as a physicist, astronomer, inventor and occasionally, an administrator. He worked at the United States Coast and Geodetic Survey (Currently the National Geodetic Survey). (Dracup, 1995 & 1995a).

Inquiry using the methods of science is the best way to “satisfy our doubts” (Peirce, 1877, p. 107). To Peirce the scientific method represents the opposite of individualism. “What distinguishes it from all other methods of inquiry is its cooperative or public character” (Buchler, 1955, p. x). The classic example of the three blind men trying to describe an elephant is illustrative. Each describes the elephant from his own limited perspective (small tail, big ears, etc.). The story’s moral is that we are all trapped inside our limited selves, and can not know the truth. If, however, we allow the three blind men to talk to each other, to compare perspectives, to argue, to test new hypotheses, to behave like a community of scientific investigators. It is possible to imagine that the blind men will eventually overcome their limited perspectives and come to a truer sense of the elephant.<sup>7</sup> Peirce maintained that over a long time horizon (hundreds of years) it was possible to discover scientific truth (nature's eternal laws). At any point in time, however, results using the scientific method are provisional. Progress (a better sense of the elephant) proceeds over time.<sup>8</sup>

Peirce also distinguished between scientific and practical reasoning. He asserts that logic would contain “a theory of scientific reasoning and also a theory of the reasoning of practical men about every day affairs. These two would be shown to be governed by somewhat different principles” (Peirce MS L75, 1902). Although the logic of science, and a community of inquiry have the potential to find truth (to questions of science), Peirce makes no such claim for practical reasoning.

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<sup>7</sup>Thanks to Jeff Knepp a contributor to the Peirce listserv for the elephant and the blind men example.(peirce-l@ttacs6.ttu.edu).

<sup>8</sup>Peirce describes this aspect of the scientific method as Fallibilism which holds that “people cannot attain absolute certainty concerning questions of fact.” [Peirce, p.59 in Buchler]

## John Dewey

Dewey extended Peirce's scientific logic of inquiry to practical reasoning and social problems. The struggle to see the elephant becomes the struggle to *use* the elephant in everyday life. Hence, unlike earlier philosophers such as Plato, Aristotle, Decartes, and Kant, Dewey's real interest is *not* truth but rather the social grounds of belief. He used "warranted assertibility" as the test for the social grounds of belief (Dewey, 1938, p.14).<sup>9</sup> The methods of science retain their centrality but the focus of science is no longer the "discovery of nature's eternal laws." Rather, emphasis shifts "to the formulation of theories motivated by the desire of human beings to predict and control their natural and social environment" (Posner, 1995, p. 390).

Dewey's philosophy presupposes a "specific theory of self and community...for Dewey social institutions are better understood as *experiments in cooperation*... Rather than as embodying some timeless order. Human development requires cooperation" (Seigfried, 1996, p. 92) (Italics added). Hence, Dewey emphasized the role of community in inquiry. "An inquirer in a given special field appeals to the *experiences of the community* of his fellow workers for confirmation and correction of his results" (Dewey, 1938, p. 490) (italics added).

If inquiry is going to progress (how are we going to use this elephant anyway?), members of the community must be willing to suspend belief and listen.<sup>10</sup> If the blind men are fixated in the belief that their perception is truth, progress toward getting a more accurate sense of the elephants potential would be slowed or stopped. Dewey maintained that common dualisms associates with the enlightenment such as "subject and object, mind and body, perception and reality, form and substance" have had the

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<sup>9</sup> Dewey (1938:iii) acknowledged Peirce's influence in the Preface of *Logic*.

<sup>10</sup>Dewey envisions an *ideal* community as a "Higher form of genuine community" where through communication "its members become cognizant of a common end and so interested in achieving it that they regulate their specific activities in view of it." (Seigfried, 1996: 93). The blind men need to reach agreement about what purpose they will use the elephant. Dewey describes the larger agreement about purpose as an end-in-view.

effect of fixating belief systems (Posner, 1995, p. 389). A philosophy that suspends or connects dualisms can be more open to the benefits and insights from each perspective. The process of forging a community of inquiry is difficult (impossible) when members of the group are fixated in opposite belief systems.

Dewey puts the notion of reflection and mediation to work in an attempt to dissolve opposing dualisms such as will and reason, means and ends, motives and consequences, conduct and character. "His general strategy is to show that such distinctions are aspects of phases chosen from different points of analysis in the mediating process" (Flower & Murphy, 1977, p. 840). He thus stresses the continuity of experience and links this continuity to inquiry.

What is most relevant to Public Administration is that Dewey links social progress and social science through the instrument of the scientific method.

Every step forward in the social sciences - the studies termed history, economics, politics, sociology -- shows that social questions are capable of being intelligently coped with only in the degree in which we employ the method of collecting data, forming hypotheses, and testing them in action which is characteristic of natural science, and in the degree in which we utilize in behalf of the promotion of social welfare (Dewey, 1916, p. 333).

He also recognizes the "experimental character" of policy. "Failure to take into account the experimental nature of policies undertaken encourages laxity and discontinuity in discriminative observation of the consequences that result from its adoption" (Dewey, 1938, p. 509).

### **Historical Detour**

Public Administration is a field where the balance and synergy between theory and practice; ideas and action has been a focus. The paper will now take a historical side trip and show how the theory-practice tension surrounded the development of pragmatic thought and the idea of the "community of inquiry."

If ever there was a special time and place it was Chicago in the 1890s. Historian Mary Dearborn (1988) describes Chicago as a uniquely American metropolis (1.5 million people) emerging in the mid-west as a center of change, activity and new ideas. “A heady spirit of reform characterized turn of-the-century Chicago” (p.53). The 1893 Worlds Fair, which attracted 25 million visitors and some of the most brilliant minds of the day, is often given as evidence of Chicago’s acknowledged prominence (Dearborn, 1988, p. 53).

Chicago was a place where the synergy between theory and practice was real and lived. For purposes of this paper, the most relevant example of this synergy, at the macro level, was the relationship between the young University of Chicago and the newly established Settlement- Hull-House (founded 1889).

William Harper Rainey, first President of the University of Chicago “assembled some of the most innovative -and most politically involved- minds in America”<sup>11</sup> (Dearborn, 1988, p. 53). A major outlet for the young, ‘politically involved’ faculty was participation in the experience and activities of Hull-House. Clearly, the University of Chicago represented the ‘theory’ in the theory/practice nexus. Hull-House, representing the practice side, served the struggling, diverse, often conflict ridden, immigrant community. The two sites were within a short commute by street car. Hull-House and the mostly women that lived there, offered an odd sort of mirror to the newly formed, male dominated sociology, and philosophy departments at the University of Chicago.

Addams herself notes that “in the early days...we were bold enough to compare ourselves with universities and colleges” (Addams, 1994, p. 204). Hull-House was an alternative center of “research and social thought.” There was great interaction between the men of the University of Chicago and the women of Hull-House. Most of

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<sup>11</sup> For example Albion Small and W.I. Thomas in Sociology, Edward W. Bemis and Thorstein Veblen in political economy, James Tufts and George Herbert Mead in Philosophy (Dearborn , 1988:53)

the University of Chicago faculty contributed in much the same way Theodore Roosevelt contributed, through lectures (the world of ideas), to the various social clubs. While the men and women worked together, they had distinct and sometimes negative views about the value of each others work.

The men believed that they were intellectually superior and that the best institutional home was the University. They expected women to be 'out in the world' applying ideas and testing them in the process. Women were the 'data collectors,' the doers of the 'mundane.' [Ironically] "the women believed that their work was superior to men's. They thought that the men were more concerned with 'safe' abstract ideas than with the real problems of everyday life (Deegan, 1988, p. 33).

At the individual level, Dewey and Addams emerge as the two people who best capture the theory/practice synergy. Dewey developed a philosophy that placed empirical inquiry at its heart. Although he was a social activist, he published little if any empirical research. His primary affiliation was the world of *ideas*. One might say that in the tension between theory and practice, Dewey spent most time with theory. On the other hand, Jane Addams' relative emphasis was *practice*. She was a philosopher comfortable with developing and using theory. As a committed social reformer and a brilliant administrator (Deegan, 1990, p. 33) she worked for social progress by living among Chicago immigrants. She also supervised groundbreaking empirical research at Hull-House. Addams practice enriched Dewey's theories and Dewey's theory enriched Addams practice. Dewey and Addams became friends<sup>12</sup> during the 1890s when both were in their mid 30s. Although they came from different backgrounds and had different life experiences, they had independently come to many similar philosophic organizing principles. Both their shared experiences at Hull-House and their respectful, enduring friendship helped to propel Pragmatism into new frontiers.

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<sup>12</sup> It should be noted that both Alice and John Dewey were close friends of Jane Addams. The best evidence of the Dewey's esteem for Jane Addams is that they named their daughter after her and when their young son Gordon died, Jane Addams was asked to give the eulogy.

John Dewey had visited Hull-House in his Michigan years and when he arrived in Chicago he became a trustee. Jane Addams became an extremely close personal friend; she was a profound influence on Dewey and he on her. The goals of progressive education and the settlement house movement, of Jane Addams and John Dewey, were intertwined at every point (Dearborn, 1988, p. 54).

### **Jane Addams**

Jane Addams designation as a founder of pragmatism has been recently rediscovered.<sup>13</sup> Both Deegan (1990) and Seigfried (1996) attribute the delayed recognition to a sexist tradition within academia (and philosophy in particular) and the unorthodox institutional setting of Hull-House. Addams works, most notably, *Twenty Years at Hull-House*, is filled with her philosophy. Nevertheless, *20 Years* is unlike most philosophy texts because it is written as narrative.

Addams philosophy is *problem centered*. She developed an "approach to social analysis that was broad, synthetic, and problem- as opposed to discipline- or profession-centered." Her problem-centered approach encouraged "fundamental rethinking of seemingly settled issues" (Langeman, 1994, p. xii). The problem orientation allowed her to envision communities in which cooperation crystallized around a quest to address common problems. Jane Addams was willing to attack some of the biggest social problems of her day. Her unique approach was the Settlement, Hull-House.

A careful examination of Addams definition of a Settlement, highlights her philosophical approach. The Settlement as Addams envisioned was akin to a "community of inquiry."

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<sup>13</sup>See for example Audi(1995:638); Seigfried (1996); Deegan (1990) and Menand (199?), Luizzi and Mckinney (forthcoming). Deegan also argues persuasively that Addams is one of the founders of Chicago Sociology.

The Settlement, then is an experimental effort to aid in the solution of the social and industrial problems which are engendered by the modern conditions of life in a great city (Addams, 1910, p. 125).

In addition to the “problem” and “experimental” approach to problem solving, the Settlement has a commitment to tolerance. It could not be ‘fixated’ in one belief system or a single method. It welcomed all perspectives and was flexible in its approach to problem solving. Furthermore its residents (the core community) should have “scientific patience in the accumulation of facts.”

From its very nature it [the Settlement] can stand for no political or social propaganda. It must in a sense, give the warm welcome of an inn to all such propaganda, if perchance one of them be found an angel. 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 environment may demand. It must be open to conviction and must have a deep and abiding sense of tolerance. It must be hospitable and ready for experiment. It should demand from its residents a scientific patience in the accumulation of facts and the steady holding of their sympathies as one of the best instruments for that accumulation (Addams, 1910, p. 126).

There are two key elements of the experimental approach (or mind set) that must be stressed. First, people must be willingness to suspend belief systems. When people forgo preconceived ideas they must *listen* carefully. This was a lesson learned early while working among the immigrants.

The experience of the coffee-house taught us *not to hold preconceived ideas* of what the neighborhood ought to have, but to keep ourselves in readiness to modify and adapt our understandings as we discovered those things which the neighborhood was ready to accept (Addams, 1910, p. 132) (italics added).

Secondly, the experimental mind set involves a willingness to see and learn from experimental failures. “There was room for discouragement in the many unsuccessful experiments in cooperation which were carried on in Chicago during the early nineties” (Addams, 1910, p. 141). And, “in spite of failures, cooperative schemes went on, some of

the same men appearing in one after another with irrepressible optimism” (Addams, 1910, p. 142).

It must be emphasized that Addams guided the experimental effort. She was the leader that directed and probably most important held it together for over 40 years. Addams guided the work at Hull-House by stressing important components of the “community of inquiry” --cooperation and the mediator role. In some ways she was the personification of the pragmatic mediator role described by James (1907) in *Pragmatism*. Her personality was nonjudgemental and she encouraged diversity in points of view at Hull-House.

“Communities of inquiry” need mediators because there are often language and other barriers that discourage cooperation. Mediators build bridges between different points of view and different experiential references. Addams used a labor museum as a mediation device.

It seemed to me that Hull-House ought to be able to devise some educational enterprise, which should *build a bridge between Europe and American* experiences in such ways as to give them both more meaning and a sense of relation. I meditated that perhaps the power to see life as a whole, is more needed in the immigrant quarter of a large city than anywhere else, and that the lack of this power is the most fruitful source of misunderstanding between European immigrants and their children, as it is between them and their American neighbors (Addams, 19310, pp. 235-236) (italics added).

The immensely successful labor museum built a bridge by including traditional old-world methods of clothes making along side new technology (sewing machines). Further, the museum bridged dichotomies (Europe/ America; young/old), enabling learning and reconstructing experience and thus, resolved problems. Addams hoped that “if these young people could actually see that the complicated machinery of the factory had been evolved from simple tools, they might at least make a beginning towards that education which *Dr. Dewey defines as 'continuing reconstruction of*

*experience.*' They might also lay a foundation for ... sound *progress* (Using the elephant)" (Addams, 1910, pp. 236-237) (italics added).

Both Addams and Dewey incorporate well developed conceptualizations of democracy into their pragmatism. Addams' ideal democracy was egalitarian. It was also generic enough to be applied to both large and small groups (Farrell, 1967: 63) and was not solely associated with government. "Democracy was a method of discovering truth through the combination of rational thought with equal participation of all citizens in community process." [Addams as cited in Deegan p. 275] She incorporated a scientific method as part of the method for discovering the truth. "Democracy was weakened by excluding any group from the democratic ideal" (Farrell, 1967, p. 78). She viewed the Settlement (in all its complexity) as a "tangible expression of the democratic ideal" (Addams, 1910, p. 122). The Settlement was also an expression of "the desire to interpret democracy in social terms" (Addams, 1910, p. 125).

Addams' democracy is linked to a larger, moral "common good." And, part of the Settlement's job is to articulate an end-in-view associated with the common good.

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, but for the *common good* (Addams, 1895, p. 203) (italics added).

Addams may have articulated an 'ideal' democracy in her philosophy, she, nevertheless, had an abiding reverence for the flawed U.S. democracy for which Lincoln "had cleared the title" (Addams, 1910, p. 41).<sup>14</sup> "We must learn to trust our democracy, giant-like and threatening as it may appear in its uncouth strength and untried applications" (Addams, 1895, p. 198).

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<sup>14</sup>Addams devotion to democracy stemmed from her devotion to her father who was a state senator and a friend of Lincoln. Some of her earliest and most vivid memories were of Lincoln's death (she was four years old). In *20 Years* Addams describes her attraction to democracy "There was growing within me an almost passionate devotion to the ideals of democracy" (Addams, 1930:79)

Much of her social reform efforts involved ways to make U.S. democracy more inclusive- more egalitarian. At the local level, she and the residents of Hull-House worked to effect reform within the political framework of a corrupt Cook County. Ironically, they did not even have the right to vote. Although Addams reform efforts<sup>15</sup> may have appeared radical at the time, she always respected and worked within the existing democratic governmental framework.

U.S. Public Administration must function within that same flawed democracy. We can learn from the experiences of Jane Addams. The experimental nature of policy within a democracy suggests both success and failure are inevitable. Jane Addams had faith and experience with the benefits of even a flawed democracy. Similar faith and experience should help practitioners be more realistic, hopeful, and see the big picture. Practitioners are charged with using the elephant. Democracy is a key element of 'use' because it is the communication and decision making process which direct where to go and how to use the elephant. Over the long haul, even flawed democracies have the potential to make everyday life better (progress).

### **HULL-HOUSE AS COMMUNITY OF INQUIRY**

A common, understandable misconception is that Hull-House was an 1890s version of a modern soup kitchen/homeless shelter. Hull-House had a broader objective. It quickly became a large complex which addressed the needs of the nearby immigrant community in a vast variety of ways. There were college extension courses, (which emphasized art, literature, language, music, history, mathematics and drawing), a summer school, Sunday concerts, a choir, at least 25 clubs, cooking classes, free kindergarten and day nursery, facilities for organized labor to meet, speaker series,

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<sup>15</sup>Causes which Addams championed included women's right to vote, child labor laws, safety regulations for the workplace, restrictions on hours worked, social security for the elderly and sick, civil service reform, juvenile justice, mandatory education for teenagers (up to age 16), better and more available care for the mentally ill.

dances, a gymnasium, a coffee house, a public dispensary (drug store), labor bureau, labor and art museum (Appendix *Hull-House Maps and Papers*, 1895, p. 208). John Dewey, Susan B. Anthony, and Theodore Roosevelt, lectured at Hull-House. Some of the services were self-supported (coffee-house, dispensary). Others were subsidized through private funding sources.

Addams and the residents of Hull-House formed a core community who lived and worked at the Settlement. They also investigated conditions in the surrounding neighborhood. They wrote together, investigated factories and industries, gathered statistics, examined sanitary conditions, and conducted health exams. They documented miserable conditions and then (acted) lobbied for legislative and political reform and organized the local community for social betterment. "Addams was the charismatic leader who translated (mediator role) the 'facts' to everyday language, articulating problems and needs of the community" (Deegan 1990, p. 6). The settlement provided for a "particular type of learning, one based on community involvement and challenge, especially by workers and the poor" (Deegan, 1990, p. 39).

Originally, Addams modeled Hull-House after England's Toynbee Hall. Toynbee Hall used an elite model. The founder, aristocrat, Arnold Booth, believed his vision would solve the problems of the poor. Addams rather quickly rejected this model and adopted a more inclusive role for the residents. It was a more "democratic model where a settlement resident needed to be in the district as much as people in the district" (Deegan, 1990, p. 39). As evidence of their faith in the (ideal) democratic model "they argued that 'facts' and 'scientific' evidence could persuade all fair minded people," (the members of the community) to formulate action which could stimulate (produce) needed reform (progress).

The residents had a particular method to stimulate social progress. They would (1) suspect that a certain problem existed; (2) gather data documenting that such a problem did exist; (3) form a policy for social action based on the factual evidence, and then; (4)

“lobby political and community forces to alleviate or eliminate the problem” (Deegan, 1990, p. 40). Their team approach to problem solving and social research could be described as a “community of inquiry.”

Although a team approach is used, the work is facilitated by a leader/mediator. Jane Addams took on this role at Hull-House. It should be noted that aside from language barriers people within the immigrant community “often had contempt for one another. They brought their old-world national hostilities with them. This made the neighborhood more contentious than one might expect” (Holbrook, 1895, p. 18). Obviously, this diverse “little Europe” was an environment where mediation was necessary and difficult.<sup>16</sup>

The labor movement offers another example. Addams often found herself negotiating labor disputes. She usually sided with labor and worked tirelessly for the better working conditions. Nevertheless, she chastises leaders of both groups (labor/capitalists) for constructing a dualistic we/they or friend/enemy dichotomy to describe management and labor. Real progress is difficult when these ‘fixated dualisms’ capture debate. The value of the Settlement is that it could bridge the gap and articulate a “larger and steadier view” (something akin to Dewey’s end-in-view).

The settlement may be of value if it can take a *larger and steadier view* than is always possible to the workingman, smarting under a sense of wrong; of the capitalist, seeking only to ‘quiet down,’ . It is possible to recall them both to a sense of the larger development (Addams 1895, p. 196) (italics added).

Her actions as labor negotiator were also connected to her larger view of democracy. “We contend that the task of the labor movement is the interpretation of democracy into industrial affairs” (Addams 1895, p. 196).

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<sup>16</sup>Nationalities during the 1890s included Irish, German, Dutch, Russian, Polish, Italian, French, French Canadian, Bohemian, Scandinavian, Chinese and Colored (Hull Maps and Papers, 1895).

Returning a minute to the elephant and the blind men. Consider a world filled with two groups of blind men. One group focuses on "what is truth" or "science" or "government." The other focuses on use. Both groups are enriched if they can communicate with each other. Good mediators facilitate such communication. To do this, it helps if they see the big picture (the larger and steadier view) and have a sense of where the elephant is going (common good). Good mediators enhance success and reduce discord in "communities of inquiry."

In the last few pages of *The Second Twenty Years at Hull-House* Addams (1930) reflected on her experiences and defines the essential nature of a settlement (community of inquiry). She is flexible, realistic and patient.

The thesis which emerged in the third decade of our existence as a sort of settlement creed that the processes of social amelioration [addressing social problems] are of necessity the results of gradual modification ...[and]...requires the cooperation of many people [community] and because ... it is impossible to get the interest of the entire [geographic] community centered upon any given theme, we gradually discovered that the use of the current event [current problem] is valuable beyond all other methods. ... In time we came to define a settlement as an institution attempting to learn from life itself [do inquiry] in which undertaking we did not hesitate to admit that we encountered many difficulties and failures (Addams, 1930, pp. 407-408).

### **Products of “communities of inquiry”**

In the early 1890s, Jane Addams supervised the writing and production of *Hull-House Maps and Papers*<sup>17</sup>. This, 230 page, book is testament to the residents commitment to careful systematic “inquiry”. In addition, *Maps and Papers* is a true manifestation and

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<sup>17</sup> Sociologist, Mary Jo Deegan (1990:55), describes *Hull-House Maps and Papers* as a “significant,” “brilliant sociological document. ...First, it established the Chicago tradition of studying the city and its inhabitants. Second, its central chapters on immigrants, poverty, and occupational structures became the major substantive interests of Chicago sociologists. Third, it used the methodology of mapping demographic information on urban populations according to their geographic distribution... Fourth, it undisputedly shows the intellectual influence of Addams on the men of the Chicago School. Fifth, it reveals the development of her social thought and intellectual antecedents.”

product of a “community of inquiry.” *Maps and Papers* has no single editor or author. It is written by a community --“the residents of Hull-House.” It is a tangible product created by a “community of inquiry.”

The residents of Hull-House had a strong commitment to the first two phases of their experimental effort to stimulate social progress: (step 1) suspect that a certain problem existed; and (step 2) gather data documenting that such a problem did exist. The information gleaned in the problem recognition and evidence collection stages formed the basis of their understanding of the nearby neighborhood and its problems. It was also the foundation for their subsequent policy recommendations (step 3) and political activity (step 4).

In the first chapter of *Maps and Papers*, Agnes Sinclair Holbrook (1895) describes how the residents of Hull-House investigated the conditions of the people by putting in “graphic form a few facts concerning the section of Chicago immediately east of the House” (p. 3). They did this using information collected from 1893 Department of Labor Census entitled *Special Investigation of the Slums of Great Cities*. Florence Kelley (1895), a resident of Hull-House, was “the Special Agent Expert in charge in Chicago.” The data collected by the government officials was “brought within the very doors” (Holbrook, 1895, p. 3). The residents of Hull-House copied the documents. Using an innovative and ahead of its time mapping technique, information about nationalities and wage scales were aggregated and then displayed as colorful maps on the walls of Hull-House. The maps were also included in an elaborate appendix to *Maps and Papers*.

Holbrook (1895, p. 11) describes the overarching *problem* facing the residents of Hull-House. Slums have become a “menace to the public health and security.” Their goal (end in view) was to help move “toward an improvement in the sanitation of the neighborhood, and toward an introduction of some degree of comfort.” It should be noted that sanitation was no small issue since in the 1890s, horses were the primary

means of transportation. Stables and outhouses were generally found on the ground floor of the tenement housing<sup>18</sup>.

The investigation was painstaking and

the facts set forth are as trustworthy as personal inquiry and intelligent effort could make them. Not only was each house, tenement, and room visited and inspected, but in many cases the reports obtained from one person were corroborated by many other.

Several of the authors of *Maps and Papers* worked for the public sector. As noted earlier, the highly educated, Florence Kelley (1895) worked for the Department of Labor and for the State of Illinois as a State Inspector of Factories (Kelley and Stevens, 1895). Her assistant (Alzina Stevens) was also a resident of Hull-House. Julia Lathrop (1895) was a member of the Illinois Board of Charities. The Board of Charities was not a private non profit organization as the name might imply. Rather, it was a public sector organization. Not surprisingly, these authors referred to problems in public administration such as corrupt, politically motivated hiring practices. This was particularly problematic in the public hospitals which cared for the poor and insane. Not surprisingly, Hull-House residents worked for civil service reform.

The aim of both the maps and subsequent narrative chapters (papers) was to present "

conditions rather than advance theories- to bring within reach of the public exact information concerning this quarter of Chicago rather than to advise methods by which it may be improved. While vitally interested in every question connected with this part of the city, and especially concerned to enlarge the life and vigor of the immediate neighborhood, *Hull-House offers these facts more with the hope of stimulating inquiry and action*, and evolving new thoughts and methods, than with the idea of recommending its own manner of effort (Holbrook, 1985, p. 13) (italics added).

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<sup>18</sup>This goal stimulated action. Jane Addams herself became a Garbage Inspector of Cook County

An examination of *Maps and Papers* is useful because it highlights the concrete nature of the "community of inquiry." Communities of inquiry often share their efforts and findings with wider audiences. They also open their inquiry (theory and methods) to broader scrutiny through published scholarship. What is also noteworthy, is that *Maps and Papers* was used as a basis of subsequent efforts to improve life within the immigrant community that it studied.

Why would a document written (by what might be described as a group of secular nuns) over 100 years ago have any relevance to modern PA? In the next section, a 1998 product of a PA relevant "community of inquiry" is discussed. There are remarkable similarities to *Maps and Papers*. The differences, however, are also relevant because they show how the "community of inquiry" notion has evolved and how it can be useful and innovative today.

Two things struck me immediately when I saw *Helping Kids Succeed-Alaskan Style*. First, like *Maps and Papers* the community was given credit. There was no single author or editor. It is "written by and for Alaskans." Secondly, I noticed that the spiral binding made it a book easy to *use*.

A careful skimming reveals that *Helping Kids* is an ideal example of a PA relevant "community of inquiry" because it incorporates theory, data, community and "use" in new and innovative ways. It was also developed by public organizations such as the Association of Alaskan School Boards and the State of Alaska, Department of Health and Social Services<sup>19</sup> in cooperation with a research institute (Search Institute of Minneapolis).

*Helping Kids Succeed* uses the Search Institutes "Developmental Assets Framework" to create a handbook for school counselors, teachers and parents. Society has spent much time and resources dealing with the problems of children and adolescence

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<sup>19</sup>Both the Division of Public Health, Section of Maternal Child and Family Services and the Division of Alcoholism and Drug Abuse, Rural & Native Services.

(juvenile delinquency, drug and alcohol abuse, failure in school, teen pregnancy). *Helping Kids Succeed* is innovative because it uses a framework that examines these issues from the vantage of success. It focuses on “assets...the key building blocks in children's lives that help them grow up strong, capable and caring” (*Helping Kids*, 1998, p. 1).

*Helping kids* uses research on “resiliency” or the ability to “withstand hardship, repair yourself, bounce back, and grow. A resilient person copes with stressful things in life and becomes stronger as a result” (*Helping Kids*, 1998, p. 1). Researchers at the Search Institute in Minnesota surveying over 1.5 million seventh through twelfth graders to develop the assets framework – “a model that describes what we each can do to help kids succeed” (*Helping Kids*, 1998, p. 1)<sup>20</sup>. The model isolates “40 things kids need to be successful.” The *more* of these things (assets) teen have the more likely they will grow to be effective adults --healthy, productive and caring. Conversely, the fewer assets a child have the more likely they were to be troubled youth. Early in *Helping Kids* there are charts (hauntingly similar to the maps in *Maps and Papers*) which illustrate research showing that more assets promote healthy behaviors and protects against unhealthy behaviors. For example, 72% of children with the highest level of (31-40) assets are able to delay gratification (saves money for something special rather than

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<sup>20</sup>The Assets framework is divided into External and Internal assets. External assets include: SUPPORT (1)family support, (2) Positive family communication, (3) Other adult relationships, (4) Caring neighborhood and community, (5) Caring school climate, (6) Parent involvement in school; EMPOWERMENT (7) Community values youth, (8) Youth have useful roles, (9) Volunteers in community, (10) Safety; BOUNDARIES AND EXPECTATIONS (11) Family boundaries, (12) School boundaries, (13) neighborhood boundaries, (14) Adult role models, (15) Positive peer influence, (16) High expectations; CONSTRUCTIVE USE OF TIME (17) Creative and cultural activities, (18) Youth programs, (19) Religious community, (20) Time at home. Internal Assets include: (21) Achievement motivation, (22) school engagement, (23) Homework, (24) bonding to school, (25) Reading for pleasure, POSITIVE VALUES (26) Caring, (27) Equality and social justice, (28) integrity, (29) Honesty, (30) Responsibility, (31) Restraint; SOCIAL SKILLS (32) Planning and decision-making, (33) Interpersonal skills, (34) Cultural competence, (35) Resistance skills, (36) Peaceful conflict resolution; POSITIVE IDENTITY (37) Personal power, (38) Self-esteem, (39) Sense of purpose, (40) Positive view of personal future. (*Helping Kids*, 1998: 10-12)For more information on the Search Institute and the assets framework see [www.search-institute.org](http://www.search-institute.org)

spending it right away). Only 7% of children with few (10 and under) assets delayed gratification. Turning to unhealthy behavior, low assets are associated with violent behavior while high assets are not (*Helping Kids*, 1998, p. 5).

The asset framework was adapted to the diverse culture that is Alaska. The developers of *Helping Kids* traveled to 114 communities (over 4000 people). In workshops, cultural retreats and interviews they sought ideas about applying the asset framework to Alaska's kids. Like the authors of *Maps and Papers*, their data collection was painstaking and comprehensive. They asked how parents, schools, faith communities, the larger community and traditional communities could build a child's assets or provide opportunities for asset development for all kids.

*Helping Kids* is oriented toward *use, use and more use*. It includes an asset survey that can be given to students and their parents. A child's 'asset' level can be assessed. Also, kids and parents are encouraged to talk about their perceptions. This encourages productive dialogue, awareness and asset development. A school counselor could use the asset framework to evaluate a child and to make suggestions to parents.

Insights from the interviews, retreats and workshops are collected and organized around specific suggestions about a specific community (faith community, traditional, family/extended family) can do to strengthen the assets among its youth. For example asset #9 "Service to others" (youth gives one hour or more per week to serving the community) can be strengthened in traditional ways by "teaching the children how to cut meat, how to distribute it to the Elders and to the other people in the community" (*Helping Kids*, 1998, p. 55). Beside each suggestion, the geographic community of origin is identified; Napaskiak in the above example.

The *use* of *Helping Kids* extends in different ways. I began asking myself personal questions, where would my boys fit in the asset framework? Did my community of faith have youth programs that supported the 40 assets? My sister, a County Commissioner in Montana, (and the person who showed me *Helping Kids*) is

considering *using* the asset framework in her County's Juvenile Justice programs. The book facilitates more "communities of inquiry."

## **Synthesis**

Ideally, a "community of inquiry" is a group of people that are united by a shared interest, problem or issue. They have a commitment to address the issue, problem or interest through a method akin to scientific investigation. Essential to the method is a laboratory mind that is able to suspend belief and is open to fresh, diverse, ideas and evidence. Communication in the community stresses listening. There is a commitment among the community to *act* to address the problem/issue. The actions taken to resolve the problem/issue are assessed using communication and reflection about consequences. Generally, empirical evidence is used in the assessment. The community of inquiry is often facilitated by a leader/mediator. This person (or persons) uses reflection and listening to bridge problematic communication dualisms and articulates the larger often evolving end-in-view. The leader/mediator is a role well suited to the public administrator.

The "community of inquiry" notion, like pragmatism itself, emphasizes practice. Its members are a *doing* community. The 'community of inquiry' as relevant to PA emerged from ideas and experiences of Jane Addams. I believe that pragmatism's greatest strength (from the PA perspective) is that it captures the voice of the practitioner. It does this, while at the same time having a deeply satisfying intellectual heritage. Jane Addams is the pragmatist who most authentically captures this voice.

First, like other practitioners, she emphasized the role of action and practice over theory and contemplation. Second, the notion of democracy is central to her philosophy. She incorporates both an ideal and realistic vision of democracy. Her philosophy speaks to a higher purpose by developing an ideal democracy. At the same time she is realistic about the problems of a flawed democracy in government. She thus acknowledges and

bridges the dualism between real and ideal within notions of democracy. Addams position supports effective administration because reflective administrators are often confronted with the consequences of dualism's. In addition, many of the residents of Hull-House worked for the state, local and federal governments. Jane Addams herself was a Cook County ward garbage inspector. Hence, the 'community of inquiry' she is most associated with included public problems and public administrators. Finally, although the activities of Hull-House were funded through private sources, she included government within her vision of action. These are just four obvious connections to public administration.

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