



Recognizing the Role of Community in Civic Education: Lessons from Hull House, Highlander Folk School, and the Neighborhood Learning Community

Nicholas V. Longo

University of Minnesota, Doctoral Candidate
long0176@umn.edu

CIRCLE WORKING PAPER 30

APRIL 2005



CIRCLE

The Center for Information & Research
on Civic Learning & Engagement

OVERVIEW

Throughout our nation's history, education has been linked to the promise of democracy. Yet over the past century this connection has too often been narrowed to the school as its sole vessel. This is harmful to education—it puts too much pressure on a single institution. It is also harmful to democracy—it ignores the role of the many institutions that educate, along with the connections between these institutions. This study unearths and examines rich models of learning in which multiple institutions collaboratively play a role in promoting civic education. Using historical and ethnographic case study analysis, this paper addresses the research question: What is the role of community in civic education?

Specifically, I examine Hull House and the pioneering social settlement work of Jane Addams at the turn of the 20th century; democratic education for social change put into practice during the civil rights movement by Myles Horton, Septima Clark, Bernice Robinson, and others at the Highlander Folk School; and the Neighborhood Learning Community in St. Paul, Minnesota, a network of community institutions, schools, and higher education institutions which applies the lessons from Hull House and Highlander in its efforts to create a neighborhood culture of learning. I give short overviews of these cases and then detail the lessons for the role of community in civic education.

The cases in this study present important historical and contemporary models where educators commit to making change over longer periods of time; place a deliberate emphasis on comprehensive, relational, and public education; make learning relevant to people's everyday lives; recognize the creative powers of diversity through public work; utilize the talents and instincts of non-professionals; foster reciprocal relationships; and embrace flexibility and trust in the messiness of democracy.

This study introduces the building blocks for a new way of thinking about civic education by presenting a narrative on a diverse set of practices that reach beyond the schools and amounts to, I hope, a widening of the conversation on the connections between education, community, and democracy.

“There is a fundamental problem in the progressive theory of education that I think bears scrutiny by those concerned with the politics of education in contemporary America,” begins Lawrence Cremin (1976) in his 1975 lecture to the John Dewey Society. Cremin, the former dean of Columbia University’s Teachers College who wrote extensively on the history of American education, then defines the problem: our narrow educational focus. Since the 19th century, Cremin continues, the problem is “the tendency to focus so exclusively on the potentialities of the school as a lever of social improvements and reform as to ignore the possibilities of other educative institutions” (p. 3). This problem still plagues us today. If anything, it has only gotten worse.

Education has become synonymous with schooling. Since the U.S. Department of Education’s National Commission on Excellence in Education warned of the deterioration of American education in *A Nation at Risk* in 1983, the crisis in education has become a national priority for people across the ideological spectrum. It has since become common for policy makers, educators, parents, and youth to articulate their concerns with the state of our educational system and make no mention of anything but the school. This is seen, for example, in the bipartisan No Child Left Behind federal legislation meant to improve educational achievement and accountability through the standardization of American schooling.

On the surface this seems to make sense given the time and resources American society devotes to schooling, and the social investment we make in schools as instruments for democratic socialization. As *The Civic Mission of Schools* (2003) rightly observes, “schools are the only institutions with the capacity and mandate to reach virtually every person in the country” (p. 5). Yet schools cannot educate in isolation. Equating education with schooling relieves the rest of society from educative and civic responsibility (Goodlad, 1997). It also misses the root of the issue because what happens in schools reflects what happens outside of schools. Educational successes and failures are mostly the products of communities and families: underachieving schools simply pass

along the inequality of resources from families and communities, while high achieving schools pass along family and community privileges (Coleman, 1966; Steinberg, 1996; Traub, 2000). Finally, seeing education as schooling overlooks important assets for improving our educational system and preparing young people to contribute to our democracy: our communities and community institutions.

Cremin (1976) recognized the importance of these objections by taking a broad definition of education reaching:

[B]eyond the schools and colleges to the multiplicity of individuals and institutions that educate—parents, peers, siblings, and friends, as well as families, churches, synagogues, libraries, museums, summer camps, benevolent societies, agricultural fairs, settlement houses, factories, radio stations, and television networks. (p. 29)

It is my premise that this insight—education reaching beyond the school—offers new hope both for academic and civic outcomes. And while academic and civic successes are certainly interrelated pieces of any educational reform, I focus on the potential of this expansive definition for civic education. Specifically, I examine the role of community in civic education.

Protest Against a Restricted View: My Research

Jane Addams, the founder of Hull House, Chicago’s famous settlement house, once described the settlement movement as “a protest against a restricted view of education” (Addams, 1910/1998, p. 275). This aptly describes the approach to education I explore in this study. This view of education is founded not only in the theory and practice of the settlement movement, but also in the writings of the great educational philosopher John Dewey, the civic experiments of the school as a social center movement, and efforts to create community schools, neighborhood learning communities, and engaged colleges and universities.

My research on the role of community in

civic education has many lessons for civic learning and the civic mission of schools. In this paper, I present these lessons based case study research and analysis of historical and contemporary models that utilize community engagement for civic learning. These findings are drawn from a larger qualitative study based on archival research, interviews, and focus groups (Longo, 2005).

I examine Hull House and the pioneering social settlement work of Jane Addams at the turn of the 20th century; democratic education for social change put into practice during the civil rights movement by Myles Horton and others at the Highlander Folk School; and the Neighborhood Learning Community in St. Paul, Minnesota, a network of community institutions, schools, and higher education institutions which applies the lessons from Hull House and Highlander in its efforts to create a neighborhood culture of learning. I give short overviews of these remarkable cases studies and then detail the lessons for recognizing the role of community in civic education, including: commit to making change over longer periods of time; place a deliberate emphasis on comprehensive, relational, and public education; make learning relevant to people's everyday lives; recognize the creative powers of diversity through public work; utilize the talents and instincts of non-professionals; foster reciprocal relationships; and embrace flexibility and trust in the messiness of democracy.

DEFINING CIVIC LEARNING

This is especially timely as the need to pursue civic learning is currently being championed by a host of initiatives. In K-12 education, the "campaign for the civic mission of schools," a coalition of 40 leading organizations, is building on the The Civic Mission of Schools report issued by the Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement (CIRCLE) and Carnegie Corporation research group to increase the quality of civic learning. And in higher education, a national "campaign for civic learning in college" is being spearheaded by Campus Compact, a national coalition of more than 950 colleges and universities. According to Peter Levine of CIRCLE, a primary architect of the movement for civic

renewal, civic learning can be defined in terms of the impressive list of civic goals set out by The Civic Mission of Schools (2003) for competent and responsible citizens. These four interrelated objectives include the aims that young people:

- Are informed and thoughtful; have a grasp and an appreciation of history and fundamental processes of American democracy; have an understanding and awareness of public and community issues; and have the ability to obtain information, think critically, and enter into dialogue among others with different perspectives.
- Participate in their communities through membership in or contributions to organizations working to address an array of cultural, social, political, and religious interests and beliefs.
- Act politically by having the skills, knowledge, and commitment needed to accomplish public purposes, such as group problem solving, public speaking, petitioning and protesting, and voting.
- Have moral and civic virtues such as concern for the rights and welfare of others, social responsibility, tolerance and respect, and belief in the capacity to make a difference. (p. 4)

Developing civic pathways to increase these values, skills, knowledge, and practices is the work of many policy makers, educators, and foundations as evidenced by the "campaign for the civic mission of schools" and the "campaign for civic learning in college." Community engagement can also be a leading pathway given the lessons from Hull House, Highlander, and the Neighborhood Learning Community.

HULL HOUSE AND THE ORIGINS OF COMMUNITY-BASED CIVIC LEARNING

In 1904, two years after John Dewey's influential "School as a Social Centre" (1902/1976) speech on the role of schools in building

community, Jane Addams hinted at a more fundamental shift in educational practice than Dewey's conception of schools as central to community life. Addams called for communities to be the center of education. Addams (1904/1994) asked her readers to imagine what public schools would look like if they followed the educational practices of Hull House, the social settlement that Addams had formed with Ellen Gates Starr 15 years before. "We could imagine the business man teaching the immigrant his much needed English and arithmetic," she wrote, "and receiving in return lessons in the handling of tools and materials so that they should assume in his mind a totally different significance from that [which] the factory gives them." In the same place, Addams argued, one might see immigrant Italian women learning English in the kitchen while they teach their instructors "how to cook the delicious macaroni, such a different thing from the semi-elastic product which Americans honor with that name" (p. 120).

This was not a new concept for Addams. In fact, she had been articulating this conception of education and schooling since the founding of Hull House. This description, however, offers one of the earliest descriptions of the practice of community-based civic learning.

Addams founded Hull House on September 18, 1889 with Ellen Gates Starr in an urban neighborhood of Chicago. Addams (1910/1998) wrote of this substantial undertaking:

I had confidence that although life itself might contain many difficulties, the period of mere passive receptivity had come to an end, and I had at last finished with the everlasting 'preparation for life,' however ill-prepared I might be. (p. 61)

She would have no way of knowing at that time that their decision would have a substantial impact on an entire era of reform efforts, many of which thrive to this day, including community-based and civic learning initiatives today (Daynes & Longo, 2004; Harkavy & Puckett, 1994; Morton & Saltmarsh, 1997).

Addams and Starr began with a modest plan to live as neighbors with poor immigrants. Hull House, however, was filled with an ambitious democratic vision. It was hoping to provide cultural transformation in urban America, implicit in Addams's idea that the settlement "was an attempt to express the meaning of life in terms of life itself" (Addams, 1899/1965, p. 187). This experiment was not simply meant to help poor immigrants. Like service-learning today, the settlements hoped to address pressing "objective" needs in the community, but also provide a creative, educational "subjective" outlet for college-educated people by putting their idealism into action (Addams, 1910/1998).

Giving idealism concrete opportunities for application was a core ingredient for success. In an address in 1892, Addams gives us an insight into a core dilemma that still demoralizes young people (as well as those older) today—the feeling of powerlessness. Addams (1910/1998) writes:

We have in America a fast-growing number of cultivated young people who have no recognized outlet for their active faculties. They hear constantly of the great social maladjustment, but no way is provided for them to change it, and their uselessness hangs upon them heavily... [T]he sense of uselessness is the severest shock which the human system can sustain, and that if persistently sustained, it results in atrophy of function. These young people have had advantages of college, European travel, and of economic study, but they are sustaining this shock. (p. 83)

Addressing this "sense of uselessness" with concrete applications is one of the core legacies of Hull House that lives on in today's efforts to revitalize civic engagement.

Soon after founding Hull House, Addams realized that education was also inexplicably linked with civic engagement. Thus, Hull House

increasingly linked its educational efforts with attempts to bring about political reform. During the Progressive Era, Jane Addams was an articulate voice on almost every reform issue and her settlement house was a practical response to many of these issues (Davis, 1991). Hull House addressed political issues as varied as the corruption of elected politicians, child labor, labor organizing, arts education, war and peace, treatment of new Americans, and the need for sanitary streets. In taking on these issues, Jane Addams was a founder of social work; a champion for children's rights, immigrants' contributions, and international peace; and a powerful woman in times where there were limited opportunities for women in public life. More importantly, for the purposes of this exploration, Jane Addams was an educator for democracy.

As an educator for democracy using community-based learning, Addams and Hull House provide important lessons for how we conduct our work today. As Gary Daynes and I have argued in further detail (Daynes & Longo, 2004), Addams allows us a glimpse into the origins of service-learning as a practice, as opposed to a theory. A history of service-learning that takes account of Addams also locates the origins of service-learning not in the schools, but in the community. And it places the origins of service-learning squarely in the movement for the expansion of the role of women in public life. Jane Addams's work is also a valuable reminder that service-learning may be understood not only as an educational technique, but also as a craft, whose greatest value is the unpredictable creativity that it brings to our public life. Each of these lessons for service-learning—practice, community, gender, and craft—is also vital to our contemporary efforts to link community learning with civic education.

**HIGHLANDER FOLK SCHOOL:
DEMOCRATIC EDUCATION AS A FOUNDATION FOR
CIVIC LEARNING**

Prior to founding Highlander Folk School in 1932 in the poor, rural area near the small Cumberland Plateau town of Monteagle, Tennessee,

Myles Horton, like Jane Addams in the late 19th century, spent time researching and visiting examples of innovative approaches to education. Horton was looking for a way to put his hopes for overcoming social injustice through democratic education into practice. These early inquiries brought him to Chicago to learn from, among other people, Jane Addams and her then 40 year experiment with community-based learning at Hull House. These visits gave Horton first-hand lessons from Addams on the early days at Hull House and her experiences with keeping the vision intact through difficult times. Most importantly, Horton came away inspired by what was the key similarity between Addams and himself: an abiding faith in democracy (Longo, 2005).

On Christmas night, 1931, while in Denmark visiting the Danish folk schools, several months after meeting with Jane Addams, Myles Horton wrote to himself:

I can't sleep but there are dreams. What you must do is go back ... get a simple place [and] move in.... [T]he situation is there ... you start with this and let it grow.... It will build its own structure and take its own form. You can go to school all your life and you'll never figure it out because you're trying to get an answer that can only come from people in the life situation. (as cited in Adams, 1975, p. 24)

Almost one year after writing these words, Horton found the place and people to begin, and on November 1, 1932—just over 43 years after the founding of Hull House—the Highlander Folk School was launched in Gundy Country, Tennessee with the goal of linking education and social change.

During its first 30 years, Highlander was an integral part of several social movements. It was a community folk school, a training center for Southern unions, and a gathering place and partner for black and white civil rights activists (Glen, 1996). Highlander was at the center of several struggles for social justice, most notably the labor

movement in the 1930's and 1940's, and the civil rights movement in the 1950's and 1960's.

Highlander's approach to education put problem-based learning at the core by using a democratic method described as a "circle of learners" (Horton, 1998, 1985/2003). "I think of an educational workshop as a circle of learners," Horton (1998) writes. "'Circle' is not an accidental term, for there is no head of the table at Highlander workshops; everybody sits around a circle" (p. 150). Out of this description, others, including service-learning pioneer John Wallace of the University of Minnesota, have termed the style of teaching and learning at Highlander "learning circles" and learning circles are widely used in classrooms and conferences across the country to reflect on community engagement experiences (Pearson & Wallace, 2004).

In a conversation with Paulo Freire, Horton uses a fitting metaphor to explain how Highlander's theory of education involves more than people simply sitting in a circle, chatting, without any direction. Horton (Horton & Freire, 1990) responds, fittingly, by comparing democratic education to planting a garden:

Someone criticized Highlander workshops, saying, 'All you do is sit there and tell stories.' Well, if he'd seen me in the spring planting my garden, he would've said: 'That guy doesn't know how to grow vegetables. I don't see any vegetables.'... Well he was doing the same thing about observing the workshop. It was the seeds getting ready to start, and he thought that was the whole process. To me it's essential that you start where people are. But if you're going to start where they are and they don't change, then there's no point in starting because you're not going anywhere.... But if you don't have some vision of what ought to be or what they can become, then you have no way of contributing anything to the process. (pp. 99-100)

The seeds of Highlander's educational method grew in dramatic ways. Highlander's most famous student, Rosa Parks, for example, reflected that Myles Horton was the first white man she ever trusted and that he taught her that it was possible to trust other white people. Her experiences at Highlander, in the summer before the Montgomery Bus Boycott, helped her see the value of collaborative action across racial lines (Horton, 1966).

Another important seed grew into the Citizenship Schools during the civil rights movement. Highlander created the Citizenship Schools with the community of Johns Island, where strong local leaders, such as Esau Jenkins, had a desire to give black citizens political power by helping them gain the right to vote through literacy education. These elements, along with careful planning, enabled this to be one of the most powerful examples of democratic education in the community connected with civic engagement.

From an initial class in 1956 of 14 students with a teacher named Bernice Robinson, a black beautician, the program grew rapidly throughout the segregated South. When demand grew too great for Highlander to handle, the Citizenship Schools were transferred to the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) led by Martin Luther King. In a report to the Board of Directors of Highlander in 1965, Septima Clark, a staff member from Highlander and later SCLC, reported that more than 25,000 people had taken classes and were responsible for more than 50,000 registered black voters in the South (Clark, 1965).

The Citizenship Schools and Highlander provide a model for civic learning illustrating how civic competency can be learned in a community setting through democratic education. It also showed how educational institutions, including schools, colleges and universities, can partner with other institutions to support community learning for the development of what was then termed "first class citizenship." The democratic education at Highlander, like the settlement house movement, recalls a dramatic lesson: ordinary people, even people who were poor and uneducated in a formal

sense and who suffered from long histories of abuse and oppression, learned that they could develop civic self-confidence and make lasting contributions to their communities (Boyte & Kari, 1996).

NEIGHBORHOOD LEARNING COMMUNITY: COMMUNITY-BASED CIVIC LEARNING TODAY

Inspired by the democratic traditions of Hull House and Highlander, the Neighborhood Learning Community is a network of people and organizations working collaboratively to strengthen learning on the West Side of St. Paul. The network directly supports and partners with K-12 schools by coordinating, catalyzing, and making visible informal and formal learning initiatives in the West Side neighborhood. Organizers involved with the Neighborhood Learning Community have provided leadership development, language learning, and youth development in partnership with youth, teachers, and adult neighborhood residents since the founding of the Jane Addams School for Democracy in 1996. This community education initiative, named for the founder of Hull House, grew into the Neighborhood Learning Community in 2001. One consistent theme has been to connect community learning with civic engagement.

The organizations and people involved in the Neighborhood Learning Community work to create what they term "a culture of learning" in the neighborhood. By culture of learning, West Side organizers seek to create an environment for intergenerational learning that not only nurtures individual growth, but also develops an educative system on the neighborhood level that supports learning and civic engagement throughout the community.

The importance of a culture of learning is evident for young people involved with a community-based learning initiative called the Youth Apprenticeship Project. Within the broader context of the Neighborhood Learning Community, the Youth Apprenticeship Project provides summer employment opportunities in West Side nonprofits for high school students who live or go to school on the West Side. This public work includes adult mentors at each site, as well as four "coaches" who

lead weekly reflection sessions for the 29 youth involved with the Youth Apprenticeship Project.

With the Youth Apprenticeship Project, teenagers select to work with organizations throughout the West Side that take a variety of approaches to making community impact. Youth apprenticed at direct service organizations, such as the neighborhood food shelf; youth development organizations, such as parks and recreation centers; and community organizing and electoral initiatives, such as a West Side effort to register eligible residents for the upcoming election. Finally, youth work as leaders doing community gardening, along with other projects, such as cooking, photography, and community youth leadership on an urban farm project.

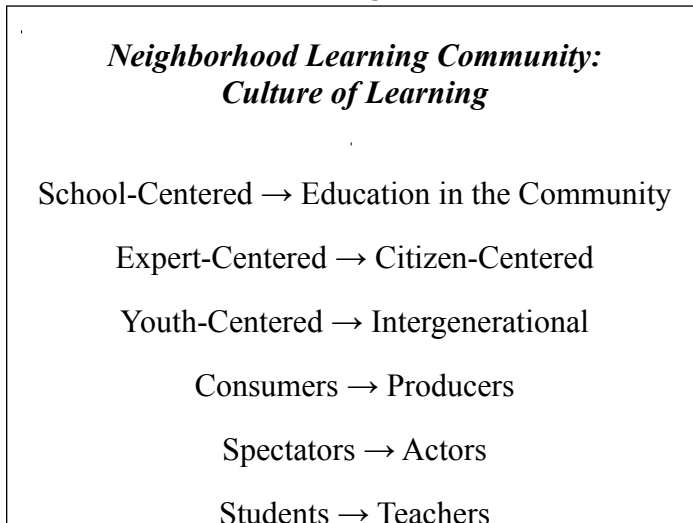
Each of the apprenticeships deliberately reflects upon the public dimensions of their host organizations and the civic dimensions of their work. Giving youth experience with personally fulfilling work that makes a meaningful public contribution is a deliberate aim of the apprenticeship. "We think that there aren't a lot of places where kids can learn that they can make civic contributions through work," explains Nan Kari, who helped develop the curriculum for the Youth Apprenticeship Project. "We wanted to find a way to weave together work and citizenship."

Youth worked to combat violence on the West Side by offering intergenerational dialogues, social events, and community dances. Youth worked to publicize the learning opportunities on the West Side in a directory which will also be an interactive web site, so, as one youth explained, "people can be more informed about what their neighborhood is into." The directory will include information on neighborhood organizations, stores, businesses, popular places, and public art. Still other youth collected and documented the oral histories of Hmong elders to learn more about and honor their cultural traditions. "We want them to think about making change in a community and see that there are a lot of ways to make change," explains one of the adult neighborhood coaches in describing the diversity of apprenticeship options.

With projects such as the Youth Apprenticeship Project where young people's

public work projects make civic contributors, the Neighborhood Learning is creating a culture of learning. This constitutes several paradigm shifts: seeing ordinary people as producers, not consumers; actors, not spectators, and teachers, not students. In addition, these efforts are intergenerational, not simply youth-centered; centered in the community, not the school; and driven by citizens, not experts—as illustrated in Figure 1.

Figure 1



When these ideas frame a civic learning initiative, it represents a conceptual shift that undergirds programming, as evidenced by the Youth Apprenticeship Project. This approach runs contrary to many of the dominant views of citizen/learners in public life. As opposed to passive recipients of education, a culture of learning is centered what organizers for the Neighborhood Learning Community term, “co-creating learning opportunities.”

**LESSONS LEARNED:
CONNECTING COMMUNITY AND CIVIC
LEARNING**

Unfortunately, “co-creating learning” is not the dominant educational framework. Too often government policy, schooling, or other potential mediating institutions, such as colleges, universities, or community-based institutions are failing to address the problems of community deterioration, democratic disengagement, and

academic underperformance. It is also apparent that these interrelated issues cannot be addressed by any of these institutions in isolation. Therefore, Ira Harkavy (2002), one of the most articulate voices in today’s movement for school-community partnerships, calls for systemic reform and puts forward a challenge for educators and policy makers:

A strategy needs to be developed that connects school and school system change to a process of democratic community change and development. The strategy should be directed toward tapping, integrating, mobilizing, and galvanizing the enormous untapped resources of communities, including colleges and universities, for the purpose of improving schooling and community life. (p. 22)

Important lessons for such a strategy are evident in the cases of Hull House, Highlander, and the Neighborhood Learning Community. These cases produce ideas and concrete practices for recognizing the role of community in civic education; and help us see the possibility for connecting community learning with civic learning. Some of the lessons learned from the cases include:

- Commit to making change over longer periods of time;
- Place a deliberate emphasis on comprehensive, relational, and public education;
 - Make learning relevant to people’s everyday lives;
- Recognize the creative powers of diversity through public work;
- Utilize the talents and instincts of non-professionals;
- Foster reciprocal relationships; and
- Embrace flexibility and trust in the messiness of democracy.

Change Requires Time

Robert Halpern (1995) has written a history of neighborhood initiatives as responses

to poverty and social problems. One conclusion of his study is that most often “reform impulses in America are short-lived” (p. 5). New generations must deal with the unfulfilled promises and tasks of prior generations. As we look at the history of educational responses to social problems, there is an impulse toward the short-term program and solution, not the long-term effort. This is confirmed from my case study research on civic education. Again and again, I found that time is an essential variable for connecting community learning with civic engagement.

Horton’s autobiography, aptly titled “the long haul,” seems to be the most fitting description for this lesson. Jane Addams at Hull House, Myles Horton at Highlander, and leaders in the Neighborhood Learning Community exemplify the importance of spending time building community. These commitments illuminate that change does not happen in snapshots or with one-time service projects; rather, change requires the deliberate and arduous commitment of time.

Horton founded Highlander in 1932, where he lived and worked for 58 years until his death in 1990. Jane Addams spent 46 years at Hull House, from its founding in 1889 until her death in 1935. Aware of these extraordinary commitments, many of the leaders involved with the Neighborhood Learning Community, such as Nan Skelton, Nan Kari, and John Wallace, have been involved since the Hull House inspired community education initiative, the Jane Addams School for Democracy, began on the West Side of St. Paul in 1996. Many of the children from Jane Addams School have grown into leaders of the Neighborhood Learning Community. And college students have stayed involved throughout their years in college and beyond graduation; some of them have even settled into the West Side neighborhood.

Carrie Catt, a contemporary of Jane Addams, helps explain the importance of time when she eulogized that Jane Addams would head her list of the country’s greatest women. “I do not base her greatness on Hull House,” she explained at Addams’s funeral, “important as that contribution is. Far more remarkable is the human trait of sticking to that project all her life. She

made it a success. She stuck through when it was a success. That is a rare thing to do—to stick to a success” (“Jane Addams,” 1935). Having educators willing to “stick to it” is essential for making long-term civic change.

Comprehensive, Relational, Public Education

To include civic dimensions to learning, there must be a deliberate emphasis on Lawrence Cremin’s (1976) call for comprehensive, relational, and public education. Comprehensive, relational, and public learning, absent from many educational settings, is evident in the cases in this paper. Hull House, Highlander, and the Neighborhood Learning Community act comprehensively by considering all the institutions that educate for democracy within the “configuration of education”—not simply schools or colleges and universities. For each, education includes community centers, nonprofits, libraries, museums, retreat centers, local businesses, as well as traditional schooling.

The cases act relationally by demonstrating the interconnections between the locations where education occurs. The Neighborhood Learning Community has a coordinator who acts as a “community connector.” Esau Jenkins was a social entrepreneur who played this role for the early Citizenship Schools on Johns Island. He connected the ideas of citizenship education with the many community organizations with which he was involved, including Highlander. Hull House residents acted relationally as well, doing what Addams described as “commission work,” connecting neighborhood residents with many public institutions.

Finally, in each of the cases the primary goal is not simply private gain for individual learners who participate. Rather, each case illustrates how civic learning can also help institutions—schools, colleges and universities, businesses, and community institutions—become more public spirited. In discussing its commission work, Jane Addams (1892/1965) recognizes the impact Hull House had in helping other institutions move beyond individual “formulas” to connect with a broader, public mission. The Neighborhood Learning Community works with a series of institutions, such as the public schools, universities,

and libraries, which have public missions which are sometimes marginalized.

In its early work, Highlander helped democratize labor unions and later worked with community institutions, including black churches on civil rights—all with public aims. And efforts such as Highlander's support for the civil rights movement, Hull House's advocacy for child labor laws and sanitary streets, and the Neighborhood Learning Community work on immigration and school reform issues, each demonstrate that education can transform publics, as well as individuals.

Relevant Learning

Unlike much of the current emphasis on educational accountability measured by "one size fits all" high-stakes testing, Hull House, Highlander, and the Neighborhood Learning Community emphasize relevancy to everyday life by respecting people's unique experiences. Experience, then, can then be the touchstone for educative growth. This approach might be simply stated as "engagement matters." "When students have an opportunity to use or share what they know," McLaughlin and Blank (2004) argue, "they want to learn more."

The learning circle approach used at Highlander (and by the Neighborhood Learning Community) recognizes that the best teachers of poor and working class people are "the people themselves" (Horton, 1998). People are the experts in their own stories; they also are best able to solve their own problems. The iron rule of community organizing applies to community-based civic learning: never do for others what they can do for themselves.

The role of an educator is to create free spaces for people to share experiences, learn from their peers, and ultimately, act collectively. With this approach, educators find ways to build on stories using what Horton called his "two-eyed theory of education"—with one eye on people's experiences, and another eye on their best aspirations; and when learning is relevant, educators are more likely to "free the powers within people," as Jane Addams encouraged (1902/2002).

For Addams, important insights came from events—brief moments that exemplified larger

insights. Addams used these experiences as the basis for reflective narratives, which were also the basis for educational programs, such as the Labor Museum with adult immigrants and their children, the many art and theater classes, and discussion groups which were hallmarks at Hull House. When educators pay attention to narratives, as Addams did, these experiences can lead to empowering contextualized learning with important implications for making learning relevant.

The practices of the Neighborhood Learning Community also illustrate that in a contemporary setting, especially when working with immigrant adults and youth, making learning relevant is essential. Community education is based on the premise that people's unique experiences are the foundation for democratic life. This was seen, for example, in focus groups with youth involved with the Youth Apprenticeship Project, I found that young people often find that their work in the community more relevant and connected to their lives than their experiences in school (Longo, 2005).

Creative Powers of Diversity

Hull House, Highlander Folk School, and the Neighborhood Learning Community each recognize the creative powers of diversity through common, public work (Boyte & Kari, 1996). A public work approach respects the resources of cultural, gender, age, class, and racial differences by finding ways for diverse people to contribute to solving public problems. Diversity, then, is honored not as a token gesture, but as a contribution to the creation of democratic communities.

The mostly female residents of Hull House were committed to addressing problems in the neighborhood, whether they were essential needs or structural reform. Settlement workers put issues in a larger democratic context. In response to the forces of industrialization and the influx of non-English speaking immigrants to fast growing cities at the turn of the 20th century, settlement workers put new Americans in the position of leaders with projects such as the Labor Museum which enabled immigrants to teach and then display their traditional craft skills. Addams said from the beginning that Hull House was about

creating a democracy that allows a diverse group of people to contribute their talents to the common lot. “This is the penalty of democracy,” she writes in *Democracy and Social Ethics* (1902/2002), “that we are bound to move retrograde or forward together. None of us can stand aside” (p. 112).

In the segregated South from the 1940’s through 1960’s, Highlander adds another important example of respecting the creative powers that black and white activists could have together in a non-segregated setting. Beginning in the early 1940’s, Highlander refused to accept the unjust segregation laws in its practices, and decided to host integrated workshops. While the decision-making process of Highlander was generally process oriented, on the issue of desegregating workshops at Highlander there was no room for debate: blacks and whites would learn together, eat meals together, sleep in the same room together, dance together, and be treated equally. This practice had an impact on many people, including Rosa Parks, who discovered for the first time that people of different races could join together for justice and equality.

The creative powers of diversity are also seen when young people are given the opportunity to make public contributions, as is done with the Neighborhood Learning Community’s Youth Apprenticeship Project. A youth apprentice reflects that an important lesson is to “see things from different perspectives” (personal interview, July 29, 2004). Nan Kari, an organizer with the Neighborhood Learning Community, explains this lesson: “The only way [the immense diversity] works is for people to learn a different kind of politics, to negotiate different interests and perspectives” (as cited in Boyte, 2004, p. 112). Navigating divisive and diverse communities with an appreciation for various perspectives is an important democratic skill and democratic value learned in community settings, such as Hull House, Highlander, and the Neighborhood Learning Community.

Talents and Instincts of Non-Professionals

Highlander, Hull House, and the Neighborhood Learning Community rely heavily

on the talents and instincts of non-professionals in their educational endeavors. Perhaps the best example of this emphasis was Highlander’s practices of hiring unlicensed teachers for the Citizenship Schools. Horton (1998) refused to hire certified teachers because he felt this type of professional training would cause people to impose their schooling methodology on the students. Thus, the Citizenship Schools hired a black beautician with no teaching experience, Bernice Robinson, as its first teacher. On the other hand, the informal education of the Citizenship Schools had the most difficulty in “degree crazy” places where the credentializing presence of colleges and universities made community learning more difficult to promote (Clark, 1960).

The settlement movement also relied on the talents and instincts of non-professionals. Hull House, for example, was “staffed” by settlement workers who lived and worked in the neighborhood. These residents came from mostly upper-class backgrounds, but they addressed issues as collaborators and co-investigators with their low-income neighbors. Addams’s writing is filled with stories of Hull House residents tackling local politics, delivering babies, lobbying for reform, and advising both their immigrant neighbors and city leaders on a variety of issues—none of which they were formally trained or certified to do.¹

Overcoming the tendency to rely on professionals to lead projects is much more difficult in our current technocratic society (Scott, 1998). Well-meaning professionals, armed with credentials and standardized techniques, have come to dominate almost every sector of society—from social work and education, to politics and business. There is less and less power given to ordinary citizens. This is a challenge for today’s civic educational movement.

In the Neighborhood Learning Community, non-professionals are put in the position of teachers and leaders. In describing how a group of college students created the Children’s Circle

¹ This, of course, took place prior to the professionalization of social work, a development which Addams fought. See Lasch (1995) *Revolt of the Elites* and Polsky (1991) *The Rise of the Therapeutic State*.

in the West Side neighborhood, John Wallace explains, "We don't trust [the college students who run the Children's Circle] because they have specialized knowledge. We trust in their spirit and their honesty and their ability to learn; we go with their instincts and abilities." Wallace, who helped develop the Jane Addams School and Neighborhood Learning Community, summarizes: "We're learning how non-professionals can work in a community-based way to create something subtle and powerful" (personal interview, May 27, 1998).

Reciprocal Relationships

"At the Jane Addams School [a core partner in the Neighborhood Learning Community], everyone is a teacher and everyone is a learner," explained a student from the Humphrey Institute voicing the stated philosophy of Jane Addams School and the broader Neighborhood Learning Community. The student continued, "I found that even while I was primarily a teacher as we studied for the [naturalization] test, I still learned a lot. I mostly learned by trying to teach the concepts of freedom and democracy. Having to find ways to illustrate showed me how contextual they are, and challenged me to think of what they meant to me" (as cited in Boyte, 2004, p. 99). The importance of reciprocal relationships could have been voiced by residents of Hull House, youth involved in the Youth Apprenticeship Project, teachers of the Citizenship Schools, or participants in countless civic learning projects.

The educational philosophy of Highlander helped inspire the approach of the Neighborhood Learning Community. It is common for organizers of the Neighborhood Learning Community to recall the words of Bernice Robinson, the first teacher of the Citizenship Schools. Setting the tone in the first class in the back room of a cooperative store, Robinson said, "I am not a teacher, we are going to learn together. You are going to teach me as much as I'm going to teach you" (as cited in Horton, 1998, p. 103). This sentiment embodies the spirit of reciprocal learning seen in the best civic education.

This same spirit of reciprocal relationships was prominent at Hull House. Addams always said the settlement house experiment addressed mutual

problems: the "objective" needs of the urban poor, as well as the "subjective" desires of the privileged suffering from the paralysis of inaction. In fact, Addams insisted that she founded Hull House just as much for herself as the poor who lived in the neighborhood. Most significantly, as a way to show that the settlement was not simply an act of charity, Addams often linked the need for reciprocal relationships to the promise of democracy. "[Hull House] is an effort to add the social function to democracy," explains Addams (1893/2002). "It was opened on the theory that the dependence of classes on each other is reciprocal; and that 'the social relationship is essentially a reciprocal relation'" (p. 14).

Flexibility and Trust in the Messiness of Democracy

The cases described in this paper each strive for a democracy that is not a fixed point; but rather, they strive for a democracy that is dynamic, ever-changing, and messy. For instance, the weekly reflection sessions with young people involved with the Youth Apprenticeship Project is a high-energy and often chaotic environment, with young people scattered around the room filled with excitement and sometimes wanting to talk all at once. The same could certainly be said of a learning circle at Highlander. These sessions are not held in traditional classrooms that have students sitting neatly in rows; nor should they be. These community practitioners have learned to not only deal with messiness, but they also tend to thrive in uncertainty. Their reform work requires a spirit of improvisation and adaptation that marks the creative longevity that Highlander and Hull House exemplify, and the courage to try new things, seen with the Neighborhood Learning Community.

This approach also requires an unbending trust in the capacity of ordinary people. When Myles Horton (1998) declared that there is no method to learn at Highlander aside from "trusting people and believing in their ability to think for themselves" (p. 157), he meant that flexibility and trust are essential for democratic practice.

Flexibility is also seen in the responsiveness in each case study to community-generated

requests. Highlander partnered on the literacy at the request of Johns Island residents, and later the requests of other communities to start Citizenship Schools. Organizers of the Neighborhood Learning Community tackled projects, such as teaching English, helping immigrants pass the naturalization exam, working with young children, learning to garden, and trying to reform the local schools, because these were the community-defined issues, at those moments. Each of these actions was not pre-determined; they were based on improvisational responses to community interests and needs.

Likewise, in a talk given in 1892, just after Hull House opened its doors, Jane Addams described the need for flexibility in the democratizing efforts of the settlement movement. Addams (1893/2002) said:

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

Addams, whose work responded to industrial conditions with agility and creativity, continues to provide good guidance today, as does Highlander; and this approach is also seen in the Neighborhood Learning Community. The emphasis on narrative and relationship, over statistics and programs in each of the three cases should impel us toward greater flexibility and trust in our civic efforts.

CONCLUSION

A Highlander-style learning circle workshop ends by asking people to reflect on a forward-looking question: What are you going to do when you go home? This seems like an apt final question for this paper, as well. It seems that there are two interconnected next steps for the educational community to engage with when we “go home.” The first step is meeting Cremin’s challenge, posed at the beginning of this paper, by “reaching beyond the schools” into communities and community institutions for meaningful learning. The second step, as I have argued, is connecting community-based learning with civic outcomes.

Each of these areas, however, may seem daunting in an age of high-stakes testing. Education is becoming more narrowly, not more expansively, defined. Moreover, some would point out that it is difficult enough to get schools to revitalize their civic missions and ask: “How can we also think more broadly about the civic missions of communities?”

These are surely valid obstacles; and there are many others. And yet there is reason to be hopeful. The powerful stories and lessons from Hull House, Highlander, and the Neighborhood Learning Community make clear—in very different contexts—that “community matters” for civic learning. Put simply, we cannot do civic education in isolation.

If schools, colleges, and universities want to play a role in civic learning, they must find creative ways to make education a more expansive endeavor. Developing what Jane Addams termed an “unrestricted view of education” involves taking the lessons from this paper and applying them to educational practice. This requires making, and then maintaining, a commitment to recognizing the role of community in civic education.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Adams, F. (1975). *Unearthing seeds of fire: The idea of Highlander*. Winston-Salem, North Carolina: John F. Blair.

Addams, J. (1965). The objective value of a social settlement. In C. Lasch (Ed.), *The social thought of Jane Addams* (pp. 44-61). New York: The Bobbs-Merrill Company. (Original work published 1892).

Addams, J. (2002). The subjective necessity for social settlements. In J. B. Elshtain (Ed.), *The Jane Addams reader* (pp. 14-28). New York: Basic Books. (Original work published 1893).

Addams, J. (2002). *Democracy and social ethics*. Chicago: University of Illinois Press. (Original work published 1902).

Addams, J. (1994). The humanizing tendency of industrial education. In E. Lagemann (Ed.), *Jane Addams on education* (pp. 120-123). New York: Teacher's College Press. (Original work published 1904).

Addams, J. (1972). *The spirit of youth and the city streets*. Chicago: University of Illinois Press. (Original work published 1909).

Addams, J. (1998). *Twenty years at Hull House*. New York: Penguin Books. (Original work published 1910).

Boyte, H. (2004). *Everyday politics: Reconnecting citizens and public life*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania.

Boyte, H., & Kari, N. (1996). *Building America: The democratic promise of public work*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.

The civic mission of schools. (2003). New York: Carnegie Corporation and Center for Information & Research on Civic Learning & Engagement.

Clark, S. (1960). Letter to Myles Horton. Highlander Papers: Box 38, Folder 2.

Clark, S. (1965, May 14). Southern Christian Leadership Conference education program. Horton Papers: Box 10, Folder 9.

Coleman, J. S. (1966). *Equality of educational opportunity*. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Office of Education.

Cremin, L. (1976). *Public education*. New York: Basic Books.

Davis, A. (1991). *Spearheads for reform: The social settlements and the progressive movement 1890-1914*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press.

Daynes, G. & Longo, N. (2004). Jane Addams and the origins of service-learning practice in the United States. *Michigan Journal of Community Service-Learning*, 11, 5-13.

Dewey, J. (1976). *The school as social centre, The middle works, 1899-1924* (Vol. 2, pp. 80-93). Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press. (Original work published 1902).

Glen, J. (1996). *Highlander: No ordinary school*. Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press.

Goodlad, J. (1997). *In praise of education*. New York: Teachers College Press.

Halpern, R. (1995). *Rebuilding the inner city: A history of neighborhood initiatives to address poverty in the United States*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Harkavy, I. (2002, April). Governance and the connection between community, higher education, and schools. In *Gathering momentum: Building the learning connection between schools and colleges* (pp. 20-29). Proceedings of The Learning Connections Conference.

Harkavy, I. & Puckett, J. (1994, September). Lessons from Hull House for the contemporary urban university. *Social Science Review*, 299-321.

Horton, M. (1966, May). An interview with Myles Horton: It's a miracle—I still don't believe it. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 490-497.

Horton, M. (2003). A circle of learners. In D. Jacobs (Ed.), *The Myles Horton Reader: Education for social change* (pp. 272-278). Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press. (Original work published 1985).

Horton, M., with Kohl, J. & Kohl, H. (1998). *The long haul: An autobiography*. New York: Teacher's College Press.

Horton, M., & Freire, P. (1990). *We make the road by walking: Conversations on education and social change*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.

Jane Addams. (1935, May 22). *The New York Times*.

Lagemann, E. (1994) Introduction. *On education: Jane Addams*. New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers.

Longo, N. (2005). *Reaching beyond the schools: The role of community in civic education*. Unpublished dissertation, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, MN.

McLaughlin, M. & Blank, M. (2004, November 10). Creating a culture of attachment: A community-as-text approach to learning. *Education Week*, 24, 34-35.

Morton, K. & Saltmarsh, J. (1997). Addams, Day and Dewey: The emergence of community service in American culture. *Michigan Journal of Community Service-Learning*, 4, 137-149.

Pearson, N. & Wallace, J. (2004). What is a learning circle? *Educators for Community Engagement*

web site. Retrieved November 3, 2004 from <http://www.e4ce.org/NG2004/learning-circles.shtml>

Rough notes. (n.d.). Myles Horton Papers: Box 11, Folder 2.

Scott, S. (1998). *Seeing like a state. How certain schemes to improve the human condition have failed.* New Haven: Yale University Press.

Tjerandsen, C. (1980). *Education for citizenship: A foundation's experience.* Santa Cruz, California: Emil Schwarzhaupt Foundation, Inc.

Traub, J. (2000, January 16). What no schools can do. *New York Times Magazine*, 52-57.

CIRCLE (The Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement) promotes research on the civic and political engagement of Americans between the ages of 15 and 25. Although CIRCLE conducts and funds research, not practice, the projects that we support have practical implications for those who work to increase young people's engagement in politics and civic life. CIRCLE is also a clearinghouse for relevant information and scholarship. CIRCLE was founded in 2001 with a generous grant from The Pew Charitable Trusts and is now also funded by Carnegie Corporation of New York. It is based in the University of Maryland's School of Public Policy.

**CIRCLE**The Center for Information & Research
on Civic Learning & Engagement