

**From Hull House to Paseo Boricua:  
The Theory and Practice of Community Inquiry**

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In 1889, Jane Addams and Ellen Gates Starr started a successful and influential social settlement in Chicago.<sup>1</sup> It served a low-income neighborhood of Russian and Polish Jews, Italians, Irish, Germans, Greeks, Bohemians, Romanians, Mexicans, and others. Known as Hull House, it provided services including kindergarten facilities, tutoring in English, an employment bureau, an art gallery, libraries, music and art classes, a cooperative residence for working women, the first Little Theater in America, a Labor Museum, and a meeting place for trade unions. The participatory community-building of Hull House anticipated John Dewey's vision of democracy as a way of life based on faith in other people:<sup>2</sup>

Democracy is a way of life controlled by a working faith in the possibilities of human nature...This faith may be enacted in statutes, but it is only on paper unless it is put in force in the attitudes which human beings display to one another in all the incidents and relations of daily life.

The work at Hull House reflected a trust in people, the belief that the process of community building was as important as the material outcomes, a view of learning as threaded throughout life's activities, the idea that social activities should be connected in ways that would afford mutual benefits to each, and a striving to support the wholeness of both individuals and the community.<sup>3</sup>

Today, Hull House lives on in the Jane Addams Hull House Association, and its spirit continues in other venues, including one near Humboldt Park, about four miles away. This is the Paseo Boricua neighborhood. In the midst of urban poverty and racism, Paseo Boricua has engaged in community building through processes of participatory democracy and active transformation of its lived environment. Like the residents of Hull House, those in Paseo

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<sup>1</sup> Jane Addams, *Twenty years at Hull-House*, New York: MacMillan, 1920. Jane Addams, 'The subjective necessity for social settlement', in J. B. Elshtain (ed.), *The Jane Addams reader* (pp. 14-28), New York: Basic, 2002/1892.

<sup>2</sup> John Dewey, 'Creative democracy - the task before us', in J. A. Boydston (Ed.), *John Dewey: The Later Works, 1925-1953, Volume 14*, pp. 224-30. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1940/1991. p. 226.

<sup>3</sup> Anca Campian (this volume) develops the history of Addams and Hull House further, especially in terms of her interactions with Mead and Dewey.

Boricua seek, in Addams's words, 'to make the entire social organism democratic, to extend democracy beyond its political expression.'<sup>4</sup>

My colleagues and I have used the term *community inquiry* to describe both the activities of communities such as Hull House and Paseo Boricua, and the conception underlying their organization and development.<sup>5</sup> We have attempted to continue that spirit through social action projects in which a key question is 'What happens when community members are not merely recipients of services, but as Dewey argues, become part of the process of authority?'<sup>6</sup> This paper focuses on the theory of community inquiry and how it is realized in actual community settings.

### **Is Community Inquiry Possible?**

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<sup>4</sup> Jane Addams, 'The subjective necessity for social settlement', p. 15. It is important to interpret 'social organism' as a pragmatic aim, not as an idealized entity. I should also caution that the links I see between Hull House and Paseo Boricua are through their general orientation to community building, not necessarily a direct lineage.

<sup>5</sup> Ann P. Bishop & Bertram C. Bruce, 'Community inquiry', in D. Schuler (ed.), *Liberating voices! A pattern language for communication revolution*, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2008.

Ann P. Bishop, Bertram C. Bruce, Karen J. Lunsford, M. Cameron Jones, Muzhgan Nazarova, Dave Linderman, Mihye Won, P. Bryan Heidorn, Rajeev Ramprakash, & André Brock, 'Supporting community inquiry with digital resources', *Journal of Digital Information*, 5(3), Article No. 308, 2004.

Bertram C. Bruce, 'Coffee cups, frogs, and lived experience', to appear in P. Anders (ed.), *Festschrift for Ken and Yetta Goodman*, Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum, in press. Portions of the section on Paseo Boricua below are adapted from that article.

Bertram C. Bruce & Ann P. Bishop, 'New Literacies and community inquiry', in J. Coiro, M. Knobel, C. Lankshear, & D. Leu, (eds.), *The handbook of research in new literacies* (pp. 703-746), Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum, in press.

<sup>6</sup> John Dewey, 'Democracy and education in the world of today', in J. A. Boydston (ed.), *John Dewey: The later works, 1925-1953, Vol. 1*, Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1991/1939.

Many writers across a variety of discourse arenas have sought ways to describe collective or communal thinking and action.<sup>7</sup> The various terms, or rather, the projects that give rise to them, share several characteristics encompassed by the belief that community inquiry is possible. First, there is the assumption that people can both understand the world and act through some sort of collective process. Second, this community inquiry is needed for social progress, because individual thought and action is too often dormant, scattered, or even counter-productive. Third, the process of community inquiry is itself integral to social progress, in fact is part of what social progress means. Finally, community inquiry is fundamental to moral action and development.

For some, collective thinking is a problem, while for others it is a much-needed response to a perceived atomization of society, in which families are reduced in size or fragmented, consumers are manipulated, and workers become alienated and insecure. But for our purposes here, I simply note the growing prevalence of discussions around ideas such as social intelligence, civic society, communitarianism, collective social capital, solidarity, deep democracy, rhizomatic understanding, delphi systems, and social networking. These ideas have arisen in diverse fields and contexts, and certainly have different histories and meanings, but they all share in the attempt to capture aspects of inquiry that go beyond the individual, what we call here, *community inquiry*.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Community intelligence [website]. <http://www.community-intelligence.com>

Gordon Pask, *Conversation theory, applications in education and epistemology*, Amsterdam: Elsevier, 1976.

P. P. Grassé, *Evolution of Living Organisms*, New York & London: Academic, 1977.

<sup>8</sup> For example, LaDonna Harris describes Native collaboration with the Cogniscope syste. See also Alexander N. Christakis, LaDonna Harris, 'Designing a transnational indigenous leaders interaction in the context of globalization: A Wisdom of the People Forum,' *Systems Research and Behavioral Science*, 21(3), 251 - 259, 2004.

Indeed, as John Dewey argues throughout his work,<sup>9</sup> individual development must be understood in the context of social structures that set the conditions for social inquiry. Dewey argued that the Public of his day was in 'eclipse,' in part because 'the physical machinery of transmission and circulation' is our 'despotic master' rather than 'the means of life.'<sup>10</sup> Our '[social] intelligence is dormant ...until it possesses the local community as its medium.' However, we have the capacity to reinvigorate the Public. In doing so, we will find that there is no limit to 'the liberal expansion and confirmation of limited personal intellectual endowment' by social intelligence.<sup>11</sup>

These thoughts about community and social growth are intriguing, but the mere assertion of the value or importance of community inquiry leaves much unanswered. Assuming that something like community inquiry is possible, how does it manifest itself? This is an issue of praxis, not merely of abstract characterization. We need to know the conditions under which it occurs, the actions that people do, and the consequences in order to ascertain whether and how it differs from simply an agglomeration of individual inquiry.

Consequently, there are several aspects to this overarching question about what if anything community inquiry actually is: What do we see when there is a commitment to community inquiry principles of participatory democracy, social justice, and the integration of mind and body? How do individuals integrate their ordinary and personal experiences and situations with one another? If our knowing rests upon ordinary experience, how then can we coordinate with the thoughts of others who have had perhaps widely variant experiences? Is it redundant to say community inquiry; how does community inquiry differ from inquiry itself? What is the most productive way to define community inquiry? Does it mean inquiry *into* the community or inquiry *by* the community? Finally, how does pragmatism help us address these questions?

In this paper, I explore these questions first by examining the pragmatist conception of community and inquiry as developed by Addams, Starr, Dewey, and others, especially during

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<sup>9</sup> John Dewey, *Reconstruction in philosophy*, New York: Henry Holt, 1920.

John Dewey, *The public and its problems*, New York: Henry Holt, 1927.

John Dewey, *Experience and education*, New York: Macmillan, 1938a.

John Dewey, 'Creative democracy - the task before us', in J. A. Boydston (ed.), *John Dewey: The Later Works, 1925-1953, Volume 14*, pp. 224-30. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1940/1991.

John Dewey, *Democracy and education. An introduction to the philosophy of education*, New York: Free Press, 1966/1916.

<sup>10</sup> John Dewey, *The public and its problems*, p. 184.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid*, p. 184.

the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries during their time in Chicago. Second, I explore the work of the communities around Hull House and Paseo Boricua, both the concrete realizations in social practice and their theoretical groundings. The aim is to determine the usefulness and feasibility of community inquiry as a lens on community action.

### Defining Community Inquiry

Louis Menand<sup>12</sup> argues that the pragmatist movement in the US during the late-nineteenth century was in part a response to the massive destruction of lives during the Civil War, and the inability of people to find ways to reconcile differences without violence. Even worse, that violence was a pyrrhic victory. While it accomplished the end of legal slavery and maintained the formal structure of the nation, near-slavery conditions persisted for years, the nation remained divided, and the problems of racism and injustice were unresolved, leaving economic, social, and educational debts to this day.<sup>13</sup> Born in 1859, shortly before the war, Dewey displays throughout his writing an insistence on addressing social inequities such as these, but doing so through alternatives to violence or brute force as a means of social organization.<sup>14</sup> Moral action and growth is to be achieved through reflection on experience and on dialogue with others.<sup>15</sup>

The year 1859 was also the year that Charles Darwin's *On the Origin of the Species* was published. Pragmatists saw promise for social organization in the developing sciences, especially in biology and statistics, and later, physics. Dewey in particular was deeply influenced by Darwin and what later developed into the grand evolutionary synthesis. He saw the phenomena of life as crucial to his theory of inquiry, and especially his theory of education: 'The primary ineluctable facts of the birth and death of each one of the constituent

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<sup>12</sup> Louis Menand, *The Metaphysical Club: A story of ideas in America*, New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2001.

<sup>13</sup> Gloria J. Ladson-Billings, *From the Achievement Gap to the Education Debt: Understanding Achievement in U.S. Schools*, Presidential address at the American Educational Research Association Annual Meeting, San Francisco, CA, 2006.

<sup>14</sup> His account of social inequity is often muted, appearing to accept social hierarchies, but was made more explicit in essays such as 'The need for a philosophy of education'. John Dewey, 'The need for a philosophy of education', *The New Era in Home and School*, XV, 1934, pp. 211-214.

<sup>15</sup> See the chapter by Susan Pangerls in this volume for a discussion of trust and the bridging of difference without violence.

members in a social group determine the necessity of education.' He also saw that life implies growth, thus 'education is all one with growing; it has no end beyond itself.'<sup>16</sup>

### *Becoming a Unified Whole*

For many people, notably academicians, learning allows us to rise above our baser instincts, to elevate thinking above feeling, theory above practice, abstraction over concreteness--to create a distance from the body. Many others, perhaps most people, do the opposite, placing 'what works' above conceptual frameworks. Dewey rejected this dichotomy, seeing instead that the problems with both intellectual life and the practical world lay in the breakdown of connections between the two, the severing of mind from body:

...the question of integration of mind-body in action is the most practical of all questions we can ask of our civilization. It is not just a speculative question, it is a demand--a demand that the labor of multitudes now too predominantly physical in character to be inspired by purpose and emotion and informed by knowledge and understanding. It is a demand that what now pass for highly intellectual and spiritual functions shall be integrated with the ultimate conditions and means of all achievement, namely the physical, and thereby accomplish something beyond themselves. Until this integration is effected in the only place where it can be carried out, in action itself, we shall continue to live in a society in which a soulless and heartless materialism is compensated for by soulful but futile idealism and spiritualism.<sup>17</sup>

The notion of the integration of mind-body in action is often used by educators to justify hands-on learning or learning by doing. But Dewey's educational theory extends well beyond this pedagogical implication, indeed well beyond schools or learners as they are usually conceived.

For Dewey, it was exactly in the ordinary experiences of life that we find the core of our intellectual, moral, and social being. As McDermott says, Dewey believed 'that ordinary experience is seeded with possibilities for surprises and possibilities for enhancement if we

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<sup>16</sup> These ideas became central in the development of progressive pedagogy in the US and many other countries. See Yetta M. Goodman, 'Roots of the whole-language movement', *The Elementary School Journal*, 90(2), (1989, November), pp. 113-127.

<sup>17</sup> John Dewey, 'Body and mind', first published in the Bulletin of the NY Academy of Medicine. Also in *The Collected Works of John Dewey: Later Works Volume 3: 1927-1928 Essays, Reviews, Miscellany*, pp. 25-40, Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1928. For further discussion on nondiscursive experience, see Wojciech Malecki's chapter in this volume. Malecki has pointed out that Dewey's commitment to ordinary, especially bodily experience, raises questions about the extension to community inquiry as defined here. R. M. Gale develops this case in 'The problem of ineffability in Dewey's theory of inquiry,' *Southern Journal of Philosophy*, 44(1), pp. 75-90.

but allow it to bathe over us in its own terms'.<sup>18</sup> Making sense of experience is what prepares us for enlarged experiences in the future. Dewey states this concisely in a much-quoted sentence, 'We always live at the time we live and not at some other time, and only by extracting at each present time the full meaning of each present experience are we prepared for doing the same thing in the future.'<sup>19</sup> Extracting at each present time the full meaning of each present experience enables us to do the same for our past as well. The continual reconstruction of the past in the light of the present is integral to full engagement with the present time.

The idea of extracting meaning from experience is expressed most precisely in Dewey's logic. Here, he defines inquiry as a process of transforming situations, especially those that are problematic or indeterminate. Dewey, defines *inquiry* as 'the controlled or directed transformation of an indeterminate situation into one that is so determinate in its constituent distinctions and relations as to convert the elements of the original situation into a unified whole.'<sup>20</sup>

This wholeness of situations for individuals has a parallel in the case of communities. In his social theory, Dewey speaks clearly about the growth of the social organism.<sup>21</sup> But the examples he uses for inquiry often remain individualized, emphasizing the ordinary, personal, situated, and nature-interactive aspects of inquiry, not whether and how community inquiry is possible.<sup>22</sup> Thus, Dewey's account of the development of *social intelligence* appears to be incomplete. This is unfortunate, given that he sees the very survival of society as dependent upon rich communication and collective inquiry. He notes that

Society exists through a process of transmission quite as much as biological life...Without [the] communication of ideals, hopes, expectations, standards, opinions, from those members of society who are passing out of the group life to those who are coming into it, social life could not survive.

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<sup>18</sup> John J. McDermott, *The philosophy of John Dewey: Two volumes in one*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981/1973, p. x.

<sup>19</sup> John Dewey, *Experience and education*, p. 51.

<sup>20</sup> John Dewey, *Logic: The theory of inquiry*, New York: Henry Holt, 1938b; also developed in *How We Think, Knowing and the Known*, and a variety of other works.

<sup>21</sup> E.g., *Democracy and Education, The Public and Its Problems*, and other works,

<sup>22</sup> In *Experience and Education*, Dewey also proposes what he calls the 'criteria of experience', *continuity* and *interaction*. These terms which provide a basis for extending inquiry from the individual to the social. Interaction is the lateral aspect of experience, in which we find ourselves not just in, but actually an integral part of the physical and social world. Continuity is the longitudinal aspect, the fact that each experience shapes the conditions and meaning of experiences to follow.

Like Addams, Dewey conceives society as an organic union of individuals. In his analysis of the eclipse of the Public, he defines democracy and community as essentially the awareness of our participation in this social organism: 'Regarded as an idea, democracy is not an alternative to other principles of associated life. It is the idea of community life itself... The clear consciousness of a communal life, in all its implications, constitutes the idea of democracy.'<sup>23</sup> For Dewey, democracy fosters individual growth, and is created through collective consciousness of the need for it.<sup>24</sup> But how does this occur?

### *Commitment to Community Inquiry*

In Dewey's notion of *situation* there is a crucial entanglement of each individual with the world. For Dewey, we do not enter *into* a situation; we are *integrated with it* and continually re-construct it through lived inquiry. Our experiences occur both within us, influencing 'the formation of attitudes of desire and purpose. But...[e]very genuine experience has an active side which changes in some degree the objective conditions under which experiences are had.'<sup>25</sup> The notion of experience changing the objective conditions outside the person (or outside the narrow view of personhood that we might have assumed initially) opens the door to a less individualistic conception of inquiry.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> John Dewey, *The public and its problems*, pp. 148-49.

<sup>24</sup> This is analogous to the communal and environment-shaping actions of living things, in which individual and social become not a dichotomy, but simply different perspectives on experience. Biologist Richard Lewontin notes that environments do not exist independently of living organisms. The features that change a physical space into an environment are often constructed by organisms, the most obvious case being the creation of an oxygen-rich atmosphere by plants. Even more fundamentally, what counts as significant cannot be disentangled from the needs and activities of the organism. Instead, a view of organic evolution as a constructive process is called for: 'the actual process of evolution seems best captured by the process of construction. Just as there can be no organism without an environment, so there can be no environment without an organism.' Richard Lewontin, *The triple helix. Gene, organism, and environment*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000, p. 48.

<sup>25</sup> John Dewey, *Experience and education*, p. 39.

<sup>26</sup> In *Knowing and the Known*, Dewey moves away from *interaction* in favor of *transaction*, a term later elaborated by Louise Rosenblatt in her reader-response theory. If he were writing today, he might employ a term such as *ecology*, which does appear already in *Knowing and the Known*. That would foreground his view of society as an organic union, not simply a system of interacting parts. John Dewey & Arthur F. Bentley, *Knowing and the known*, Boston: Beacon, 1949. Louise Rosenblatt, *The reader, the text, the poem: The transactional theory of the literary work*, Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois Press, 1978.

Inspired by the work of Hull House, especially the Labor Museum, Dewey articulated a vision of education in relation to the social organism. In that he recognizes the need for lifelong learning, and as a result, the need to change the image of what constitutes citizenship as well as the image of the purpose of the school.<sup>27</sup> Lee Benson, Ira Harkavy, & John Puckett applaud Dewey for that vision, but then apply that vision to critique him for abandoning the practical effort after he left Chicago.<sup>28</sup> They call for a renewed commitment to academic engagement with the challenges of everyday life, or what I here call *community inquiry*.

This renewed commitment involves three key aspects. First, the inquiry is *of* the community in the sense that it starts with perceived problems in areas such as health care, economic development, education, social order, participatory democracy. Second, it is *for* communities, in that its end-in-view is concrete action to effect change and foster community building. Third, it is *by* communities; it is inquiry in which community members are deeply involved, setting the agenda, determining methods, and evaluating progress. Community inquiry implies a *community of inquiry* in Peirce's sense,<sup>29</sup> but it extends beyond that to entail sustained collaborative action toward the attainment of shared goals.

We may summarize this by saying that *community inquiry* is inquiry conducted *of, for,* and *by* communities as living social organisms. *Community* emphasizes support for collaborative activity and for creating knowledge, which is connected to people's values, history, and lived experiences. *Inquiry* points to support for open-ended, democratic, participatory engagement. Community inquiry is a learning process that brings theory and action together in an experimental and critical manner.

### **From Hull House to Paseo Boricua**

Wholeness is essential to life for both individuals and communities, but in the context of a pluralistic and rapidly-changing society, how do we maintain that wholeness? How can there be healthy growth of the social organism when commonly-held standards are in question and even basic assumptions about communication are not shared? The pragmatist answer to

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<sup>27</sup> John Dewey, 'The school as social center', *The Elementary School Teacher*, 3(2), pp. 73-86, 1902, October.

<sup>28</sup> Lee Benson, Ira Harkavy, & John Puckett, *Dewey's dream: Universities and democracies in an age of education reform*, Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 2007.

<sup>29</sup> In this volume, Gert-Rudiger Wegmarshaus discusses the social logic of scientific inquiry, which shares with community inquiry the social construction of meaning, though not the transformation of material conditions found in community inquiry. For more on communities of inquiry and their link with learning, see Matthew Lipman, *Thinking in education* (2nd ed.), Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003 and Peter Seixas, 'The community of inquiry as a basis for knowledge and learning: the case of history', *American Educational Research Journal*, 30(2), pp. 305-324, 1993, Summer.

questions such as this cannot be found in formal analysis divorced from everyday realities. We need instead to reflect carefully upon experiences in which communities have faced these challenges, and critically assess their unique histories. In what follows, I focus on Paseo Boricua and its antecedents in Hull House. These experiences help us see both what community inquiry is and how it can be fostered.

*Paseo Boricua: A Current-Day Hull House?*

The neighborhood around Humboldt Park in Chicago has a rich and varied history. Once it was a home for Jewish immigrants, including Saul Bellow's *Augie March* and Elaine Soloway's *Division Street Princess*. Later it was home to Polish Catholics. Many other immigrant groups, religions, languages, and ethnicities have been represented over the years, and today it is home to Asian-, Latina/o-, African-, and European-Americans.<sup>30</sup> It is best known for Paseo Boricua (literally “Puerto Rican Way”), a half-mile stretch of Division Street, demarcated by two 59-foot-tall Puerto Rican flags made of steel to represent the work of Puerto Ricans in the steel, pipe-fitting, and welding industries post-WWII. The neighborhood contains many Puerto Rican stores and restaurants, and is currently adding iron balconies and streetlights in the style of old San Juan, along with mosaic-covered planter boxes representing the 78 municipalities of Puerto Rico. As the community works to promote a safer and more vibrant neighborhood, it actively resists the gentrification that successively and successfully forced it out of West Town, Wicker Park, and Ukrainian Village.

In a context of urban poverty and discrimination, with issues of gang violence, drug abuse, school dropouts, and unhealthy lifestyles, Paseo Boricua has taken action to build a strong community. Community building there goes beyond familiar remedies such as economic enterprise zones or dropout prevention programs, to include active transformation of the lived environment (see below). Moreover, that transformation has begun and continues to be defined by participation and ownership by community members. Puerto Rican identity is affirmed and renegotiated in relation to that of other members of a diverse neighborhood, to that of Puerto Rico, and to a variety of other groups, including university partners.<sup>31</sup> The community seeks to maintain a wholeness of its environment, because community members

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<sup>30</sup> Pragmatism has not always engaged well with the politics of race, although Eddie S. Glaude (*In a shade of blue: Pragmatism and the politics of Black America*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007) has argued that it, especially Dewey’s version, both can and should.

<sup>31</sup> Recently, my School inaugurated a new Masters program, known as the *Community Informatics Corps*. Its aim is to open opportunities for community members as well as to enhance learning for all of our students through community inquiry. Ann Bishop has led in creating this program, with active participation from Alejandro Luis Molina and others in Paseo Boricua.

realize that it is essential for the growth of each community member, and in turn for the continued vitality of the community.<sup>32</sup>

### *Transforming Public Spaces*

Decades before Paseo Boricua, equitable participation in community building was a distinguishing feature at Hull House, whose long-term residents included the cofounders, Jane Addams and Ellen Gates Starr, as well as many other talented social reformers.<sup>33</sup> Living with the new immigrants, the ideal of *social democracy* was neither an abstraction, nor a prescription from afar, but rather, a goal to address through concrete, collaborative action. Addams saw the purpose of the settlements as 'an attempt to express the meaning of life in terms of life itself'.<sup>34</sup> They would build participatory democracy by living it.

In order to do this, dialogue among the residents, the immigrants, and others in the city was essential. The participants represented diverse backgrounds in terms of language, religion, and social class. There was no assurance that either well-established procedures or straightforward argument would be sufficient to bring them together. Moreover, full participation in dialogue and decision-making was not just a means for achieving democratic outcomes, but was itself constitutive of the social democracy that Hull House envisaged.

Participatory democracy is essential to the community building within Paseo Boricua as well. There is a remarkable degree of participation by residents in governance and social problem-solving, for example in addressing healthcare needs around diabetes. Leaders are themselves community residents and participate fully in every aspect of community work from leading neighborhood tours to washing dishes. When conflicts arise, there is respect for difference coupled with an openness to the improvisation enabled by conversation. Stout<sup>35</sup> identifies this process as a key to developing a sense of common purpose that is essential for establishing community inquiry:

Conversation is a good name for what is needed at those points where people employing different final vocabularies reach a momentary impasse. . . . The political discourse of a pluralistic democracy, as it turns out, needs to be a mixture of normal discourse and conversational improvisation. In the discussion of some issues, straightforward argument on the basis of commonly held standards carries us only so far. Beyond that, we must be either silent or conversational.

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<sup>32</sup> Billy Ocasio, *Puerto Rican Chicago: A holistic approach to community building*, Chicago: 26th Ward, City of Chicago, 2006, September.

<sup>33</sup> Eleanor J. Stebner, *The women of Hull House: A Study in spirituality, vocation, and friendship*, Albany: State University of New York Press, 1997.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid, p. 33.

<sup>35</sup> Jeffrey L. Stout, 'What's beyond politics', *First Things*, 148, pp. 8-9, 2004, December.

The conversational process exemplifies Maxine Greene's call for both opening and transforming public spaces: 'it is not only a matter of admission and inclusion in predefined public spaces; it is...a matter of transformation of our institutions and public spaces'.<sup>36</sup> Dialogue among community members is a vital component of this capacity to construct public spaces that allow the social organism to flourish (see below).<sup>37</sup>

### *Community Knowledge Building*

Genuine dialogue enables the community to build on its strengths, rather than to focus on deficits. A framework for this is to identify what Luis Moll and colleagues call *funds of knowledge* within the community.<sup>38</sup> That model operates within both formal learning and overall community development at Paseo Boricua. Self-empowerment for residents develops on the basis of these community funds of knowledge.<sup>39</sup>

Community building is enacted through a variety of community organizations, such as the Puerto Rican Cultural Center. There is a community newspaper, *La Voz*, which plays a central role in the participatory democracy project. There are more formal education elements, such as a daycare center, a family learning center, and an alternative high school, as well as a library and community museum. Community action is supported through a healthy lifestyles program, a health center, and Batey Urbano, a club/study center for young people and a venue for social action, where they present poetry with a purpose, hip hop, and other cultural

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<sup>36</sup> Maxine Greene, 'Moral and political perspectives: The tensions of choice', *Educational Researcher*, 27(9), pp. 18-20, 1998, December, p. 19.

<sup>37</sup> Bernard Jackson (this volume) discusses Roberto Unger and the politics of empowerment. Although Paseo Boricua does not explicitly reference Unger, its activities exhibit the emancipatory process that Unger describes.

<sup>38</sup> Luis C. Moll, Cathy Amanti, Deborah Neff, & Norma González, 'Funds of knowledge for teaching: Using a qualitative approach to connect homes and classrooms', *Theory into Practice*, 31(2), pp. 132-141, 1992.

<sup>39</sup> Initially, much of the discourse focused on resistance. For example, the Puerto Rican Cultural Center (PRCC) website [www.prcc-chgo.org/pachs.htm](http://www.prcc-chgo.org/pachs.htm) quotes Buddhist monk Thich Nhat Hahn's call for a community of resistance:

...resistance, at root, must mean more than resistance against war. It is resistance against all kinds of things that are like war... so perhaps, resistance means opposition to being invaded, occupied, assaulted and destroyed by the system. The purpose of resistance, here, is to seek the healing of yourself in order to be able to see clearly... I think that communities of resistance should be places where people can return to themselves more easily, where the conditions are such that they can heal themselves and recover their wholeness.

Over time, the discourse has moved from community resistance to community building.

expressions.<sup>40</sup> There is collaborative work to foster development of economic and commercial projects including a Puerto Rican-focused restaurant district. Many of these activities are designed and run by young people in the community and all are conceived as sites for learning for community members of all ages and for visitors. Throughout, there is an emphasis on the wholeness of both individuals and community and dialogue across differences, ideas linked both implicitly and explicitly with the writings of Paulo Freire, Karl Marx, Pierre Bourdieu, Luis Moll, etc., and with Dewey's version of pragmatism.

### *Connecting Learning and Community Life*

After realizing that only one in four of their young people was completing high school, Paseo Boricua established an alternative school called Pedro Albizu Campos High School (PACHS), housed within the Puerto Rican Cultural Center. Although community leaders would speak of Puerto Rican independence, community resistance against violence, and solidarity with Puerto Ricans and other oppressed people, they recognized that the young people above all need a nurturing environment for learning manifesting Nel Noddings's ethics of care.<sup>41</sup> In an ethnographic study, René Antrop-González quotes a PACHS teacher on this point:

Our students don't come here because they are consciously seeking a liberating education or because they support Puerto Rican independence. They come here because they know that this school will work hard not to neglect them and because they'll find out who they are.<sup>42</sup>

The results at PACHS have been impressive. Today, three out of four students complete high school and many have gone on to college. PACHS and the Lolita Lebrón Family Learning Center for young mothers and their children build instruction around students' lives

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<sup>40</sup> Nilda Flores-González, Matthew Rodriguez, & Michael Rodriguez-muniz, 'From hip-hop to humanization: Batey Urbano as a space for Latino youth culture and community action', in S. Ginwright, P. Noguera, & J. Cammorota (eds.), *Beyond resistance! Youth activism and community change*, pp. 175-196, New York: Routledge, 2006.

<sup>41</sup> The ethics of care has been articulated by Nel Noddings (*Philosophy of education*, Stanford, CA: Westview, 1998; Mark K. Smith, 'Nel Noddings, the ethics of care and education', *the encyclopaedia of informal education*, [www.infed.org/thinkers/noddings.htm](http://www.infed.org/thinkers/noddings.htm)). It is particularly relevant to address what Angela Valenzuela calls the problem of subtractive schooling (*Subtractive schooling: U.S.-Mexican youth and the politics of caring*, Albany: State University of New York Press, 2000.)

<sup>42</sup> René Antrop-González, "'This school is my sanctuary": The Pedro Albizu Campos Alternative High School', *Centro Journal*, XV(2), 2003, Fall.

and experiences, providing a successful alternative to dominant deficit models employed elsewhere.<sup>43</sup>

A new project at PACHS embodies the ideas of community inquiry to address community needs. The project, *Urban Agriculture in the Context of Social Ecology*, began when Carlos DeJesus, the science teacher, sought a way for students to learn science with hands-on investigations of hydroponics and soil-based gardening. It has since expanded to include the study of urban agriculture, community wellness, and economic development. For example, students grow the ingredients needed for *salsa de sofrito*, such as tomatoes, onions, garlic, green bell peppers, ajíes dulces, oregano, cilantro, and other spices. Growing these plants and making the sauce affords a deeper understanding of their cultural heritage. Bottling and selling the sauce contributes to community economic development as well as affords an understanding of economics and food processing. But the project is not merely about student learning, as important as that is. It is also a central activity of the community, which is seen as a way to address issues of economic development, cultural awareness, and environmental responsibility.

The PACHS curriculum can be seen as a realization of the *social justice youth development model* in which self awareness, social awareness, and global awareness guide growth.<sup>44</sup> Jeannie Oakes and John Rogers develop similar ideas, showing that engaging K-12 students in community-based research in collaboration with universities can be a powerful

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<sup>43</sup> There are many factors in their success, including dedicated teachers and a curriculum relevant to students' lives. Most of all is the sense of a school community connected to a neighborhood community, with an opportunity to grow in socially-meaningful ways:

That's why I'm always at this school. This school is my sanctuary. I know this because once I step outside these doors my problems come back. They're just waiting outside the doors to smack me in my face and start all over again. I stay at this school because I don't have to worry about my problems. I got my mind set on other things. It's hard to describe but it's like a load is taken off me when I'm here. —Damien, a PACHS student, quoted in by René Antrop-González

The success of the program has attracted non-Puerto Rican students. One might predict this would pose a problem in Paseo Boricua, given the emphasis on strengthening Puerto Rican identity and community. But PACHS seems to thrive on diverse interests. René Antrop-González writes that 'although the high school was initially founded as a site of Puerto Rican pedagogical resistance, it has now also come to fulfill the affective and cultural needs of the Puerto Rican, Mexican, and African-American students that call it their school.' René Antrop-González, 'This school is my sanctuary': The Pedro Albizu Campos Alternative High School', *Centro Journal*, XV(2), (2003, Fall).

<sup>44</sup> Shawn Ginwright, Pablo Noguera, & Julio Cammorota (Eds.), *Beyond resistance! Youth activism and community change*. New York: Routledge, 2006.

mechanism for both education and social change.<sup>45</sup> This fulfills various calls for integrative learning, for learning that extends over time, across courses, and between academic, personal, and community life.<sup>46</sup>

The activities at PACHS follow from the premise that students need to use language to solve problems that are meaningful to their daily lives in order to take charge of their own learning. They write and share reflections about work in the community as a way of learning language, but also as a way of learning how to participate actively in community building. In so doing they foster the growth of the social organism and the development of social intelligence advocated by Addams and Dewey decades earlier.

PACHS encourages students to think critically about their learning experiences and to participate actively in their community. The curriculum is articulated in terms of three major curricular areas. The first involves learning about the world in a connected way. Literacy follows Paulo Freire's idea of learning to read the word in order to read the world.<sup>47</sup> It means actively participating in that world as both critic and creator. This philosophy positions each student as a whole, living being. One rarely hears talk of deficits, but rather of caring, strengths, and potentials for growth.<sup>48</sup>

The second area focuses learning how to act responsibly in the world, by first understanding themselves and their Latino heritage. This ensures that the continuity of lived experiences is a present reality for students, that their daily challenges can be conceived in relation to the larger world and the experiences of others.

The third area is learning how to transform the world, to give back to the community.. Classes include video, bomba y plena (two different percussion-driven musical traditions),

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<sup>45</sup> Jeannie Oakes & John Rogers, *Learning power: Organizing for education and justice*. New York: Teachers College Press, 2006.

<sup>46</sup> E.g., from the Association of American Colleges and Universities and the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching.

<sup>47</sup> Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the oppressed* (Rev. ed.), New York: Continuum, 1993/1970.

Paulo Freire & Donald Macedo, *Literacy: Reading the word and the world*, South Hadley, MA: Bergin & Garvey, 1987.

<sup>48</sup> Laura Ruth Johnson, *History in our hands: Identity development, cultural ideologies of motherhood, and the critical practice of family literacy in Puerto Rican Chicago*, Ph.D. Dissertation, University of California, Berkeley, 2005, [www.runlulurun.com/d05/](http://www.runlulurun.com/d05/).

Angela Valenzuela, *Subtractive schooling: U.S.-Mexican youth and the politics of caring*.

dance, guitar, and journalism, as well as analysis of community resources and challenges. Recently, for example, students have been making podcasts about their school and community. Across disciplines of history, biology, English, mathematics, and others, students learn about themselves as active participants in their community.

### *Inquiry of, by, and for the Community*

It is commonplace nowadays to think of the classroom or the school as a learning community, even if that is more often achieved in name than in fact. Some have argued for extending to the community beyond, bringing neighborhood experiences into the classroom, as with *funds of knowledge* approaches mentioned above, or taking classroom learning out into the neighborhood, as with service learning. But the Paseo Boricua learning goes a step further. Rather than seeing the community as simply a resource, or as an application area for learning, it positions learning within community action and life.

Similar activities were key for Hull House. Hull House residents conducted the first investigations in Chicago of sanitation, typhoid fever, tuberculosis, cocaine distribution midwifery, and infant mortality. These investigations played a major role in responding to diseases and shaped the Nation's conception of public health issues.

In this approach to community building and learning, the community *is* the curriculum. Community inquiry thus represents collective inquiry *by* community members as well as inquiry *into* the lived experience of the community. As a result, the mutual constitution of community life and learning is evident in everything the community undertakes. And all of those activities build upon genuine dialogue in which meanings are constructed and negotiated. The activities represent a rich example of pragmatism as articulated by Addams and Dewey.

### **Conclusion**

The experiences of Hull House and Paseo Boricua tell us that community inquiry can be a reality for diverse groups. They also offer opportunities for pragmatism, for no other framework, method, or set of assumptions appears rich enough or flexible enough to account for the complex set of interwoven and constructive activities represented by community inquiry. This applies most to the version of pragmatism expressed and lived by people such as Jane Addams. She saw that the life of the community and the individuals within depends upon a shared commitment to the wholeness of each individual, to that of the community, and to the continuity of their experiences. We need to understand more about how the wholeness of the individual is interwoven with this wholeness of the community.

This brings us back to Dewey, who saw that neither democracy nor education could be reduced to technical procedures:

Democracy has many meanings, but if it has a moral meaning, it is found in resolving that the supreme test of all political institutions and industrial

arrangements shall be the contribution they make to the all-around growth of every member of society.<sup>49</sup>

How do our political institutions, industrial arrangements, or for that matter, universities, fare on Dewey's supreme test? In many cases, not well. Rather than fostering growth for each member of society, they operate as if dissecting those members is what we need to do, and will tell us all we need to know about life, growth, community, and moral commitment. Fortunately, there are alternative models of how institutions can promote individual growth, which provide us with a more sustainable and ecologically-sound vision of community life.

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<sup>49</sup> John Dewey, *Reconstruction in philosophy*, p. 186.

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