Is Community Inquiry Possible?

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Outline
- Ask: What is (community) inquiry?
- Investigate perspectives from pragmatism and the progressive era
- Create working definitions
- Discuss in terms of specific examples of community work
- Reflect on the meaning for educational practice, research, and theory

Ask: What is community inquiry?
- Can we move the Public out of its eclipse (J. Dewey)?
- Can we learn how to talk to strangers (D. Allen)?
- Can we be less polarized (health care debate)?

Investigate: Inquiry
- Inquiry is 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 (Dewey, 1938/1991, p. 108).
Peirce on continuity

- The principle of continuity is the idea of fallibilism objectified. For fallibilism is the doctrine that our knowledge is never absolute but always swims, as it were, in a continuum of uncertainty and of indeterminacy. Now the doctrine of continuity is that all things so swim in continua. (Collected Papers 1.171, c. 1897)

Gale on ineffebility

- A Deweyan inquiry begins with an indeterminate situation and terminates, when successful, with a determinate situation, both of which Dewey holds to be unique and therefore ineffable. This ineffability requirement has the disastrous consequences that Dewey's beloved collective inquiry is impossible and that there are no objective criteria for the success of inquiry. (Gale, 2006)

Community inquiry

- Can the notion of individual inquiry be extended to community inquiry, in which driving questions, modes of investigation, concrete action, collaboration, and reflection derive from community processes?
- If so, how can that be defined and supported in productive, moral ways?
- How can we extend inquiry-based learning from a process inquiry to more substantive inquiry, based on connecting formal learning to lived experience in communities?
Dewey on unity & diversity

While Turkey needs unity in its educational system, it must be remembered that there is a great difference between unity and uniformity, and that a mechanical system of uniformity may be harmful to real unity. (Dewey, 1923)

Feinberg on common sense

Critical pragmatism allows that everyday understanding is sometimes inadequate in defining a situation as problematic, especially in cases where power or experience is unequal. Here common sense may simply accept a situation as a fact of life...[it] encourages a dialogue between refined research and everyday understanding about the systematic silences that often mark subordinate or oppressed status. (Feinberg, 2010)

Addams on spontaneity

It was perhaps her spirit of youth, her elasticity, the spontaneity and tenderness of her heart, which kept her from all those blunders of moral enthusiasm, from those cruel deeds which are often perpetrated in the name of social duty. (Addams, 1929)

Addams on affectionate interpretation

He [Pullman] cultivated the great and noble impulses of the benefactor, until the power of attaining a simple human relationship with his employees, that of frank equality with them, was gone from him. He, too, lost the faculty of affectionate interpretation, and demanded a sign. He and his employees had no mutual interest in a common cause. (Addams, 1896)
Create: Working definitions for community inquiry

- 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.

Experimentalism

- Community inquiry is thus a learning process that brings theory and action together in an experimental and critical manner.

Different meanings

- Inquiry driven by community problems.
- Inquiry into “community”
- Inquiry facilitated by community => community of inquiry
Discuss: Examples

- Information spaces in the community
- Urbana Free Library movie making
- Radio spots on poverty & racism
- Paseo Boricua anti-alcohol campaign
- PACHs-Newbury Library Exhibit
- WRFU broadcast shadows
- E2Y community asset mapping

Reflect: Community as curriculum

- learn about the world in a connected way
- Learn how to act responsibly in the world, by first understanding self
- Learn how to transform the world, to give back to the community

Sources