



Jane Addams in the Classroom

Schaafsma, David, ed.
University of Illinois Press, 2014

Book Review

Tags: civic engagement | engaged learning | social justice

Reviewed by: Anne M. Blankenship, *Central Washington University*

Date Reviewed: April 23, 2015

This book's eleven essays propose ways in which educators might apply Jane Addams's approaches to education and community engagement. Each essay offers a historical examination of Addams's writing or work, followed by lessons in the practical application of her efforts to "socialize democracy" (13). With the exception of two Jane Addams Hull-House Museum affiliates, all contributions come from high school and university English instructors. Their general approach, however, applies to all educators, including those in religious studies and theology. As Petra Munro Hendry proposes, Addams's work can inspire us to understand "teaching as a form of social ethics" (48).

The book's central message emphasizes the need to listen to and understand the experiences and worldview of one's students and community. Concluding that the intellectual approach of our educational system fails to meet the needs of most citizens, Addams designed an "experiential, participatory learning" environment for the diverse immigrants of Chicago (62). She believed that accepted methods of cultural and social improvement for the working class merely reinforced the distance between social classes. Contributors to this volume interpret her approach as a challenge to teach social justice and engage the diversity of students' experiences. Essays by Lanette Grate, Susan C. Griffith, and Erin Vail recount their successful classroom efforts to engage their students with local social justice issues, using Addams's method of allowing current events to guide their work. Jennifer Krikava argues for the necessity of balancing the goals of outsiders (like standardized testing) with the need to equip students with skills that will enrich their future lives. Darren Tuggle agrees, demonstrating the benefits of reciprocal learning through his program that acclimates high school students to college life while providing learning experiences for university students training to become

teachers. In these ways, educators address the unique needs and experiences of their students while simultaneously introducing them to the necessity of engaging their community and its social needs. Lisa Lee and Lisa Junkin Lopez explain how administrators can facilitate these processes through community programs.

David Schaafsma and Todd DeStigter frame all these approaches as contributions to Addams's efforts to "support democracy" (17). Retaining such a consistent focus unfortunately resulted in considerable repetition - several authors drew similar meaning from Addams's account of the "Devil Baby," for example. Greater variation and critique of Addams would have expanded its contribution and my confidence in the book's historical interpretation.

Schaafsma and Hendry's essays offer sound critique, however, of current scholars and Addams's contemporaries who dismissed her work and narrative-style writing as "sentimental" and "nonscientific" (190). The reformer's methods reflected her ultimate point: dictating social change from a distance is undemocratic and at best ineffective, if not damaging. Reformers and educators must reject the dichotomy of benefactor and subject to embrace the contributions and participation of all people affecting a relationship, including those extending beyond the immediate contact. We can all use a reminder of this lesson, and this book suggests how to apply it to today's educational system.

https://www.wabashcenter.wabash.edu/resources/book_reviews/jane-addams-in-the-classroom/