

Chapter 13

The Educational Value of “Mental Non-resistance” and “Understanding” in Fostering Intellectual and Social Life. A Lesson from Jane Addams



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Abstract In the tradition of pragmatist studies, the scholarship of Jane Addams is usually associated with that of John Dewey, given their friendship and shared interests. However, the relationship between the two is often portrayed in terms of a narrative embodying classic archetypes of gender, “the male as mind generating theory and the woman as body experiencing and caring” (Hamington in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of philosophy*. Stanford University, 2018). Dewey himself explicitly acknowledged his debt to Addams’s ideas and insights (Dewey in *Response, Vol. 5: The later works of John Dewey, 1925–1953*. Southern Illinois University Press, 1930). Several studies have investigated the relationship between the two from various perspectives (Schilpp in *The philosophy of John Dewey*. Tudor, 1951; Davis in *American heroine: the life and legend of Jane Addams*. Oxford University Press, 1973; Deegan in *Jane Addams and the men of the Chicago School, 1892–1918*. Transaction Books, 1988; Farrell in *Beloved lady: history of Jane Addams’ ideas on reform and peace*. Johns Hopkins University Press, 1967; Lasch in *The social thought of Jane Addams*. Bobbs-Merril, 1965; Leffers in *Pragmatists Jane Addams and John Dewey inform the ethics of care*. *Hypatia* 8(2):64–77, 1993; Linn in *Jane Addams: a biography*. Greenwood Press, 1935; Seigfried in *Pragmatism and feminism: Reweaving the social fabric*. University of Chicago Press, 1996). However, a further exploration is required in order to highlight the epistemic and theoretical dimensions of Addams’s speculation. From this standpoint, it would be possible to have a clearer picture of the strong intersection of the epistemic and practical dimensions in Addams’s thought. This intersection is due to its “evolutionary” nature (Fischer in *Jane Addams’s evolutionary theorizing. Constructing “Democracy and Social Ethics”*. University of Chicago Press, 2019), which allowed her to merge multiple different cultural and empirical suggestions into an inspiring vision of the world and of human destiny.

Keywords Jane Addams · John Dewey · Mental non-resistance · Educational experience · Social agency · Social change

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13.1 Introduction

As acknowledged by John Dewey in his *Response to the Addresses Delivered in New York in Celebration of His Seventieth Birthday*,¹ Jane Addams's intellectual legacy was for him particularly precious, since it modeled a specific attitude toward the world. The American philosopher defined this attitude as “mental non-resistance”, that is the “tearing away [of] the armor-plate of prejudice, of convention, isolation that keeps one from sharing to the full in the larger and even the more unfamiliar and alien ranges of the possibilities of human life and experience” (Dewey, 1930 in LW 5, p. 421).²

If we consider the complexity of Addams's life experience and her writings, we can see that this attitude has at the same time, an *epistemic* and a *practical* value, since from it stems both a peculiar way of “understanding” the complexity of human experience and a consistent form of agency and ethics. Within this framework, we will therefore explore the powerful entanglement of the epistemic and the practical dimensions in Addams's thought, showing how the narrative portraying her only as a caring and committed activist has overshadowed her intellectual contribution.

The capacity and willingness to act are, according to Addams, strongly related to the contextual and historical conditions within which the motives to perform a specific action emerge. Actions are, indeed, as Addams writes in *Twenty years at Hull House* “the only medium man has for receiving and appropriating truth” (Addams, 1910, Location No. 2547) and, at the same time, as she notes in *Democracy and Social Ethics*, “the sole medium of expression for ethics” (Addams, 1902, p. 273). This is the framework within which Addams acted and lived.

13.2 The Epistemic Dimension of Addams Thought

A first account of Addams's *epistemic* positioning can be found in *Democracy and Social Ethics* where she contributes to the definition of a pragmatist understanding of truth,³ writing that “we can only discover truth by a rational and democratic interest

¹ First published in John Dewey. *The Man and his Philosophy: Addresses Delivered in New York in Celebration of his Seventieth Birthday*, Harvard University Press (1930) and later included in the Later Works (LW 5).

² Citations of John Dewey's works are from the thirty-seven-volume critical edition published by Southern Illinois University Press under the editorship of Jo Ann Boydston. In-text citations give the original publication date and series abbreviation, followed by the volume number and page number. Series abbreviations for *The Collected Works*: MW *The Middle Works* (1899–1924); LW *The Later Works* (1925–1953).

³ If truth is, according to Peirce, the “concordance of an abstract statement with the ideal limit towards which endless investigation would tend” (Peirce, 1901a [1935, 5.565]) which consists in “the satisfaction which *would* ultimately be found if the inquiry were pushed to its ultimate and indefeasible issue” (Peirce, 1908 [1935, 6.485]), the possibility of achieving this satisfaction depends on the conditions and the context of the inquiry. What Addams points out is that we cannot

in life” (Addams, 1902, Location No. 11709). This statement is very effective since it highlights how the search for truth and truth itself gain meaning if we primarily focus on the *interests* that prompt us. From this perspective, Addams’s understanding of “truth” can be counted as a relevant contribution to the classic pragmatist epistemic tradition since pragmatic theories of truth tend to view it “as a function of the practices people engage in, and the commitments people make when they solve problems, make assertions, or conduct scientific inquiry” (Capps, 2019, p. 1).

According to Addams, truth is a function of the contextual conditions of the search, which are both individual and social. For this reason, she points out that the discovery of what we understand as truth is possible only within a rational and “democratic” frame of reference. The term “democratic” here is referred neither to a “sentiment” nor to a “creed” but to a “rule for living” and a “test of faith” (Addams, 1902, Location No. 11676). This again helps us to understand that democracy is conceived by Addams both as a normative and a practical reference and as the empirical condition of associate living within which we can test our ideas, opinions, and values. It is also the context where we can “determine” our ideals, including the democratic ideal.

This statement highlights a strong connection between Addams’s thought and Dewey’s understanding of logical patterns, which are the by-products of cultural and historical processes grounded in human experience. It also focuses on the requirement to articulate and confront logical arguments and judgments within the social arena. Dewey’s idea is that, as stated in the preface to *Studies in Logical Theory*,⁴ “judgment is the central function of knowing”, which is not a “self-enclosed and self-explanatory whole” but should be considered as a “function within experience” whose aim is “distinctively reconstructive or transformatory” (Dewey, 1903 in MW2, p. 296). This concept is used by Addams to highlight a process of construction and clarification of democratic ideals, which constantly need to be challenged and reflected upon through what she describes as a “sane” process of judgment.

It is interesting here to see that Addams uses an organismic metaphor to analyze and evaluate the quality of logical processes, which are deeply embedded and incorporated within the social body and have a significant role in its well-being since the relationship with the social body is essential to the cultivation and development of effective logical tools. Within this framework, according to Addams, “sanity of judgment” can grow out only from a deep contact with the complexity of “social experience”, which is “the surest corrective of opinions concerning the social order, and concerning efforts, however humble, for its improvement” (Addams, 1902, Location No. 11684). This means that logical processes and practical judgment need to be validated not on a formal basis but within a contextual and social perspective.

Moreover, Addams points out that all our ideas “pass through a course of development” (Addams, 1902, Location No. 11722) and that therefore we should never

even carry out an inquiry which would lead us to this point if there is no rational and democratic interest beyond this inquiry.

⁴ Dewey (with the cooperation of fellows of the Department of Philosophy), *Studies in Logical Theory*, University of Chicago Press 1903, later included in the Middle Works (MW 2).

hold to a single belief, concept, idea, or opinion as an abstract and static reference. This means that even truth has to be understood as something which develops and unfolds over time within and across our fields of experience.

The epistemic and educational value of experience, which will be one of the main themes of Dewey's educational philosophy, is clearly highlighted by Addams when writing that "we are under a moral obligation in choosing our experiences since the result of those experiences must ultimately determine our understanding of life" (Addams, 1902, Location No. 11700). However, while Dewey focused his interest on the naturalistic foundation of experience and on its esthetic and educational dimensions, Addams directed her attention to the social dimension.

What Addams in *Democracy and Social Ethics* describes as "social experience" is an embedded experience of the complexity of society, of its contradictions, of its evils and limitations, but also of its potentialities and opportunities, all of which grant it a strong educational potential. Social experiences are particularly effective in educational terms since they offer us the opportunity to gain a deep and broad understanding not only of individual life but also of the life of society as a whole, highlighting how individual frames of mind are determined by the social condition in which they live. Accordingly, these kinds of experiences are the core of educational processes since they shape the way individuals experience the world and act within it.

In the sixth chapter of *Twenty Years at Hull House* Addams had pointed out that the educational experiences provided to most cultivated American young people tended to lead them toward what she termed "mental accumulation" (Addams, 1910, Location No. 2611). This is a condition that "lowered vitality and discontent" (Location No. 2612) and becomes even more dangerous when it comes to fostering an attitude toward experience and a habit of thought that traps individuals in isolated and predefined pathways. Indeed "mental accumulation" is the epistemic reflex of what Addams describes as "the overaccumulation" which characterizes one pole of society in contrast with "the destitution" which characterizes the other, a dichotomy that is "most sorely felt in the things that pertain to social and educational privileges" (Location No. 2737).

As very clearly stated in "A Modern Lear", it is important to acknowledge that

the virtues of one generation are not sufficient for the next, any more than the accumulations of knowledge possessed by one age are adequate to the needs of another. Of the virtues received from our fathers, we can afford to lose none. We accept as a precious trust those principles and precepts which the race has worked out for its highest safeguard and protection. But merely to preserve those is not enough. A task is laid upon each generation to enlarge their application, to ennoble their conception, and, above all, to apply and adapt them to the peculiar problems presented to it for solution. (Addams, 1912a, Location No. 9783)

Both juvenile conditions determined by the contrasting experiences of "overaccumulation" and "destitution", described by Addams in *Twenty Years at Hull House*, are problematic from an educational point of view: "young life, so sincere in its emotion and good phrases and yet so undirected, seems to me as pitiful as the other great mass of destitute lives" she wrote. It was nonetheless clear to her that one was "supplementary to the other" and that both conditions could be overcome through

the identification of a communicative device that would sustain mutual engagement in a shared project of human development (Addams, 1910, Location No. 2017).

In order to be able to develop a clearer understanding of the social conditions in which people live and to overcome social and educational inequalities, it is necessary to develop, first of all, a different epistemic attitude that strongly contrasts with the “accumulative” attitude and acts as a counterbalance to the risk of destitution and dissipation. This attitude can be effectively cultivated through an engagement with particular kinds of social experiences which provide individuals with new cognitive tools. The establishment of a social settlement, which requires “flexibility”, a “power of quick adaptation”, and a “readiness to change methods” according to the demands of the environment can be seen as an example and model of such a social experience.

As a matter of fact, to grow and to fulfill all of its goals a settlement “must be open to conviction and must have a deep and abiding sense of tolerance”. Moreover, “it must be hospitable and ready for experiment. It should demand from its residents a scientific patience in the accumulation of facts and the steady holding of their sympathies as one of the best instruments for that accumulation. It must be grounded in a philosophy whose foundation is on the solidarity of the human race, a philosophy which will not waver when the race happens to be represented by a drunken woman or an idiot boy” (Addams, 1910, Location No. 2745). Accordingly, “its residents must be emptied of all conceit of opinion and all self-assertion, and ready to arouse and interpret the public opinion of their neighborhood” (Location No. 2752).

The participation in the construction of a social settlement is, therefore, itself an educational experience, which helps individuals from both sides in the operationalization and revision of their inherited knowledge as well as in the development of a new and different mindset, which has to be constantly reconstructed and re-organized in response to the emerging political and social challenges.⁵ In the short essay, *The Philosophy of a New Day* Addams would better articulate this point, highlighting how the most dangerous epistemic condition for a society is “when people clung to old ideas, whether they did so out of loyalty to tradition or for the fear of appearing radical”; on the contrary, it is crucial that people be allowed to “imagine new possibilities” but also “to look at life as it is” (Addams et al., 2006, p. 351). Addams thereby combined two different epistemic positions: an imaginative and utopian position together with one more realistic and embedded within real experience.

This is indeed what characterizes the originality of Addams’s epistemology since it combines the capacity to have a clear and complete vision of the possible alternatives to an unsatisfactory status quo with the conditions of possibility of specific plans of action (which may be abandoned if they are not feasible and replaced with more sustainable strategies). This requires a deep knowledge of the aspirations, desires, and ideas which people refer to in order to be able to evaluate them in perspective and to abandon them without regrets if, for some reason, they cannot be continued.

⁵ In this way the educational processes become the context within which it is possible to have a continuous “reconstruction” of individual and collective experience (Addams explicitly quotes Dewey and his idea of education as experiential reconstruction); this means that past experiences need to be reconstructed and reinterpreted in order to become educational.

On the other hand, it is necessary to be open to alternative and new solutions when the moment to plan and to act arrives. This combination of positions is the outcome of a dynamic cognitive movement, which requires a “vigorous thinking” capable of building “a bridge” between the things we desire and those which are possible, namely the epistemic equivalent of a “non-resistant” ethical positioning toward the world.

This positioning is also clearly visible in Addams’s description of the foundation and development of Hull House over twenty years, which moves back and forth between a description of the aspirations of the residents and an analysis of the accomplishments and failures of the settlement project. As a matter of fact, Addams described the experience of Hull House using the same epistemic stance that Dewey employed in relation to his laboratory school at the University of Chicago. From this point of view, she highlighted how the starting point of her project was the encounter with a social problem that needed to be solved through a sound process of inquiry, which would lead to the planning and realization of effective actions. However, she added to the description a narrative reconstruction of the desires, hopes, and visions that had animated the project, giving space and words to the imaginative and utopian elements embedded in the process of inquiry.

Both Dewey and Addams depicted the two experiences as “experiments” and highlighted the complex processes of inquiry that had generated and sustained them according to a pragmatist frame of reference. But while Dewey focused on the concrete educational outcomes of his endeavor, Addams was very keen to focus also on the ethical, political, and social implications of the process of inquiry she was engaged in, whose ultimate goal was the improvement of individual and collective life.

On this basis, we can say that the epistemological dimension of Addams’s thought is to be found in the combination of: an experimental attitude; an imaginative attitude; a flexible, resilient, and open attitude toward ideas, projects, and situations; and the capacity to take into account different points of view and different perspectives (Knight 2010). Moreover, it is important to state that the problems which are the basis of the process of inquiry described by Addams when recalling the experience of Hull House are considered as historically and culturally situated and are fruitful for future generations, who are required to overcome their condition in order to advance society.

This deep awareness of the cultural and historical background of the process of inquiry and the active engagement in the processes described makes Addams’s epistemology a precursor of what Sandra Harding names as “standpoint” epistemology, which is characterized by “a distinctive kind of knowledge (knowledge for one’s projects)” that “can emerge only through political processes” (Harding, 2004, p. 8). As Wylie points out standpoint epistemology is “characterized by a particular kind of epistemic engagement, a matter of cultivating a critical awareness, empirical and conceptual, of the social conditions under which knowledge is produced and authorized” (Wylie, 2012, p. 63).

Constant engagement is Addams’s personal epistemic response to the challenge from which the Hull House project emerged and shapes her non-resistant attitude

toward the multiple possibilities of human life and experience. She is deeply aware of the situatedness of her knowledge as well as of the distortions produced by the fixation on one objective and static epistemic position (such as, for example, the position of a well-educated privileged woman toward emerging social problems). For this reason, she attempted to explore these problems from the standpoint of the individuals directly involved, opening her mind to their stories.

13.3 The Practical Dimension and the Value of Non-resistance

As an ethical correlate of this epistemic frame of reference, Addams worked out what in *Twenty Years at Hull House* (Addams, 1910, Location No. 3239) she defined as “a certain theory of non-resistance”, mainly inspired by the Gospel and by the ideas of Leo Tolstoy, or rather “a universal good will” to which she referred in her analysis of human and social experience. She was convinced that the morality of individual and social actions should be judged by taking into account the will behind them instead of their effective outcomes, focusing on individual choices, motivations, and responsibilities.

As a matter of fact, as Addams herself acknowledged, that theory was later “so often and so rudely disturbed” as to be intensely redefined in different epistemic terms, adding to the picture also the contextual elements at stake in every situation and the different positions and points of view of all the actors engaged, and focusing on the social implications of individual actions. Accordingly, she distinguished between “individual” and “social” morality, explaining how individual ethical motives and values need to be constantly contrasted with those embedded within a social context.

Addams focused on the deep relationship existing between morality and agency, highlighting how even the highest ethical ideals need to be concretely operationalized within everyday experiences (Fischer, 2006) and situations through a reflective agency sustained by what Dewey would call a “reflective” exercise of morality (Dewey, 1908 in MW5). What has previously been described as a “standpoint” epistemology in Addams has therefore deep moral implications, since the process of knowledge construction is always situated in and connected to the actions performed within the social arena as well as to the ideals, motives and values underlying those actions.

Moreover, Addams was convinced of the necessity of building up and disseminating effective forms of what she in *A New Conscience and an Ancient Evil* defined as “counter-knowledge” in order to contrast the bewildering impact of a confused and contradictory mass of information that could be easily distorted and manipulated (Addams, 1912b). “Counter-knowledge” is indeed what makes sense of reality and organizes it according to a reflective pattern, highlighting the main issues that need to be explored and identifying possible frames of reference to carry out meaningful actions within the social arena. Following Addams’s reasoning, we come

to the conclusion that the construction and dissemination of an effective “counter-knowledge” requires an aware involvement of individuals in the exploration of the most challenging social issues, tackling in depth the hidden social “evils” that menace the development of a true democratic society.

“Counter-knowledge” is always based on a first-hand and “sympathetic” knowledge, collected and elaborated through an active and sensitive engagement with the complexity and contradictions of the social world, the cultivation of different forms of social relationship, and the involvement in a continuous process of description and re-description of human experience. Addams vividly describes the lives of Chicago girls, collecting and narrating their stories, each one of which is a powerful and moving example of the miserable conditions of a speechless multitude of young “destitute” individuals scattered within a glowing city so indifferent to their single existence. In doing so she somehow returns to them their individuality and their dignity and creates a counter-narrative focused on individual experiences emerging from the reports of the Juvenile Protective Association of Chicago containing hundreds of personal stories of girls, including immigrant girls, employed in department stores, factories, hotels, offices, and restaurants. In the same way in the *Spirit of Youth and City Streets* Addams is capable of taking the standpoint of the boys and girls living in the city and understanding their desire to be acknowledged, to be engaged, to contribute with their capacities and their energy to social change and social progress.

Addams’s epistemology is an idiographic epistemology, according to which human experience can be effectively grasped and understood through narrative and storytelling rather than through extensive and nomothetic descriptions and generalizations. However, this epistemological stance is combined with a practical approach, which offers us a well-defined guideline for social action. In *Democracy and Social Ethics* Addams points out that the “great difficulty we experience in reducing to action our imperfect code of social ethics arises from the fact that we have not yet learned to act together” (Addams, 1910, Location No. 12617). Social action is by its nature a collective form of agency based on the acknowledgment of a shared goal.

Addams’s advocacy of the capacity to act together is not referred only to different political and social forces. In the *Spirit of Youth and City Streets* (1909) she calls for an intergenerational alliance, based on the capacity to merge two different standpoints regarding life and society. She is aware that the “extraordinary advances in human progress” have been made when different generations share the same ideals and goals. Moreover, she is convinced that an appeal to the “confident spirit of youth” coming from the older generation is essential to acknowledge and identify the real demands for social reconstruction and to engage in the realization of more equitable social conditions within a truly democratic society.

As a matter of fact, according to Addams, democracy itself “like any other of the living faiths of men is so essentially mystical that it continually demands new formulations” (Addams, 1909, Location No. 16094). She adds that these reformulations can occur effectively if sustained by the “wonderful and inexplicable instinct for justice which resides in the hearts of men which is never so irresistible as when the heart is young” (Location No. 16208).

13.4 The Epistemic and Moral Conditions of Social Agency. Addams’s Lesson for the Present Times

In Addams’s view, every human action contains an epistemological motive and an ethical and practical one and combines both completely. Accordingly, we cannot analyze and explore individual and collective action unless we take into account and articulate this double-sidedness, focusing on the forms of knowledge that we are able to construct and re-construct while we act, together with the lessons learned from our actions, as well as on the implications and further consequences and outcomes of those actions, highlighting also the motives and values that orient them (Miras Boronat, 2015).

The capacity to articulate and combine the epistemological and ethical dimensions of individual and collective experiences is a by-product of what Dewey described as Addams’s “mental non-resistance”, so to speak, the awareness and capacity of being mentally open and “non-resistant” to the cultural and political challenges in which individuals are embedded. As we can see here, “non-resistance” refers to both an epistemic as well as a moral posture toward the world, which implies a mastering of the conditions of isolation that individuals are used to and an identification and overcoming of biases, constraints, and prejudices, which limit our knowledge and compromise the possibility of a satisfactory relationship with others and with the world.

This understanding is particularly powerful if we use it to frame what is happening at present. The growing risk of isolation for individuals and communities is the main indicator of the fact that the social fabric in which we are used to living is rapidly deteriorating and needs to be rewoven using different patterns and threads which will make it more inclusive and respondent to the capacities, hopes, needs, and projects of its members. Moreover, contemporary cultural and social scenarios are characterized by growing levels of conformism, which limit the possibilities that young people have to commit themselves successfully to the search for a more meaningful life and a broader understanding of the world in which they live. Conformism is also connected to the tendency to an acritical attitude to information, news, statements, and items of knowledge that are unreflectively accumulated, disseminated, and shared, becoming the confusing background of individual and collective experiences. At the same time, we are currently witnessing the diffusion and intensification of conflicts all over the world, the increasing levels of fear, ignorance, hatred, and prejudice in all the spheres of society, and the affirmation of aggressive, dogmatic, and non-dialogical positions in politics connected to negationist, nationalist and populist tendencies. All these trends are leading individuals and communities toward closure, intolerance and an unwillingness both to encounter others as well as to get to know themselves in depth.

This strongly contrasts with the reality of a world which is rapidly changing and is constantly challenging us with the requirement to reframe our epistemic and ethical references in order to be able to cope with the experiences in which we are embedded. Within this scenario, the cultivation and promotion—through dedicated educational actions and selected experiences—of a “non-resistant” mental attitude

toward the world may have a significant relevance in the development of an alternative epistemology. This undertaking can frame the processes of knowledge construction, elaborating new and different forms of “counter-knowledge”, which may contrast the reference to an indeterminate and confused mass of background information, news, and unrelated and unexamined items of knowledge.

Moreover, Addams’s notion of “sympathetic understanding” seems to be particularly promising since it would support the development of new and different forms of social understanding. These qualities need to be enhanced at a very early stage within any educational processes which are intended as lifelong pathways, along which individuals and society come to grow mutually and satisfactorily (Condliffe Lagemann, 1994).

The idea that the ultimate end of education must be, as Addams stated in a paper presented at the *Illinois State Conference of Charities and Corrections Proceedings* in 1897, “the development of human nature in scope and power and happiness” (Addams, 1897) should be understood as the key for the construction of a society based on the acknowledgment and cultivation of the “humanity” of its members through educational actions and practices aimed at broadening the capacities and powers of all human beings and at sustaining their efforts in the construction of happier living conditions.

This concept can be used as a leading reference contrasting the mainstream political agenda, which reduces educational processes to instructional tracks aimed at the acquisition of the knowledge and competencies that provide individuals with the tools to be effectively engaged in productive and working processes, thereby limiting the social impact of educational actions and practices.

Addams conceived of education as closely connected to human and social development and considered the experience of the “settlement” described in *Twenty Years at Hull House* as a model for an effective educational project since it can be seen as an “attempt to relieve, at the same time, the over accumulation at one end of society and the destitution at the other”, taking into account that both “over accumulation” and “destitution” pertain at the same time to “social and educational advantage” (Addams, 1910, Location No. 960).

The risk of “destitution” was (and is) particularly severe for disadvantaged people, such as immigrants. For this reason, Addams paid particular attention to the care for and instruction of immigrant children, highlighting the challenges and the advantages of schooling in areas characterized by a strong presence of immigrants. While in the article *The Public School and the Immigrant Child* she highlighted the richness and value of immigrant culture, experience, and traditions, she also acknowledged the risk that the schooling process could disorient the students, increasing the gap between their traditions, and their cultural and family background, and the forms of knowledge and understanding to which they are exposed at school. This experience could lead to disaffection, frustration, and early school drop-out. However, it can be overcome by acknowledging that the main task of the schooling experience is to provide each student with “the beginning of a culture so wide and deep and universal that he can interpret his own parents and countryman by a standard which is worldwide and not provincial” (Addams, 1908, p. 100).

Addams provided the conceptual tools to design an effective educational approach to meet the needs of immigrant children and their families and framed a number of powerful pedagogical intuitions that can be used to design a suitable project of intercultural education for contemporary scenarios. As a matter of fact, these pedagogical intuitions can be effectively mobilized to formulate educational actions and practices within present-day public schools which—due to processes of globalization—are challenged by the presence of a growing number of immigrant students who risk being left behind and isolated if their personal experiences cannot be capitalized on and exploited within an educational process, aimed at broadening their understanding of the world as well as their capacities and possibilities. However, in order to achieve this goal, which is both educational and social, it is necessary to enhance and promote “mental non-resistance” both on the part of the school and the teachers and on the part of the immigrant students and their parents, taking into account that this is the only effective condition for individual and social growth within a democratic perspective.

The challenge of immigration and intercultural education is, indeed, an exemplary political and social test for contemporary democratic societies and a good test bench for Addams’s ideas. It is within this context that we can see concretely how “non-resistance” can work both as an epistemic as well as a practical key to promote social change, social development, and social justice according to an ideal of democracy that requires the active engagement and participation of all individuals, institutions and social forces. Only through an open and direct encounter with the circumstances and difficulties which people experience and experiment in their lives can activists, educators, intellectuals, and politicians acquire a complete picture of the world they live in. On this basis (as Addams states in *The Philosophy of a New Day*) they can “correct” their “beloved ideals” in order to “find out wherein they may be possibly misleading, wherein we can make them better and more adapted to human nature” discovering “from life itself what lessons we may best learn and best transmit” (Addams et al., 2006, p. 352).

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