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Abstract

This article examines the potential for critical theories to contribute towards social transformation through a process of popular education that supports learning and organising. Theory can create a platform of understanding across different communities that are resisting social injustice. This can enhance opportunities for translocal learning to catalyse social transformation at scale. Too often, however, academic theories remain disconnected from contemporary struggles for social justice – and as a result their contribution to social transformation is diminished. Therefore, we must reconsider how critical theories develop. Pragmatism is a philosophical tradition that builds theory through social action. It can guide a methodological infrastructure through which to best develop practice-led theory. I will explain how a critical pragmatist approach, anchored in participatory research, is more likely to generate theories that are both *resonant* to conditions of injustice and *relevant* for social transformation. The methodological innovations of early 20th century scholars WEB Du Bois and Jane Addams illustrate the key dimensions necessary for a critical pragmatist approach. Du Bois' contestation of structural problems and Addams' commitment to participatory experimentalism can inform an effective approach to these issues. In so doing, the article outlines key foundations for a philosophy of social inquiry to support learning and organising about social transformation. The ideas presented in this paper also contribute to debates about how to re-imagine the civic purpose of the academy.

Keywords

Social transformation, critical theories, pragmatism, WEB Du Bois, Jane Addams

Introduction

Social transformation aims to change structures that cause injustice. Practices working towards social transformation include the creation of alternative forms of participatory governance, innovations in radical democracy, and the cultivation of the commons (Schmid and Smith, 2021: 254). These practices can happen in spaces of everyday radicalism that resist the status quo on a local level and provide pre-figurative alternatives (Silver, 2018). These spaces are made up of people coming together to resist injustice and include community organisations and social movements. Alternative spaces are created through which 'boundaries of the possible can be autonomously shifted, rejecting and resisting dominant frameworks' (Gaventa, 2006). Ideas generated through these spaces can be drawn upon to illuminate new perspectives on social change (Choudry and Kapoor, 2010). As such,

spaces of everyday radicalism are alternative sites of knowledge production in which to learn about social transformation (Silver, 2021). Yet, unfortunately, these spaces are often disconnected – due in part to the absence of a common understanding to situate their resistance as a form of collective struggle (Fraser, 2016). As a result, there are problems of scale in terms of the 'diffusion, upscaling, and mainstreaming' of transformative practices (Bartels, 2017). The question of how to connect spaces of everyday radicalism with each other to generate social transformation at scale remains an unresolved puzzle.

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A partial answer to how to connect spaces with each other is through learning. Learning is a social process that can connect different spaces and knowledges (McFarlane, 2011: 6). It involves acquiring knowledge to think about society in new ways. The pivotal role for learning is often absent in debates about social transformation, but McFarlane (2011: 360) demands that we must ‘recuperate learning as a political and practical domain’. Developing translocal processes of learning across spaces of everyday radicalism opens possibilities to produce strategies for social transformation at scale. Translocal learning can provide a new ‘iterative learning space to obtain new ideas and perspectives’ across multiple locations (Kudo et al., 2020: 1). Learning about alternative ways of seeing the world can lead to the adaptation of strategies for social change. Translocal learning does not mean that a particular approach is replicated in different contexts but is about discovering new ideas and dynamically relating them to local, rooted strategies. While translocal strategies are responsive to both place and particular historical context, learning is developed horizontally across spaces (McFarlane, 2011: 67). Translocal networks can generate learning to share strategies and foster a common narrative of social change – enhancing the possibilities for transformation at scale (Loorbach et al., 2020).

Prior to becoming an academic, I worked for over a decade in the North-West of England to organise networks across the voluntary and community sector. This organising was most successful when there was a shared problem that animated social action or where there was a common strategy to move forward. The cultivation of relationships was essential: networks became stronger when people felt more deeply connected with each other. Relationships rested on a tacitly shared narrative about social change that was rooted in common understandings of injustice. Through collaborating in these networks, our collective learning and knowledge were enhanced. Since I started my PhD, I have been thinking about how academic knowledge can be used to support the type of organisations that I worked with and help to make their alternative approaches to social action more visible. I have attempted to do this through work that recognises the radical potential of everyday politics, by developing new ways to effectively document social change, and through thinking about how to elevate the conceptual contribution of social action. My experiences have helped me to think about how to use academic knowledge to support community organising that can enable social change at scale.

Now I work as a lecturer at a university, I am committed to the original civic purpose of the academy to produce knowledge that can improve society (Jones, 2019). I believe this is a legacy worth trying to revitalise to help overcome the institutional and material constraints on socially engaged scholarship (Leibowitz and Bozalek, 2018: 983). Despite these constraints, scholars committed to social transformation still persist by working in the interstices (or in parallel to) the academy. My contribution to this endeavour is to

explore how we can support the development of a common platform across translocal community networks to enable social transformation. Grossberg (2015: 10) explains that our role as scholars demands that we ‘accept the responsibility, and all the work it requires, of offering better stories about what’s actually going on, stories that will enable people to struggle more effectively and imaginatively to remake the present and reinvent the future’. As academics we can help to develop shared narratives of social change by creating ‘network building methodologies’ (Jordan and Kapoor, 2016) to support translocal learning.

The new municipalist movement has developed an important conceptual contribution that can advance our thinking about translocal learning. New municipalism has emerged as an international social movement that aims to democratically transform the local state and economy (Thompson, 2021). While these movements have emerged in different contexts, they connect through a process of ‘collaborative theory building’ (Russell, 2019). The process of collaborative theory building is not bound to a particular theoretical approach but led by practice and focused on creating a shared understanding of what the movements have in common. This common platform can be used as the foundation to share knowledge to collectively develop alternative practices. Therefore, in this article I explore the methodological innovations needed to realise this potential. Below, I set out the foundations of my approach in the traditions of popular education and pragmatism, before turning to WEB Du Bois and Jane Addams to illustrate the critical dimensions of social inquiry that are necessary to learn about social transformation.

Popular education and the value of theory building

Popular education is a participatory process of learning that connects people’s experiences with critical theories through a process of education, research and community organising (Freire, 1996). Popular educators support participants to situate their experiences of injustice in a broader context as the basis to develop more effective strategies. In doing so, popular educators support publics to situate their everyday problems in a social, historical and political context and then use this knowledge to develop strategies for social change. Popular education has been the foundation for successful social movements by marginalised communities – from the civil rights movement in the United States to mass campaigns for literacy in Latin America (Horton and Freire, 1990).

In recent years, popular education has enjoyed a re-emergence (Emejulu and Littler, 2019). Whilst effective practices may be exchanged across sites, there is an unfulfilled potential to promote learning in a more systematic and coherent way (Luckett et al., 2017). Popular education engages with critical theories to highlight structural injustices, but it is less

focused on *developing* theories. This limitation constrains the possibilities for connecting spaces with each other to achieve transformation at scale. Theory can guide social action and inform a more strategic approach (Collins, 2019) and whilst theorising is certainly not the exclusive domain of academics, there is a crucial role for social scientists to cooperate with communities in a process of theory-building. Academics are positioned to support theory building due to our training, knowledge of existing theories and the (relative) time that we have for critical reflection (Bevington and Dixon, 2005: 191). We can use our capacities to develop new forms of popular education that can build theories to help connect different spaces. For this to happen, traditional approaches to theory building need to be adapted.

Critical theories are frequently disconnected from social conditions. A level of abstraction is necessary when developing theories because complexity needs to be situated in a manageable frame for understanding. Yet social conditions are frequently bracketed away, resulting in a ‘withdrawal into a reified and self-referential model of the political’ (McNay, 2014: 4) – which creates a disconnect between theories of transformation and the social conditions they intend to change. For instance, an important approach that can advance our thinking about social transformation is scholarship on utopia. One of the most compelling features of contemporary utopianism is to combine immediate improvements to everyday life with an orientation to the future to imagine transformation (Cooper, 2014; Levitas, 2013; Srnicek and Williams, 2016; Wright, 2010). There is not only a gap in the literature about how these practices occur in particular contexts, but also these theories could be developed in more unconventional ways that build on the knowledge of people involved in social change in order to engage with the complexities of transformation (Choudry and Kapoor, 2010: 6).

When thinking about how to reconfigure traditional approaches, we must first reflect on the purpose of theory. Stuart Hall maintained that our aim should be ‘to always reproduce the concrete in thought—not to generate another good theory, but to give a better-theorised account of concrete historical reality. This is not an anti-theoretical stance. I need theory to do this. Yet the goal is to understand the situation you started out with better than before’ (Hall cited in Nagar, 2002: 184). Theories can help us to make sense of the world that we want to transform. As hooks (1994: 67) reminds us, ‘we need to develop theories that are rooted in an attempt to understand both the nature of our contemporary predicament and the means by which we might collectively engage in resistance that would transform our current reality’. To build theories that can guide social action, it is vital that we ensure that they are *resonant* to conditions of injustice and *relevant* to practices happening in spaces of everyday radicalism.

Theories must be adaptable if they are to resonate with local conditions and support learning. Contexts of social

injustice must not be hidden, as this serves to perpetuate unequal relations of power. By critically engaging with particular social injustices, theories are more likely to ‘uncover unnoticed types of inequality. . .and consequently, open up new avenues of transformative democratic change’ (McNay, 2014: 13). There will be variation in how theories are understood in different contexts, which can lead to different understandings of social change – but translocal learning can be developed through critical engagement with these differences (Grayson and Little, 2017: 60).

An epistemological foundation of critical participatory action research can ensure that theories are situated in conditions of injustice. Marginalised people have ‘resistant knowledges’ that are rooted in everyday experiences of injustice and geared towards social action to resist injustice (Collins, 2019: 88). Resistant knowledges already involve critical theorising about injustice. As Torre and Fine (2011: 116) remind us, people who have been marginalised ‘carry sharp critique and knowledge about the architecture of social relations, and that revealing and legitimating this knowledge, significantly challenges existing forms of institutional and structural oppression that have been naturalised as inevitable’. Cooperation in the process of theory building with marginalised groups can help to mitigate against ‘the risks of abstraction and indifference’ (Armstrong and Ludlow, 2020: 8). Theories of social transformation that critically engage with resistant knowledges are more likely to be multidimensional and socially grounded, standing in contrast to the ‘singular stories’ that often dominate normative theories (Oldfield, 2015: 2083). Dialogue between resistant knowledges and academic critical theories can create new explanations of social injustice and frame shared conceptualisations of social change. Through this dialogic relationship between experience and theory, situated knowledge is produced and the narratives of resistant knowledges are made more accountable to their location in the social world (Haraway, 1988); more compelling narratives of social change can then emerge. Given this, the next section explains how critical pragmatism can guide a generative relationship between theory and practice to inform social action and the development of new shared concepts.

The promise of pragmatism and the need for more critical foundations

Popular education and critical participatory action research are informed by pragmatism as they are concerned with the relationship between knowledge and social action. Pragmatism provides the methodological apparatus to bring together popular education with a situated approach to building theories of social transformation. It is a paradigm for social inquiry through which we learn from practices designed to address social problems (Wills and Lake, 2020: 5). These problems are always located in a particular ‘time, place and culture’ (Cutchin, 2020: 64). The sensitivity to

context mirrors the foundations necessary for translocal learning. A particular social condition is identified as a problem by a community of inquiry. Following collective discussion to frame the problem, practices that respond to the problem are designed, and partial solutions are implemented (Morgan, 2014: 1047). As Cornell West (cited in Wills and Lake, 2020: 33) explains, pragmatism ‘consists of a future-oriented instrumentalism that tries to deploy thought as a weapon to enable more effective action’.

An emphasis upon experimentalism ‘puts teeth into [the] more amorphous category of creative social action’ (Collins, 2019: 174). The idea of experimentalism is that ‘the meaning of an idea comes from its pragmatic use in social context, and not exclusively from its internal logic or from some pre-determined definition’ (Collins, 2019: 174). The aim is to learn from practice as it is unfolding and produce knowledge to create iterative improvements. Knowledge is produced in this way to generate new problem-solving ideas and develop original concepts as a foundation for future learning (Ansell and Bartenberger, 2016). Such an approach can be used to strengthen practices in spaces of everyday radicalism and generate a common conceptual or narrative foundation to connect them together.

Abduction is the foundation of experimentalism. An abductive approach is specifically geared towards the construction of theory. Abduction has a logical form that is distinct from the traditions of induction and deduction. Abduction is orientated towards theoretical innovation through a ‘radical rethinking of the relation between data and theory construction’ (Timmermans and Tavory, 2012: 168). The pragmatist philosopher C.S. Peirce identified abductive scientific inquiry as a ‘creative and open-ended endeavour’ (Ansell and Bartenberger, 2016: 65) in which reflective learning is central. Abduction requires us to start our studies with wide-ranging knowledge of theories, while also maintaining a commitment to be open to learn about new theories. Analysis begins the moment our research commences. Researchers collect data and then reflect on emerging unexpected findings that do not conform with the original theories – encouraging us to think creatively about new relevant explanations. Through the process of abduction, we can imagine new ideas that we might not have previously considered. We open ourselves to new perspectives in the process. As such, abduction is well suited to a process of popular education to learn about social transformation.

Abduction provides the route to develop theories through first, critical thinking which is needed to generate a new explanation in response to emergent data that does not fit with original theoretical frames. The construction of a new theoretical explanation of what is happening in a site of social action is viewed as a tentative hypothesis. These tentative hypotheses provide an inferential insight, which has been developed through an engagement with the data that did not fit with the original theories. An absence of certainty is an asset from which we can begin to think differently (Wills

and Lake, 2020: 4). Following this, the tentative hypothesis is then tested through a logical process of retroduction, which involves a systematic examination of the way that the data fits back to the new theoretical explanation. Retroduction is done to either eliminate the new theory if it does not fit with the data or to build on the original theory in new ways. Retroduction is based on the notion that theoretical explanations are given meaning from the facts through which they have emerged. As Levin-Rozalis (2000: 425) clarifies, ‘the hypothesis has to explain the facts, in the sense that it then makes it possible to derive the facts logically from the explanation’. The whole set of empirical data is then related back to the new theoretical explanation to determine whether a better fit has been created.

The process of retroduction provides the basis from which we can engage in dialogue within spaces of everyday racialism to ensure that theories resonate with people’s experiences of injustice and are relevant to their practices of resistance. An abductive approach can ensure that theories are less closed and more situated in particular social conditions. Abduction can ‘unstiffen all our theories’ (James cited in Schneiderhan, 2011: 594). The abductive process supports a rupture against theoretical closure – which can ensure that theories can be adapted and related to ‘dynamics of concrete struggle’ (McNay, 2014: 22). Once unanticipated data is engaged with through a process of abduction, alternative or adapted theories can be developed and tested again through an iterative cycle that involves revisiting research sites (Tavory and Timmermans, 2014: 176).

Whilst abduction is well suited to dialogue with resistant knowledges as it involves continuous reflection and engagement in the field, there is a significant gap in thinking about how a more critical and participatory approach to abduction might occur – particularly in a way that responds to questions of social transformation (Collins, 2019: 7). Pragmatism has traditionally been associated with meliorism and incrementalism (Wills and Lake, 2020: 32). It is less often focused on social transformation (James, 2017: 163). Recent scholarship has criticised pragmatism’s focus on incremental social progress as being insufficient to deal with structural social problems. A concern about inequality was not the primary focus for the classical pragmatists and this neglect has largely been continued into contemporary pragmatist philosophy (Collins, 2012: 74). To realise the potential for pragmatism to act as a philosophy of progressive social transformation, we must consider how to make questions of social justice central to the process (Medina, 2017: 203). A renewed critical foundation for pragmatism can meet this challenge by including resistant knowledges and anchoring problems in questions of social justice. If structural social problems are more comprehensively engaged with, then it follows that the solutions that these will demand will necessarily be more radical (Medina, 2017: 198).

While questions of social injustice might not have been a central concern for the classical pragmatist philosophers,

there have been scholars working on these issues at the margins. Early 20th century activist-scholars WEB Du Bois and Jane Addams worked together against dominant cultures of knowledge production and exclusion. They struggled against this marginalisation to advance alternative paradigms of civic-oriented research to support social justice (Deegan, 1988). Du Bois recognised the need to critically situate social problems in systematic knowledge of injustice (Medina, 2017: 203). Addams developed a novel form of experimentalism that centred the resistant knowledges of communities that she worked alongside. The following sections draw on Du Bois and Addams to illustrate how to create a more critical foundation for pragmatism to support learning about social transformation in ways that are *resonant* to particular conditions of injustice and *relevant* to social movements.

Scholarship and social injustice: Insights from WEB Du Bois

WEB Du Bois worked at the margins of the academy to develop groundbreaking empirical studies of African American communities that brought together novel theories with rigorous research methods to contest the dominant construction of ‘race’ in Jim Crow America (Wright, 2006: 5). Du Bois used his innovative ‘methodological conscience’ (Green and Wortham, 2018: 71) to generate data through mixed methods community studies against which theoretical explanations could be assessed and reconfigured if necessary (Morris, 2015: 67). Du Bois’ ‘accent on political economy and social theory and his consistent emphasis on race, gender, and class issues, make his work an ideal model for reconceiving and recreating critical theory of contemporary society’ (Rabaka, 2006: 746). His work demonstrates the ways in which pragmatism can be reconfigured to identify social problems that centres a determined focus on structural injustices.

Du Bois’ philosophy of research involved contestation to reframe social problems (Koopman, 2017). He rejected the dominant approach of social science that was used to justify racial capitalism and oppression (Morris, 2015: 135). His work was rooted in ‘epistemic disobedience’ that challenged the dominant practices of social research (Lomotey-Nakon, 2018: 365). Social science followed a naturalist philosophy that aimed to mirror the natural sciences with a view that they were similar enough to be studied in the same way (Bevir and Kedar, 2008) and this included a rejection of engagement with normative foundations. The naturalist approach limited the scope for contesting dominant explanations of ‘race’ considered to be both natural and permanent. Du Bois recognised that this reduced the scope for critical questioning of the status quo, preserving the system of injustice. This recognition informed an alternative approach to social research whereby knowledge could be used to collectively identify social problems and produce counter-narratives to challenge injustice. In the process he created a more

politically engaged form of social science to contest the dominant approach that was being used to justify the oppressive Jim Crow laws, where he concluded that ‘One could not be a calm, cool, and detached scientist while Negroes were lynched, murdered, and starved’ (cited in Morris, 2015: 134).

Du Bois argued that theory should account for the role of agency within society (Morris, 2015: 26–27). Structures of oppression had been created by elites and so consequently these structures could be dismantled by marginalised groups (Schwartz, 2017: 1230). As social structures were a site of contestation, then a comprehensive understanding of the causes of injustice became necessary to develop the most effective strategies of resistance. As social injustice unfolds over time and is reproduced in new ways, so a critical theory must be adaptable to changing conditions (Rabaka, 2006: 747–748). Du Bois wrote that: ‘true lovers of humanity can only hold higher the pure ideals of science, and continue to insist that if we would solve a problem we must study it, and that there is but one coward on earth, and that is the coward that dare not know’ (Du Bois, 1898: 23).

Du Bois’ pragmatic spirit involved using social science to support political education to learn about social problems (Milligan, 1985). He believed that social scientists should study social problems to produce evidence of injustice that could be used by civil rights activists. His approach to education was ‘geared toward translating theory into progressive social praxis’ (Rabaka, 2006: 741). Du Bois maintained that ‘sociological knowledge combined with political activism could serve as a weapon against Jim Crow’ (Morris, 2015: 90), writing that: ‘We wish not only to make the truth clear but to present it in such shape as will encourage and help social reform’ (Du Bois, 1907). It was crucial that reform was rooted in a systematic understanding of the problems that social reforms were designed to address.

Du Bois wrote that reformers are so driven by their fixed ideas that they ‘haven’t time to study the abuses which they seek to abolish and baldly assume that they know all about them’ (Du Bois, 1897: 15). He was critical of social experiments not grounded in a critical assessment of what the problem was, concluding that ‘there are many people who have a vague desire to right wrongs, help the needy, and reform the vicious. Ultimately, these people in very many instances are ignorant of the results of scientific research in these lines. . . and they often waste money and energy, or do absolute harm, either by antiquated or discredited methods’ (Du Bois, 1897). Contextualised explanations of injustices were needed to guide strategic social action to erode structures of oppression. Without systematic research to identify the cause of social problems, he believed discussions on social issues ended up leaving ‘in the dark background the really crucial question as to the relative importance of the many problems involved’ (Du Bois, 1898: 9).

Du Bois was troubled by the way in which the construction of social problems was pre-determined in such a way as to limit the necessary depth of social reforms. Abstracted

theories which framed social reforms were left undisturbed through the dominant paradigm of social science. He advocated for a social science thoroughly situated within an historical context: 'we can only understand the present by continually referring to and studying the past; when any one of the intricate phenomena of our daily life puzzles us, when there arises. . .political problems [and] race problems, we must always remember that while their solution lies in the present, their cause and their explanation lie in the past' (Du Bois, 1905: 104). Du Bois' scholarship 'dissected the mechanisms through which racial inequality was produced and sustained' (Morris, 2015: 154). In the Philadelphia Negro and studies produced through Atlanta University, Du Bois situated the 'race problem' in the US within the contexts of slavery and racial capitalism. In so doing, he produced knowledge to contest the dominant emphasis on the individual failings of African American communities. The Philadelphia Negro study 'revealed the Negro group as a symptom, not a cause, as a striving, palpitating group, and not an inert, sick body of crime; as a long historic development and not a transient occurrence' (Du Bois, 2017: 58–59). The pragmatist tradition of identifying social problems becomes more critical by using a Du Boisian lens and as a result sets the foundations for more transformative social action.

Weis and Fine (2012) explain how we should approach our research with a 'dual lens of critical bifocality', which focuses on the structural causes of social injustice and highlights resistance to these injustices. While Du Bois identified the need to understand the structural causes of social problems, he recognised the need to pay attention to the potential seeds of transformation within society. In a blistering assessment of the state of sociology, he criticised the American Sociological Society and its failure to produce any impactful research. Du Bois (1897: 13) admonished the Society and argued that 'the trouble is we despise the day of little things - we neglect little movements, small efforts, tentative experiments, and throw ourselves blindly against adamant walls which have withstood the assaults of philanthropists for centuries'.

Participatory experimentalism: Insights from Jane Addams

Jane Addams developed experiments through a critical and participatory approach. She founded Hull House Settlement in a poor immigrant neighbourhood on the West Side of Chicago. It brought together social service and rigorous social research to actively change conditions for the most marginalised in the city through developing experiments in social action. Hull House represents an alternative model for social science working in parallel to the academy. Addams and her colleagues created an institution that could resist the academy so that it did not 'swallow the settlement, and turn it into one more laboratory: another place in which to analyse and depict, to observe and record'. (Addams, 1899: 47). She was against research projects that did not benefit the community.

Pragmatism was at the methodological heart of Addams' work: 'she closely [linked] theory and practice, the personal and the political, facts and values, experience and experimentation (Seigfried, 1999: 217). Hull House was built on the 'hope of stimulating inquiry and action, and evolving new thoughts and methods' (Addams, 2007: 13–14). A core feature was the use of experimentalism to develop interventions that responded to social injustice (Skorburg, 2018: 930). A kaleidoscopic range of experiments were created in collaboration with the local community (Gross, 2009: 87). The women at Hull House worked with the local community to collectively identify a social problem and then design an experiment to address the issue (Scimecca and Goodwin, 2003: 153). Addams' philosophy of knowledge was embedded in the community, situated in social injustice, and rooted in long-term normative ambitions to catalyse social transformation. Learning about social transformation was generated through practices that responded to the everyday problems of marginalised communities. Academic theories were entangled with action. Sociological knowledge was related to the practices of Hull House through the process of experimentalism, which would in turn produce new ideas that could influence policy and practice (Gross, 2009).

Addams was deeply sceptical of municipal reformers who had little connection to their local communities and who were resolutely tied to their pre-determined ideas of reform. She critiqued the failures of municipal government to adapt to the changing industrial conditions, as well as social scientists who failed to engage with the experiences of communities; she argued that they both neglected the everyday needs of the community, instead preferring to 'hold to [their] theory of government and [ignore] the facts. . .because they might disturb [the] theory' (Addams, 1905: 439). A theory that was closed off to adaptation resulted in reforms that would ultimately fail as they were not relevant to the particular social problems experienced by the community. The scope for learning anything new from an experiment was diminished through such an approach. Addams (2013: 122–123) wrote that: 'the Settlement. . .is an experimental effort to aid in the solution of the social and industrial problems which are engendered by the modern conditions of life in a great city. . .The only thing to be dreaded in the Settlement is that it loses its flexibility, its power of quick adaptation, [and] its readiness to change its methods as its environment may demand'. She recognised the key to successful experimentalism as flexibility. This flexibility meant that experiments were open to adaptation to ensure that they were relevant to the demands of the community.

It was not enough that theories should simply be open to adaptation. Adaptations to theory should be responsive to the insights of those who have experience of injustice and for whom the experiment had been designed. Following the pragmatist tradition, theories were given meaning through their use in a particular context. If it turned out that an experiment was not relevant to the needs of the local community,

then it was reconfigured. Addams was against certainty and closure; unanticipated outcomes led to new insights through which original theories could be iteratively developed through a process of abduction (Gross, 2009: 89). An experiment had to include the capacity to be redesigned in relation to the experiences of the local community. The ideas were then refined over time. Addams demanded that an experiment should be adaptable to the particular social conditions within which it was operating and it had to be relevant to the experiences of people who it was designed to benefit.

Recognising the value of knowledge held within marginalised communities was pivotal to Addams' approach. She held the belief that working class immigrant women should be supported to contribute to the intellectual production of ideas in society (Hamington, 2019), writing that 'no one so poignantly realises the failures in the social structure as [the people] at the bottom, who has been most directly in contact with those failures and has suffered most' (Addams, 1990: 174). She pioneered an original participatory dimension to pragmatist philosophy that has often been overlooked (Whipps, 2004: 128), but from which more critical foundations for pragmatism can be developed. Solutions to social problems were developed through collaborative inquiry that built upon these resistant knowledges.

There was a crucial role for the women at Hull House to educate local people and introduce new ideas that were relevant to their everyday struggle (Wills and Lake, 2020: 18). Equally, the women at Hull House were educated by the local community about social conditions of injustice. This represents a process of mutual education that transformed both perspectives to create new experiments and theories of social change that responded directly to experiences of injustice (Seigfried, 1999: 222). There is a beautiful illustration of this process in *Twenty Years at Hull House*, where Addams (1990: 131) describes the creation of a women-led housing cooperative:

"At a meeting of working girls held at Hull-House during a strike in a large shoe factory, the discussions made it clear that the strikers who had been most easily frightened, and therefore first to capitulate, were naturally those girls who were paying board and were afraid of being put out if they fell too far behind. After a recital of a case of peculiar hardship one of them exclaimed: 'Wouldn't it be fine if we had a boarding club of our own, and then we could stand by each other in a time like this?'"

We read aloud together Beatrice Potter's little book on 'Cooperation', and discussed all the difficulties and fascinations of such an undertaking, and on the first of May, 1891, two comfortable apartments near Hull-House were rented and furnished. The Settlement was responsible for the furniture and paid the first month's rent, but beyond that the members managed the club themselves. . . . Although there were difficulties, none of them proved insurmountable, which was a matter for great satisfaction in the face of a statement made by the head of the United States Department of Labor, who, on a visit to the club when it was but two years old, said that his

department had investigated many cooperative undertakings, and that none founded and managed by women had ever succeeded. At the end of the third year the club occupied all of the six apartments which the original building contained, and numbered fifty members".

What Addams describes here is a form of popular education from which new experiments were created to respond to particular social conditions. Addams and her colleagues worked with the women to collectively identify an immediate problem of everyday life. They supported the women through critical reflection and engagement with radical theories from the cooperative movement to develop a successful experiment to address their problem. Experiments at Hull House were always 'led along from the concrete to the abstract' (Addams, 1990: 280). Their experiment in housing then created ideas that could be used to inform wider feminist struggles for justice. Addams advanced a critical pragmatism that was open and adaptable, and which generated ideas that could be used to contribute towards social transformation.

For experiments to connect to the local community, they had to be incremental and open to adaptation. However, an incremental approach did not exclude the possibilities of social change at a larger scale than the immediate site. Theories which were led by practice and generated through the process of experimentalism could be extended beyond the initial site. Experiments could generate ideas to transform the dominant frames of social policy and create social change at a municipal level (Gross, 2009: 87). Addams explained that interventions at Hull House were 'experiment stations' and that when these had demonstrated 'genuine need' and 'usefulness' then the municipal administration would adopt them (Addams, 1913: 2134). Hull House developed the first public playground for children in Chicago. This experiment was such a success that the municipal administration took over its maintenance. The work of Jane Addams demonstrates how experimentalism can make a difference to everyday life, while also creating new practice-led ideas that could contribute to social change beyond the immediate site of the experiment.

Popular education with critical pragmatic foundations

This article has explained how academics can support social transformation by developing theories to provide an intellectual platform that can connect spaces of everyday radicalism. Pragmatism can guide the process of theorising from social action to produce knowledge that is useful for social movements. To illustrate this, I then moved on to explore the methodological innovations of Du Bois and Addams to sharpen the critical dimensions of pragmatism. They both demonstrated the value of learning as a foundation for social transformation. Popular education can be reconfigured by bringing a more critical edge to pragmatism that draws on

Du Bois' contestation of structural problems and Addams' commitment to including the resistant knowledges of marginalised communities to develop solutions to these problems. By engaging with these dimensions, popular education can be deployed to produce theories that can be used as a common platform for translocal learning.

Du Bois advanced the need for politically engaged scholarship that was historically situated and contested the values and structures that perpetuated injustice. He demonstrated how we can bring social scientific knowledge together with activism to identify social conditions that need to be redressed. His work demands that as popular educators we should help to situate problems within their structural contexts to guide strategic action for social transformation. Furthermore, we can connect spaces involved in struggle against the same global processes of injustice by positioning them on a common platform and creating a shared narrative of resistance. Popular educators can use a participatory process of abduction to develop theories of social injustice that resonate with local conditions, but which are made more meaningful by being situated in contexts of global injustices.

Addams set out the contours for a critical philosophy of pragmatism epistemologically anchored in the knowledge of marginalised communities. Experiments developed at Hull House created spaces for learning that could inform social change. Addams pioneered a participatory approach to abduction through which new theories were generated in collaboration with marginalised communities. Theories were iteratively constructed and adaptable to ensure that they were relevant to the context in which they were operating. By anchoring pragmatism in resistant knowledges, we are more likely to learn about the changes needed for social transformation. The process of learning and experimentalism should be open to new ideas and to all participants. Overall, she demonstrated how we should follow a participatory approach to abductive theory building to facilitate a process of mutual education. Through this process of mutual education, the perspectives of academics and communities can be transformed to produce new ideas about social change.

The value of exploring the work of Du Bois and Addams is enhanced by bringing their complementary approaches together. Academics can work as popular educators within spaces of everyday radicalism to help situate problems of social injustice and develop new practice-led conceptualisations of social transformation. The knowledge produced through this collaboration can guide future strategies. The juxtaposition between concepts of transformation and the contextual spaces of injustice in which they are situated illuminates a dissensus that represents a rupture within the status quo (Ranci re, 2010). Reflection on this dissensus can guide translocal learning by identifying common features of resistance in ways that remain resonant to conditions of injustice and relevant to the practices of each site. Through this approach we can use theory to organise new translocal

communities of inquiry that share a commitment to social transformation.

Robin Kelley (cited in Rabaka, 2006: 737) explains that: 'unfortunately, too often our standards for social movements pivot around whether or not they "succeeded" in realising their visions rather than on the merits or power of the visions themselves. By such a measure, virtually every radical movement failed because the basic power relations they sought to change remain pretty much intact. Yet it is precisely these alternative visions and dreams that inspire new generations to continue to struggle for change'.

As academics, we can use theory to enable social movements to tell more coherent narratives about their visions of social transformation. These narratives can help to connect spaces of everyday radicalism with each other and generate new forms of learning to support collective organising. Building common narratives of social transformation is a process that builds up over time. Critical theories can help to conceptualise these visions for a better future and create common understandings across diverse spaces. As social action never ends, so our critical theories are never complete. Rather, theory building should be seen as 'part of a process of intellectual dialogue, an ongoing exercise in puzzling out the world we live in, of striving for a final analysis but never completely capturing it' (Tavory and Timmermans, 2014: 128). It is surely better if we learn about social transformation collectively and develop impactful social action along the way.

A renewed critical pragmatist approach demands that we revitalise the civic purpose of the university. There are of course many barriers to achieving this. However, the commitment of Du Bois and Addams to resist their marginalisation and create new models of research to produce knowledge for social change can inspire us all. In terms of practical actions to move forward, we can build relationships with spaces of everyday radicalism with a view to collectively developing processes of popular education. We can also extend our networks with international colleagues who share a commitment to social transformation to set the foundations for translocal learning. Creating an environment to support this type of work would require universities to make their commitments to a civic approach more meaningful by allowing scholars the necessary time and space required to build these relationships. Just as the transformation of society requires tentative experiments towards a more radical future, to transform the academy, this journey can begin with small steps that we take to create the spaces for change.

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