

## NOTES FOR THE REFLECTIVE PRACTITIONER

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"What we have loved, others will love, and we will teach them how."  
(W. Wordsworth, from "The Prelude")

### NOTES FROM READERS

>>What you think<<

Dear friends, I will repeat what I wrote two months ago...I trust that you are safe and well in these frightening times. Surely this is a time when our reflective practice may be more essential than ever as we navigate through uncharted waters. Now, leadership matters as we provide calm and compassionate and transparent direction to those who look to us for how to move forward. And now, we need each other in this together – even if our community must be virtual until it is safe to be together in person. Please know that you are on my mind and in my prayers during this pandemic time.

Occasionally, I (or my colleagues) refer to items from previous issues of Notes. If you have not been a subscriber previously, and wish to review our conversations, past issues of Notes are available on-line at [www.jgacounsel.com](http://www.jgacounsel.com). I thank my friends at Johnson, Grossnickle & Associates for their many years of abiding support for our reflective practice.

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### REFLECT ON THIS

>>Higher education in these pandemic times<<

I wrote the following as a blog post for the Kettering Foundation. I then expanded the post for an essay that will appear in a Council of Europe volume later this year. You will recognize themes from my scholarship, now perhaps more relevant than ever in these times.

#### *The intersection of three pandemics*

Here we find ourselves in 2020 living at the intersection of three pandemics. The novel coronavirus Covid-19 pandemic has disrupted all aspects of how we live and work, and has pointedly illustrated the tension between public health and economic well-being. Following in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic, an economic pandemic threatens our social fabric with massive unemployment and business closures worldwide. And, most recently, the racial inequities exacerbated by the senseless murder of George Floyd by Minneapolis police officers has created a third pandemic that threatens to tear our country apart. Surely this uncharted terrain presents unique challenges for all of us as citizens, trying to imagine how we will navigate to some as yet unknown future.

As a long-time university president, leading one of the most diverse institutions in the country located in one of the most diverse neighborhoods in the country, I experience the intersection of these three pandemics with anger and resolve. The impact of these pandemics on our students, faculty and staff – and on the immigrant neighbors we cherish – is stark. Their health, their economic well-being, and their safety are all threatened. And I feel an urgent responsibility to act in response to those threats.

There is much we can – and will – do as a university community, accompanying our community as we deploy our many resources to equip our community members to work on health, economic and safety challenges. In fact, Augsburg University has, in its 150-year history, threads of a public work commitment that will shape our efforts in the days and years ahead.

But there is more that we must do. As a university leader committed to the democratic impulse in the history of my institution, I believe that I must identify resources – especially intellectual resources – that can help renew and strengthen that democratic impulse. The urgency of that renewal has been made more pressing by the intersecting pandemics of our time, each of which in its own way threatens the mission and work we pursue.

#### *Lessons from the settlement house tradition*

I believe that one compelling source of those intellectual resources is found in the settlement house tradition.

In the United States, the settlement house tradition took root initially in New York and then Chicago, where Jane Addams and her colleagues founded Hull-House in 1889 on the near west side and sought to transform a troubled immigrant neighborhood. Their work at Hull-House – including educational programs, community centers, libraries, music schools and theaters, sanitation efforts, child labor practices and honoring cultural heritages – illustrated the wide range of efforts pursued in response to the needs of neighbors, the richness of immigrant cultures, and the value and importance of immigrant work traditions.

Though the settlement houses themselves were gradually abandoned, the tenets of the settlement tradition took root in other forms in the late 20<sup>th</sup> and early 21<sup>st</sup> century. As Ira Harkavy and John Puckett have argued, the idea of applied sociology which the early settlement leaders wrote about and practiced offers a moral and pragmatic framework for colleges and universities to “function as perennial, deeply rooted settlements, providing illuminated space for their communities as they conduct their mission of producing and transmitting knowledge to advance human welfare and to develop theories that have broad utility and application.”

Especially for urban, place-based institutions like Augsburg, the settlement house tradition (and specifically the work of Jane Addams and her colleagues at Hull House in Chicago) offers three key ideas that inform our response to the pandemic and help us renew the democratic impulse of our institutions.

(1) Democracy as a social ethic - Democracy, for Jane Addams, was not simply a creed or a sentiment or a political system, but an ethic that challenges us to balance individual needs and interests with the common good. In her 1902 *Democracy as a Social Ethic*, Addams describes the idea of democracy as a social ethic with a simple image: we are all travelers on a thronged road, she said,

and our minimum responsibility to each other is to understand the burdens we bear – in other words, to know each other’s stories and circumstances. That is the basis for a democratic social ethic. The genius of democracy is that the self doesn’t go away, but it enters into relationship with others in mutual need and aspiration.

Similarly, in his recent essay entitled *With the People: An Introduction to an Idea*, David Mathews argues that “Democracy is us – The People. And we can restore our sense of sovereignty...by what we produce every day using the abilities and resources of our fellow citizens. And when the things that happen frustrate, disappoint and anger us – as they will – the question we have to ask ourselves is not what is wrong with democracy, but what are we going to do about it? That question can only be answered *with* one another.”

As universities committed to this idea of democracy as a social ethic, this “with” way of living together, we embrace the work we do – teaching, scholarship and service – with a clear regard and a sense of humility about how we might do that work alongside our neighbors – neighbors who may not share our ideological, religious or political commitments – not apart from them.

This concept of democracy as a social ethic has informed our work as part of two “anchor” partnerships in our metropolitan area. In both the Cedar-Riverside Partnership and the Central Corridor Anchor Partnership, Augsburg University comes to the table with our neighborhood partners, stating our self-interest as an institution while we explore the potential for shared value for our neighborhood. Over the past decade, our anchor work has addressed neighborhood safety, workforce, youth programs, transportation, infrastructure and place-making. The results, described [here](#), are examples of how higher education institutions can lean into pressing community challenges as authentic partners, “with” our neighbors. Our public work in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is informed by the Norwegian-American Haugeans who founded Augsburg in 1869 and who believed deeply in the ways in which work and citizenship are inextricably linked.

(2) An expansive understanding of knowing and knowledge – One of the most striking characteristics of the settlement house tradition was the embrace of various forms of knowing and knowledge. In this way, the settlement houses both helped immigrant neighbors assimilate to new surroundings, while at the same time helping them hold onto cultural practices and wisdom that might have disappeared in a new setting.

For example, at Hull House, Jane Addams recognized that certain ethnic and cultural craft practices were difficult to maintain without the materials and equipment to pursue them. In order to create opportunities to continue these craft practices, she created the “Labor and Crafts” museum, where neighbors practiced these cultural arts and also passed them along to the next generation and neighbors unfamiliar with the practices. This was a means of sustaining cultural knowledge and thereby enriching neighborhood life.

For colleges and universities, the concepts of what constitutes knowledge and ways of knowing are often limited to particular traditions such as the scientific method with its evidence-based claims or Western concepts of what constitutes truth and beauty. The settlement house tradition reminds us that there is knowledge and wisdom from many sources, and our openness to diverse forms of knowledge and ways of knowing has the potential to enrich our lives.

An example of this openness to different forms of knowledge for Augsburg is linked to our now regular practice of “land acknowledgements” at public events. We acknowledge that the land we occupy was originally settled by the Lakota and Ojibwe peoples, and we go further to lift up the ways in which indigenous peoples teach us important lessons – lessons we have forgotten – about how to be good stewards of the land. Knowledge and wisdom from native peoples expands and enhances our stewardship understanding and practices.

(3) An openness to new social arrangements – Throughout the history of settlement houses, a crucial strategy was to listen to the needs of neighbors and neighborhoods before organizing ways of responding to those needs. In other words, there was an openness to what I would call diverse “social arrangements” and there were no predetermined ways to organize.

At Hull House in early 20<sup>th</sup> century Chicago, this sometimes meant a patchwork of organizational models as the needs of neighbors overrode any static, bureaucratic responses. A museum for crafts here, a youth center there; a kindergarten here, a library there; a neighborhood sanitation team here, a safe labor practices group there. And perhaps most compelling about this openness to various social arrangements was the willingness of Addams and the neighbors to admit when a particular arrangement did not work and search for a better option.

For American colleges and universities, the idea of fluid social arrangements flies in the face of a fairly conservative, hierarchical bureaucracy, marked by many silos and layers, making it difficult to adjust to shifting needs. Yet, it is incumbent upon us to explore different organizational forms that create fluid boundaries within campuses and between campuses and the wider community, undoing the often privileged and static forms of organizational life that become obstacles for access and opportunity.

At Augsburg, this openness to fluid social arrangements has taken various forms. For example, we have reviewed all institutional policies and practices through an equity lens, identifying where long-standing policies create obstacles to student progress and success. We also have partnered with various organizations to bring them as permanent residents to our campus. Based on shared commitments to education, civic engagement and diversity, these partner organizations benefit from our organizational infrastructure, freeing them to use their resources more directly in areas of common interest, while the Augsburg community benefits from staff and programming that enrich our work in the community. Fluid organizational boundaries makes it possible for mutual benefit in pursuit of common values and commitments.

### *Renewing the democratic impulse of higher education in these pandemic times*

So we return to these pandemic times, looking for evidence of this public work, of what I call our democratic impulse, in our community – evidence that these settlement house tradition ideas make a difference. And here I find Professor Katie Clark from Augsburg’s Nursing faculty, leading our Health Commons in the midst of the Covid-19 outbreak, meeting the needs of those in our community experiencing homelessness. And there I see our students, responding to a pandemic of systemic racism, putting their black and brown and white bodies at risk protesting for racial equity and law enforcement reform. And there I find our faculty and staff, seeing the distressing impact of unemployment and economic unrest in our immediate neighborhood, stepping outside of their daily routines to provide food and housing and security to our immigrant neighbors so at risk.

Surely there are a multitude of intellectual resources that might help inform how colleges and universities embrace their democratic work. My examples have made a significant impact on our work at Augsburg and continue to shape my leadership, especially in these pandemic times. My challenge to my colleagues in higher education is to (as I tell our incoming students each fall) show up, pay attention and do the work, because our presence, our attention and our public work are more urgently important for our democracy than ever before.

## PRACTICE THIS

>>New Protocols?: Philanthropy in these pandemic times<<

I provide a link [here](#) to a recorded presentation I did for the Association of Fundraising Professionals (AFP) chapters in Southern Minnesota and Southwestern Wisconsin. In it, I suggest that these pandemic times challenge us to return to our roots in philanthropy – love for each other – and to our roles as public servants. I then point to three critical roles of philanthropy in these times: as common work, as sanctuary, and as moral direction.

I welcome your thoughts and feel free to share with colleagues.

## PAY ATTENTION TO THIS

>>Resources for your reflective practice<<

I've had more time to read during this stay at home time, so am pleased to recommend several important books:

I mention in my blog post about higher education in these pandemic times a new report from David Mathews, head of the Kettering Foundation. *With the People: An Introduction to an Idea* (Kettering Foundation, 2020) is available for download at [www.kettering.org](http://www.kettering.org). It is an important document, sure to provoke important conversations.

I've also learned much from *The World: A Brief Introduction*, by Council of Foreign Relations head Richard Haass (Penguin Press, 2020), whose concise and masterful overview and call for global literacy is must reading.

For fun reading (!), I picked up *The Lincoln Conspiracy: The Secret Plot to Kill America's 16<sup>th</sup> President – and Why It Failed* by Brad Meltzer and Josh Mensch (Flatiron Books, 2020), a well-told story of the intrigue in the days after Abraham Lincoln is elected and before he arrives in Washington, DC for his inauguration.

Finally, I would recommend again *Sightings* from the Marty Center at the Divinity School of the University of Chicago (<https://divinity.uchicago.edu/sightings>), which consistently offers insightful commentary on all things religious in our public lives.

>>To You Around Me<<

A presidential colleague posted the following William Stafford poem on our president's listserv earlier this month – it strikes me as most fitting for our community of reflective practitioners, now socially-distanced and yet mindful of each other's journeys in these pandemic times.

### **To You Around Me**

The ways I follow go down by the river  
and look out. They pause on the pavement by a church  
where a stone says, "old." They take me slowly  
to a house behind a white gate, still,  
and clean, and vacant. The ways I follow  
won't rest. They find the country and cross  
a field where a killdeer is grieving for its mate.  
Evening begins to move near. Something  
calls through the starts, telling me  
to be brave and also to be afraid.  
You around me, is it like this for you? –  
far, full of surprises, lonely  
and scary sometimes, on the ways you follow?

William Stafford

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>>Topics for upcoming issues<<

- Trusting institutions - again
- Stories we tell to ourselves and each other
- Big ideas!

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