

A garden of inspiration

For professors, making a lesson memorable is often a challenge. How can we help our students keep what they are learning with them when they go out into the world? How can we give them touchstones of "aha!" experiences that will serve them in their lives, in their careers, in their roles as citizens of the world?



ELLEN
GRUENBAUM

for social good.

Out in the real world

Recently, one of my anthropology classes met in the "real world" in order to see firsthand the work of some of Fresno's leaders in refugee resettlement. My colleague, Dr. Henry Delcore, has been applying his anthropological knowledge of Southeast Asian cultures and his experience in cross-cultural communication to the work of the Fresno Interdenominational Refugee Ministries.

There, Delcore worked with the director and program staff to improve communication with local employers about the skills and abilities of new immigrants arriving from Thailand, where they had been refugees.

Like Jane Addams' Hull House

Organizations like FIRM and the well-established Stone Soup organization near our campus seem to me to be Fresno's contemporary answers to a long tradition begun by social reformer Jane Addams, who opened Hull House in Chicago nearly 120 years ago.

Jane Addams' vision was to offer services, rooted in human kindness, to "bring into the circle of knowledge and fuller life men and women who might otherwise be left outside." She and her colleagues worked to provide a warm welcome, educational opportunities and improvement to social conditions in "the industrial districts" where so many people — from the countryside and from other countries — had come to find work.

At Hull House, immigrants had opportunities for music and theater, as well as English and literacy, and the walls were decorated with beautiful art. It was a magnet for tenement residents, offering clubs and lessons to engage the youth in the development of their own aspirations.

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Jane Addams advocated public festivals, safe parks, marching bands, concerts in parks, theater and the celebration of holidays and seasons, recognizing what Jean Elshtain called "the need for human beings to experience beauty in fellowship."

At FIRM, our class was exposed to the immigrants' art, learned something of their history, and heard from Delcore how anthropological concepts can be useful in the real world situation of immigrant acculturation and communication with potential employers. Then they met a class of immigrant English learners and had short one-on-one conversations.

Other times, when I've visited Stone Soup there is sewing, dancing, basketry and musical instrument making. There are services, classes and community organizing efforts.

The Peace Garden

Centrally located beside the Henry Madden library at Fresno State, is a quiet haven in a bustling university campus. The campus community has dedicated a beautiful space of stately pines, flowers and statuary for contemplation and gatherings for peace and justice. We've also dedicated statues honoring individuals who have promoted

nonviolence as a method of social change: Mohandas Gandhi, Cesar Chavez and Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

Next month, we will add another: Jane Addams.

From Hull House, Jane Addams took her commitment to social work for the betterment of society to an even broader international plane when she became a founder of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, a local chapter of which is active in Fresno even today, nearly a century after its founding in 1915.

Diligent in her work for peace, Addams was one of the first women to be recognized with the Nobel Peace Prize, in 1931.

Commitment to peace, justice

For our Peace Garden, Fresno State student-artist Claudia Nolan has given us an uplifting image, sure to become an important touchstone of inspiration for our activities in the garden. We meet there for the Sept. 11 memorials, peace vigils, celebrations and everyday lunch breaks. And now Jane Addams will be there to remind us of her commitment to peace, justice and lifting up the human spirit.

Our stunning statue of Jane Addams will be unveiled at a dinner on April 6. We invite the community to join us by calling 278-2364. Then we all can return to this image again and again, for inspiration.

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