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ABSTRACT

The volume "Knowledge Base for the Beginning Teacher" (KBBT), published by Pergamon Press, has been put forward by the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education as a guide for colleges of education seeking to establish a knowledge base for their programs. According to the book's summary, its 10 "features" closely parallel the progressive ideals of John Dewey. Neither Dewey nor a philosophy of education can be claimed, however, as sources for KBBT's assertions. The thesis of this criticism is that KBBT's featured themes echo a theory of education laid out by John Dewey prior to 1939 and that rediscovery of these themes in a positivist "garment" is less significant than the lack of theoretical progress provided for the field in 60 years. Or, as some leading educators have asserted, "Have we traveled down the wrong road, seeking academic prestige rather than delivering service to our profession?" An analysis of parallel quotations from KBBT and Dewey support this criticism. Based on this analysis, one may conclude that, while KBBT reminds readers and practitioners of past history and achievements, the book is a manifestation of teacher education's misdirection and neglect of school reform. (JD)

John Dewey and the Knowledge Base for the Beginning Teacher

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Abstract

John Dewey and the Knowledge Base for the Beginning Teacher

The long-awaited volume, Knowledge Base for the Beginning Teacher, which AACTE has put forward as a guide for colleges of education seeking to establish a knowledge base for their programs, summarizes itself in ten "features" which closely parallel the progressive ideals of John Dewey. Neither Dewey nor philosophy of education is, however, a source for KBBT's assertions. The volume has an ahistorical, atheoretical bent, adopting without debate the post-war rationalist-technological view of education. Why do we find ourselves echoing Dewey without acknowledging him or his methods? Have we made so little progress in educational theory that the knowledge base has been unchanged since 1939? Or, as some leading educators have recently asserted, have we traveled down the wrong road, seeking academic prestige rather than delivering service to our profession?

Problem

With considerable fanfare in the professional education community, the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education during spring, 1989, sponsored the publication of Knowledge Base for the Beginning Teacher by Pergamon Press (Reynolds, 1989). The weighty price tag --$85-- of KBBT was matched by its sizable ambition.

> This book seeks to demonstrate that teaching does have a distinctive knowledge base that the knowledge is expressed in articulated understandings, skills, and judgments which are professional in character and which distinguish more productive teachers from less productive ones.
>
> ...A new and higher norm is now possible for teacher education, one which reflects the best that research and experience can offer (p. ix).

KBBT is presented with the hope "that the ideas expressed here will have some pervasive power within the scholarly community of teacher education..." (p. xii) following the disclaimer that the "(AACTE) action group has no authority or intention to seek formal compliance with the ideas expressed in this volume" (p. xii). For those involved in the institutional report process promulgated by the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education such statements have a coy ring. Perhaps the most troublesome of the standards which NCATE-accredited

institutions must respond to are those which deal with the "knowledge bases for professional education. For example:

> (2) The knowledge bases used in professional education are broad and include the traditional forms of scholarly inquiry as well as theory development related to professional practice (NCATE, 1987, p. 37).
>
> (18) The unit insures that each course and experience of the professional studies component(s) is built upon and reflects defensible knowledge bases (NCATE, 1987, p. 40).

Since the emergence of NCATE redesign (1983), no subject has stimulated concern, scholarly writing, and workshop activity for deans of education and their accreditation leadership on a par with the conceptualization of the knowledge base. This pressurized interest has come about because NCATE at the same time features the term in its standards--it is Category I of five--as well as rendering it as a prominent omission from another central document, the Glossary. Those responsible for guiding report writing have moved feverishly to understand the meaning of this key term which was apparently seen as such common knowledge to some that it bore no definition while terms of less ambiguity or cruciality--like "education students," "school-based educators," and "weaknesses" -- were explained in full. In such an environment of vague requirements melded with the certitude of program evaluation, it seems a dissemblance for the action group to minimize the impact of its work.

KBBT is a lengthy, edited volume of twenty-four chapters and well over 300,000 words. Its ambition is to be (1) comprehensive--"designed to identify what a beginning teacher should know" (p. x); (2) authoritative--authored by "the chief custodians of knowledge (researchers and practitioners) in the various domains" (p. xi); and (3) evaluative--"Some areas (i.e., topics or chapters) which we thought were of utmost importance proved to be woefully weak in a conceptual sense. They were eliminated or revised" (p. xi). KBBT invites--literally as well as figuratively--reviews and reactions and these, one hopes, will address how well it meets the criteria listed above. Does KBBT synopsize what a beginning teacher should know in an effective way, or is it skewed toward a rationalistic and technological view of the profession? Are its contributors chief custodians of pedagogy, or is their network based on more mundane grounds? And who has eliminated which areas on grounds of their conceptual weakness? Does that process minimize the place of educational foundations and the influence of new schools of thought like the naturalist, post-structural, and reconceptualist?

These large issues could well merit book-length reviews. The objective of this response is more modest, but perhaps as useful in the overall scheme of things. Reading KBBT has made this writer recall a specific theme in the recent work of Goodlad (1988) and Clifford and Guthrie (1988), which is the need for teacher educators to focus on the preparation of effective teachers rather than on heightening our respectability vis-a-vis other university faculties. Some educators claim academic status is a vain pursuit limited by the prejudice of our peers; others assert that it is the wrong aspiration for those who prepare praxis-oriented professionals. KBBT speaks to the ongoing quest for

"knowledge that is not pedestrian or held by people generally" (p. x) and by doing so allows the field to be defined in reaction to methods of practice and inquiry which many will call inappropriate for a social process field. The purpose of what follows here is to suggest the vulnerability of KBBT's approach by the non-revelatory character of its finding. Rather than demonstrating one KBBT scholar's claim that "[the book will show] the current theories have guided researchers into new areas of scholarship, have sharpened the formulations of problems, and have led to the invention of educational practices that have proven records of accomplishment" (p. 12), the thesis here is that KBBT's featured themes are an echo of what John Dewey laid out as a theory of education prior to 1939. Secondly, that their rediscovery in a positivist garment is less significant than the lack of theoretical progress provided for the field in sixty years. And finally the suggestion that much energy in professional education continues to be grossly misdirected away from the proper mission of professional preparation of teachers. If we are to believe that the self-identified themes of KBBT synopsize today's knowledge base in educating teachers, we can conclude that current pedagogy is largely in the state in which John Dewey left it with the publication of Experience and Education.

This suggests high praise and renewed attention should, as in the work of Rorty and Bernstein, focus on Dewey and the uses of philosophy, while serious questions about the value of the rationalist research paradigm should be raised. In a comparable period positivist, empirical techniques moved us from Kitty Hawk to the moon in engineering, but have left us where we began in education. In order to examine these claims a comparison follows of "the features of the knowledge-based school" which a

co-author of KBBT himself derives from its text in the summative chapter with selected statements from John Dewey's writings. The author of KBBT's final chapter states his purpose in this way:

> If all or a substantial number of teachers in a particular school had been helped to develop the understandings suggested to teacher educators by this volume's authors, what might this school be like? (p. 276)

Analysis

KBBT Feature 1: Knowledge about teaching is mutable and always under consideration for modification (p. 277).

John Dewey, 1928: Since there is no one <u>thing</u> which is beyond question, education, and since there is no likelihood that there will be until society and hence schools have reached a dead monotonous uniformity of practice and aim, there cannot be one single science. As the working operations of schools differs so must the intellectual theories devised from those operations. From "Progressive

Education and the Science of

Education" (p. 172).

Central to Dewey's "modest and humble" application of the term science to education is his assertion that careless use of the term will result in pretense and a suffocating orthodoxy. This caveat has been proven valid by the near monopoly the rationalist paradigm has held in educational research during the period since Dewey wrote his warning.

KBBT Feature 2: Teaching is complex, often ambiguous, and frequently non-linear (p. 278).

John Dewey, 1904: (On the teaching profession) There is an enthusiastic devotion to certain principles of lofty theory in the abstract--principles of self-activity, self-control, intellectual and moral--and there is a school practice taking little heed of the official pedagogic creed. Theory and practice do not grow together out of and into the teacher's personal experience. From NSSE Third Yearbook (p.320).

And,

John Dewey, 1928: ...it is no paradox that the teacher is deeply

> concerned with what does not exist. For a progressive school is primarily concerned with growth, with a moving and changing process, with <u>transforming</u> existing capacities and experiences; what already exists by way of native endowment and past achievement is subordinate to what it may become. From "Progressive Education and the Science of Education" (p. 174).

Dewey was highly sensitive to the complexity, ambiguity, and non-linearity of education. This spawned, in part, his cautious use of the term science with respect to its study and his resistance to the application of empirics to education. One might question whether a content analysis of KBBT, however, supports the claim that the volume is likewise sensitive to ambiguity and non-linearity in educational thought. The comprehensive, authoritative, and evaluative structure of KBBT and its interposition into the accreditation process send a message contradictory to Feature 2.

> KBBT Feature 3: Learning to teach is additive, ongoing, and unending (p. 279).
>
> John Dewey, 1895: All new suggestions, new methods, he will submit

to the infallible test of science; and the conditions under which they can be most effectively employed. From "What Psychology Can Do for the Teacher" (p. 201-2).

And,

John Dewey, 1904: Unless a teacher is such a student (a student of teaching), he may continue to improve in the mechanics of school management, but he cannot grow as a teacher, an inspirer and director of soul-life. From NSSE Third Yearbook (p. 321).

As with Feature 1, Dewey is more than comfortable with notions of mutability. In fact they are integral to the pragmatic point of view. In describing himself he writes, "My belief in the office of intelligence as a continuously reconstructive agency is at least a faithful report on my own life and experience" (Archambault, 1974, p. vii).

KBBT Feature 4: Teaching and schooling are examined in light of current and historical context conditions (p. 279).

John Dewey, 1902: Let the child's nature fulfil its own destiny, revealed to you in whatever of science

and art and industry the world now holds as its own. From The Child and the Curriculum (p. 357).

And,

John Dewey, 1938: But the achievements of the past provide the only means at command for understanding the present. From Experience and Education. (p. 376).

Dewey's prose has often been criticized as opaque, but he frequently turns a phrase that could hardly be more clear. With such lucidity do his words foreshadow this feature of KBBT. The strength of the volume's claim to its own historical sensitivity is left in doubt by its scant attention to the history of education in its content. Are we to conclude this is one of the fields which is "woefully weak in a conceptual sense" (p. xi) and, therefore, not to be given a voice in the "consensus doctorum"?

KBBT Feature 5: Both pedagogical knowledge and subject matter knowledge are valued (p. 280).

John Dewey, 1902: Every study or subject thus has two aspects: one for the scientist as a scientist; the other for the teacher as teacher. These two aspects are in no sense opposed or conflicting. From the

Child and the Curriculum (p. 351-352).

The current interest in pedagogical content knowledge was anticipated in Dewey's classic booklet on curriculum. As educators well know, Dewey made a central theme out of the roles of the scientist and the educator emphasizing the discrete purposes they bring to work with a disciplinary body of knowledge. Such claims about the nature and uses of knowledge seem to evolve spontaneously from philosophy of education. They are less a product of research than they are a framework in which inquiry is conducted.

> KBBT Feature 6: Knowledge is actively constructed by students, with considerable participation by teachers (p. 280).

> John Dewey, 1902: [The teacher] is concerned with the subject matter as representing a given stage and phase of the development of experience. His problem is that of inducing a vital and personal experiencing. From The Child and the Curriculum. (p. 352).

And,

> John Dewey, 1938: Once more, it is part of the educator's responsibility to see equally to two things: First, that the problem grows out of the conditions of the experience being had in the present, and that it is within

> the range of the capacity of students: and, secondly, that it is such that it arouses in the learner an active quest for information and for production of new ideas. From Experience and Education (p. 378).

Here another cardinal theme of Dewey is reiterated by KBBT and identified as somehow new. This is an outgrowth of a "growing consensus" which is rooted in "new paradigms" (p. 280) according to the text. How is one to respond in the face of such apparent ahistoricity? There is no reason to suspect a perverse and deliberate misunderstanding of Dewey, as in E.D. Hirsch's Cultural Literacy (1987). True astonishment is, however, a likely response since ideas such as Feature 6 characterized this century's major school reform movement. Progressive education is remembered even by its hostile critics as emphasizing interest and activity among children, although educational leaders presenting in KBBT a knowledge base for the beginning teacher neglect to incorporate the movement in their analyses. Progressive education fails to merit an entry in the KBBT index.

> KBBT Feature 7: Teachers are curriculum workers (p. 281).

> John Dewey, 1895: Geography, arithmetic, literature, etc., may be provided in the curriculum their order, both of sequence and co-existence, laid down; but this is all

> dead and formal until it comes to the intelligence and character of the individual pupil, and the individual teacher is the medium through which it comes. From "What Psychology can do for the Teacher" (p. 204).

It is difficult to imagine a teacher whose curricular responsibilities would be greater than under Dewey's scheme.

> KBBT Feature 8: Curriculum and instruction are coherent and systematic over time and across grades and subjects. (p. 281).

> John Dewey, 1902: Just as two points define a straight line, so the present standpoint of the child and the facts and truths of the studies define instruction. It is continuous reconstruction, moving from the child's present experience out into that represented by the organized bodies of truth that we call studies. From The Child and the Curriculum (p. 344).

And,

> John Dewey, 1938: The further test or mark of a good activity, educationally speaking, is that it have a sufficiently long time-span so that a series of endeavors and explorations are involved in it, and included

> in such a way that each step opens up a new field, raises new questions, arouses a demand for further knowledge, and suggests what to do next on the basis of what has been accomplished and the knowledge thereby gained. From Experience and Education (p. 177-78).

KBBT speaks in generalities about the need for a more "coherent and systematic" school experience but this is idle rhetoric when cast amidst a resigned acceptance of contemporary school organization. KBBT is colored by the circumspection of insiders who themselves are very near to a place at the seat of power. Rather than entertain radical solutions when its "features" point in such a direction, the volume discursively wanders into vague exhortations and pyramids of prose. Dewey, on the other hand, grew specific and challenging in situations of this type. Specifically, he called for the problem approach, "active occupations," and a radically reconceived school organization. Can system and coherence ever be apparent to students at the assembly line school with its clockwork ambience?

> KBBT Feature 9: Theories, research, and practical wisdom influence school programs, pedagogy, and the ways the school accomplisnes its tasks. (p. 282).

Dewey treats the connection of theory to practice at such length so as to raise the discussion to another plane. KBBT pays lip service to the kind of critical intelligence Dewey expects in beginning teachers, but the

paradigmatic orthodoxy of the volume belies its calls for "multiple sources." In the second citation below, notice how Dewey questions the value of orthodox methods of inquiry in the pursuit of true reform.

> John Dewey, 1904: Ultimately there are two bases upon which the habits of a teacher may be built up. They may be formed under the inspiration and constant criticism of intelligence, applying the best that is available. This is possible only where the would-be teacher has become fairly saturated with his subject-matter, and his psychological and ethical philosophy of education. Only when such things have become incorporated in mental habit, have become part of the working tendencies of observation, insight, and reflection, will these principles work automatically, unconsciously, and hence promptly and effectively. And this means that practical work should be pursued primarily with reference to its reaction upon the professional pupil in making him a thoughtful and alert student of education, rather than to help him get immediate proficiency. From NSSE Third Yearbook (p. 320).

And,

> John Dewey, 1928: At most the [progressive

schools] can only occasionally borrow from the "Science" that is evolved on the basis of a different type of practice, and they can even borrow only what is appropriate to their own special aims and processes. To discover how much is relevant is of course a real problem. But this is a very different thing from assuming that the methods and results obtained under traditional scholastic conditions form the standard of science to which progressive schools must conform.

At all events, <u>quality</u> of activity and of consequence is more important for the teacher than any quantitative element. If this fact prevents the development of a certain kind of science, it may be unfortunate. But the educator cannot sit down and wait till there are methods by which quality may be reduced to quantity; he must operate here and know. If he can organize his qualitative processes into some connected intellectual form, he is really advancing scientific methods much more than if, ignoring what is actually most important, he devotes his energies to such unimportant by-products as may be now measured... Possibilities are more important than what

already exists, and knowledge of the latter counts only in its bearing upon possibilities. From "Progressive Education and the Science of Education" (p. 173-74).

KBBT Feature 10: Teachers demonstrate the hallmarks of professional behavior (p. 282).

John Dewey, 1904: I doubt whether we, as educators, keep in mind with sufficient constancy the fact that the problem of training teachers is one species of a more generic affair--that of training for professions. From NSSE Third Yearbook (p. 315).

And

John Dewey, 1897: I believe that ....

--every teacher should realize the dignity of his calling; that he is a social servant set apart for the maintenance of proper social order and the securing of the right social growth.

--in this way the teacher always is the prophet of the true God and the usherer in of the true kingdom of God. From My Pedagogic Creed (p. 439).

In fact Dewey places teaching at the apex of professions: it is a calling.

Conclusion

If these juxtapositions are convincing, we are left with a number of tenacious questions:

Had Dewey discovered through philosophy
what rationalist inquiry has confirmed?
Or,
Did Dewey stake out the terrain of education
so effectively that he exhausted the bank of
theoretical generalizations which could be
made about the field?
Or,
Did he merely enunciate the comprehensive
list of theoretical claims which are
politically acceptable in the American,
democratic milieux and rationalist
inquirers suppress other findings of theirs
which are at odds with our self image and
value orientation?

Will the ideas propounded in KBBT effect
reform more successfully than Dewey's
similar claims early in this century?

Are we marking time in some essential way

rather than continually reconstructing

our profession?

The members of AACTE and, specifically, the contributors to KBBT are characterized by their commitment to the welfare of students and progress in education. Few would question their motivation or achievements. In a professional spirit they invite criticism, and in this way it is offered. The knowledge base we are presented with exists in a narrow timeframe between the rich past of progressive education--exemplified by Dewey, James, Kilpatrick, and Bode--and the emerging naturalistic future--embodied in approaches like deconstruction, depth psychology, and phenomenology (Wilshire, 1990). Habermas, Derrida, Foucault, Jung, Heidegger, Freud, Marx together merit a total of one reference in KBBT. We are presented not with a broad and sufficient knowledge base but a time slice of one: what has been contributed by educators of a certain time during that time. The KBBT's inadequacy as a foundation for teacher education is due, ironically, to its neglect of the field of educational foundations.

As alluded to earlier, Clifford and Guthrie (1988) suggest "that schools of education, particularly those located on the campuses of prestigious research universities, have become ensnared improvidently in the academic and political cultures of their institutions and have neglected their professional allegiances" (p. 3). KBBT is another manifestation of teacher education's misdirection and neglect of school reform. It acts to continue our "ensnarement" in values, peer groups, and paradigms which are alien to our social process field. It accepts by default school goals and organization which are educationally unworthy and

unworkable, allowing our purview to be limited to efforts within a system which itself needs to be challenged.

Knowledge Base for the Beginning Teacher does, however, remind us of our past, if we allow it to do so. It reaffirms the philosophical foundation John Dewey provided for our field, even though it does so inadvertently. In this sense we can be encouraged by our rediscovery of Dewey's theory of education after sixty intervening years. Today we can begin again to implement it by changes in classrooms and schools. Perhaps now Dewey's wisdom has been proven to a larger community than before and a new coalition can turn to practical reform.

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