Keeping Education a Professional and Liberal Study

Editor: Chris Eisele, Illinois State University
Fall, 1988, Volume VIII

Published by the John Dewey Society for the Study of Education and Culture at Illinois State University, Normal, IL
I expect a deserved quibble over the word "keeping" in the title chosen for this Current Issues. With the increase in reductionist psychologies, the decline in serious Foundations content, and the wholesale acceptance of multiple choice teaching competencies, it is difficult to find much that remains of the "liberal arts" notion that future professional educators should study what they do and why, as well as how to do what they do. Yes, I will admit that many of our undergraduates don't know that Skinner started with rats. Or worse yet, when told, they don't "see" what difference that makes. Nevertheless, there are some straws to grasp: (1) Lee Shulman says the Teacher Assessment Project will see teaching as involving "reasoning as well as acting; it is an intellectual and imaginative process, not merely a behavioral one;" (2) the reflective teacher movement which may bring some Dewey back; (3) John Goodlad's recently articulated assumptions of what a professional teacher education program should be, i.e., "programs for preparing the nation's teachers must involve future teachers not only in knowing how schools are organized and conducted, but also in the normative issues that pertain to organization, grouping and tracking, balance and symmetry in the curriculum, students' right to learn, and more."

The what, why and how of keeping education a professional and liberal study is the subject of this Current Issues with Walter Feinberg and Landon Beyer using the term "educational studies" to suggest the direction professional education should take. Feinberg says, "A more fruitful way to constitute the domain of educational studies is to attempt, through the identification of a common function, to capture the universal features which are
represented by the practice of education while also recognizing the various forms that these features may take in specific situations." (p. 7) Beyer highlights educational studies this way:

Concerned with moral and political ideas, educational studies is equally committed to ethical conduct; committed to social justice, it seeks avenues for its concrete expression in practice; impressed with the need for reason, care, and reflection, it promotes practical actions that embody these qualities in a human context. Thus educational inquiry not only respects liberal learning, but articulates ways to further such learning in the real, social interactive contexts in which people live (p. 32).

Each essay begins with "theory" and concludes with "practice." Feinberg establishes an argument for the context of educational studies as a liberal study and then provides examples of the kinds of studies that might (or have been) undertaken. Beyer establishes a similar argument and then provides examples of matching teacher education curricula. Each author, in the best Deweyian sense, resolves apparent dualisms and suggests appropriate action.

Acknowledgements

The Dewey Society extends thanks to our authors, Landon Beyer and Walter Feinberg, for allowing Current Issues access to these 1988 American Educational Research Association paper presentations and to Teachers College Press for generously granting permission to use them, even though they are the basis for forthcoming chapters in a T. C. Press book. Thanks also to Mary Ann Lynn, Chairperson of the Educational Administration and Foundations Department of Illinois State University for continuing financial support of Current Issues and to Cammie Quinn for preparation of the manuscripts.