

Kreber, C. (2016). *Educating for civic-mindedness: Nurturing authentic professional identities through transformative higher education*. New York, NY: Routledge. 190 pp.

Review by Novella Zett Keith

This is a complex, carefully crafted book that makes an important contribution to the civic and community engagement literature. In line with much of the field, Kreber wants higher education to create democratic professionals who are committed to making the world a “fairer place to live” (p. 12) and work *with* their clients rather than make expert decisions for them. Her special contribution is to deepen our understanding of civic-mindedness in ways that make it an essential aspect of all education. Although her particular interest and focus are on professional education, some of her arguments provide supports for notions of the ideal graduate (or *graduateness*) that stretch and challenge common ways of thinking about the topic.

Kreber’s past writings have delved into authenticity, the scholarship of teaching, transformative professional education, democratic professionalism, and the like. She is particularly well versed in the pertinent philosophical and theoretical discourses, though not a stranger to research and practice (currently, she is dean of the School of Professional Studies in Cape Breton University, Nova Scotia). The book considers these themes as they relate to civic-mindedness, with the explicit goal of providing it with more robust theoretical foundations and rationales than are currently available (e.g., the more empirically grounded college outcomes). To do so, Kreber draws on the work of well-known philosophers and theorists (among the more prominent are Hannah Arendt, Ron Barnett, Albert Dzur, Jürgen Habermas, Alasdair MacIntyre, Martha Nussbaum, William Sullivan, and Charles Taylor), recent writings on critical and applied phronesis (e.g., Bent Flyvbjerg, Stephen Kemmis), as well as the literature on engagement and transformative learning. If I were to take issue with the book, it would be mainly with the theoretical abundance packed in its 159 pages. The mix is interesting and relevant, but readers might have been better served by some careful pruning of theories, leaving sharper theoretical syntheses. The book will be especially challenging to

those in the field who are more empirically and less theoretically grounded. On the whole, however, they too will be richly rewarded.

With so much packed into the book, my review is necessarily selective. For a more complete account, I refer readers to the significant help Kreber provides by mapping, in various chapters, the terrain traversed thus far (see especially Table 3.1, p. 42; Table 4.1, p. 59; and Figure 8.1, p. 107). I start with Kreber's definition of civic-mindedness, which announces her theoretical framework and themes developed throughout the book, and proceed to discuss some of its components and their connections. Civic-mindedness will lead us to capabilities, authenticity, and self-cultivation as the inner aspect of civic-mindedness. I will end with some comments directed at educating the authentic civic-minded professional and the scholarship of collaboration.

Civic-mindedness is "an overarching professional capability that is grounded in an identity that is authentic" (p. 8). The first theme pertains to capabilities, which are different from skill-based or knowledge-based capacities. Developed by Amartya Sen and Martha Nussbaum, the capabilities approach is grounded in social justice and centers on fostering whatever allows people to access and make use of enabling structures, resources, or social services, so as to reach toward well-being and freedom to pursue a life worthy of human dignity. This way of putting it heralds an important underlying referent found throughout the book, especially in versions embraced by Nussbaum: the Aristotelian notion of *eudaimonia*, which some commentators translate as authenticity, or "living in accordance with one's deeply held values" (Wright, cited in Kreber, p. 9). As Sen and Nussbaum assert, capabilities are both external and internal. Relating capabilities to identity allows Kreber to create a bridge between what she proposes are *external* and *internal* (or *in-person*) aspects of civic-mindedness: other-oriented action (external) and self-cultivation (internal).

Through this approach, civic-mindedness becomes intrinsically valuable to professionals as a practice that enriches their own well-being along with the well-being of the community. There is no separation or opposition, as an ethic of principles (deontology) would maintain. Kreber cites Nussbaum approvingly to the effect that, according to eudaimonistic thought, one becomes engaged because "these people count for me" (p. 96). Following the tenets of virtue ethics to which Kreber partly adheres, one's character (or being good, that is, *virtuous*) is the source of motivation to engage in virtuous action in community, and the interaction, with supports, develops one's practical reasoning and practical wisdom

(*phronesis*). When higher education sets out to cultivate these inner qualities in students, it fosters the growth of professionals who will be motivated and disposed to enhance the capabilities and freedoms of others. As Kreber notes, it is a far cry from becoming self-referential and self-absorbed; rather, self-cultivation enables professionals “to create a better world through their professional practice, a practice which [in turn] has as its aim to expand basic capabilities in society” (p. 56).

I have strayed into the area of self-cultivation, but before going further in this direction we need a better grasp of what Kreber means by authenticity, the second theme announced in her definition of civic-mindedness. Unpacking authenticity will serve to identify the personal dispositions and qualities that higher education should cultivate in students, so as to nurture their authentic professional identities. I found this discussion particularly interesting. In the field of community and civic engagement, references to authenticity generally pertain to the context, activities, and experiences associated with engagement. For instance, engagement is deemed authentic when it addresses real rather than contrived community needs and involves participants in activities that are both meaningful and potentially change-inducing. Kreber reviews several writers from this and other fields, whose contributions support the notion that meaning-making and achieving a sense of one’s purpose are central to authenticity; furthermore, they involve abilities, such as critical thinking and practical reasoning, that arguably are learned best through (community) engaged pedagogies and that higher education should develop in all students. Kreber’s focus on authentic identity also brings into the conversation themes from the field of identity development, including professional identity development. Here, meanings accord more closely to her own, recalling at times the definition of *eudaimonia*, above: For instance, authentic professional identities are linked to practices that connect to one’s central values, and authentic professionals feel empowered to do what matters to them.

Kreber’s review of this literature also serves as a rationale for digging deeper, toward theoretico-philosophical roots. This she does in two ways. First, she advances authenticity as an existential issue, one that is necessarily bound to the historical context. The question is, what does authenticity mean, in terms of one’s being and actions, in our present historical moment? Second, she connects the existential to two additional dimensions of authenticity: critical and communitarian. The latter will be more familiar to

readers in the engagement field, but the three together constitute a somewhat novel lens for considering civic engagement.

For the existential dimension of authenticity, Kreber turns primarily to the work of Ron Barnett, a prominent British social philosopher in the field of higher education. Key to understanding the meaning and practice of authenticity in our times are the notions of supercomplexity and strangeness. For Barnett, multiplying, contradictory, contested, and incompatible knowledge frameworks are key. This state of affairs goes beyond mere uncertainty and reaches into the very core of our being. If we dare face ourselves and the world as it is, we must contend with perennial strangeness, and its consequent disorientation, anxiety, dissonance, and sense of homelessness. Authenticity poses a challenge that is both emotional and intellectual: it requires us to refrain from self-deception and find “the courage to question received wisdom and convention” (p. 35). The only way out is to embrace the strangeness, be open to learning from and through it, and so become authors of our lives, “beings-for-themselves’ who take responsibility for our actions and stand by our inner commitments” (p. 36).

This language lends itself easily to integrating the critical and communitarian roots of civic engagement into an emergent three-dimensional framework for authenticity. First, the above discussion offers a fundamental disposition (*openness to experience—and to strangeness*). Critical consciousness, with its focus on emancipation from the influence of hegemonic and oppressive understandings of self and world, adds a critical dimension, which Kreber captures through the quality (or virtue) of *moral commitment*. Communitarian roots, with their emphasis on involvement in communities as a practice that gives us meaning and purpose, contribute the third dimension: *responsible engagement*.

From here, we can extrapolate at least some of the substance of self-cultivation—which is discussed in Chapter 5 and is directly or indirectly featured in subsequent chapters. Self-cultivation must be rooted in authentic desires, which requires the ability to distinguish between authentic and inauthentic ones: If we embrace traditional practices or organizational goals, is our desire to do so authentic, or does it originate in ‘colluded selves’ (p. 72), a misdirected sense of obligation, and corrupted institutional practices that are embodied in us? Self-cultivation involves digging out such roots, which is not always pleasurable but is growth inducing. It requires, in turn, the cultivation of emotional qualities such as courage and resilience. In turn, enacting civic-mindedness as authentic professionals requires, beyond even communicative and emancipatory

knowledge (Habermas), embracing political or public emotions (Nussbaum). Skills at public deliberation, for instance, must go hand in hand with “cultivating *love for our principles and ideals, and empathy and compassion for others*” (p. 98, italics in original).

How is this to be done? Kreber introduces related practices and pedagogies for transformative learning, briefly noting some existing approaches and pedagogies through which students can develop empathy and self-awareness and cultivate public emotions. These are respectively the pedagogies of compassion, contemplation, and public emotions. With regard to engagement as action with others, she references Biesta’s public pedagogies, which distinguish between *doing for*, *doing with*, and an Arendtian-derived pedagogy designed to generate spaces in which freedom is invited and may enter. We don’t encounter the latter frequently, but it is something worthy of imagination and consideration. The book ends by providing summarizing statements pertaining to authentic professional identities, reviewing key questions for educators that were introduced in the first chapter, and considering questions to be posed to faculty who teach in professional programs, with a view to gaining insights into transformative practices to facilitate public engagement.

Kreber spends considerable time explaining the various theories that inform her work. On a first reading, I felt that this detracted from the whole, preferring a more synthetic approach to theory building. On reflection, however, I now offer this question: What if we considered her approach through the lens of civic-mindedness? Could we then see it as a refusal to appropriate others’ work, in a display of the very qualities that underlie civic-mindedness—humility, for instance? Does the fact that she delves extensively into the writers who have shaped her thinking comport with a scholarship of collaboration that, wittingly or unwittingly, challenges the normality of single authorship and thus of what we might call a scholarship of appropriation? It is a worthwhile alternative to consider in a field that is committed to democratizing knowledge.

This book has much to commend it. In this review I have emphasized Kreber’s conceptual contributions, but readers who are researchers should not feel left out. For instance, it would be interesting to use her framework as a lens through which to consider such constructs as the civic-minded graduate and the civic-minded professional. Her suggestion for descriptive research to identify existing educational programs that subscribe to some of the tenets of authenticity are also worthwhile. Explorations of applied phro-

ness in fields such as nursing and medicine may also yield useful insights and knowledge of practice.

There are limits to what can be accomplished in a single book, and I have alluded to some of these. Overall, Kreber has produced a book that begs further exploration of the questions it raises. Could we assume that by taking up a leadership position in a higher education institution, she has put these on her agenda? If so, I look forward to the sequel.

About the Reviewer

Novella Zett Keith is professor emerita of urban education at Temple University. She is the author of *Engaging in Social Partnerships: Democratic Practices for University-Community Partnership* (Routledge, 2015). Her Ph.D. is from Rutgers University–New Brunswick in sociology.