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Marxists, Mormons and Indoctrination in Schools

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Abstract

It is argued that when we call a set of activities, 'indoctrination,' we are talking about something that is a matter of degree and that the degree of the indoctrination will be determined by a complex interrelationship between the teacher's intentions, the content of what he teaches and the methods he uses.

The content of indoctrination has to do with doctrines, doctrines being complex set of interrelated beliefs such as Mormonism and Marxism, that cannot be demonstrated to be unquestionably true (or unquestionably false). So teachers should make clear the equivocal status of doctrines.

It is suggested that although full-blown indoctrination may be difficult to achieve in Australian state schools, teachers certainly have the opportunity of exerting subtle influences and pressures on children.

Introduction

Chinese children are given mock hand-grenades to throw at pictures of the former leader, Lin Piao, and Confucius, an education administrator . . . said in Melbourne yesterday . . . Mr. D. McDonnell . . . said, 'Politics is the first study everywhere — even in kindergarten . . . When one of the grenades hit one of the pictures, there was great cheering and carry-ons.' (*The Australian*, 3/6/75).

Rations (in the spartan school) were kept short in order to stimulate the novice in the art of stealing . . . the boys stole vegetables from their neighbours' fields, meat from the communal kitchens . . . such marauding expeditions were not regarded an anti-social behaviour; they were exercises in a specific skill carried out under a strict code of rules . . . Although finesse in theft was a highly regarded accomplishment, it was a disgrace to be found out. For this offence 'they were whipped without mercy for thieving so ill and awkwardly! . . . between the ages of eighteen and twenty-one, the young men were organised into a secret service for spying on and liquidating by furtive assassination any Helots suspected of restlessness or rebellion. Thus the final initiation into full citizenship status extended training in juvenile theft into murder for political purposes (Castle, 1961, p.19).

Such close links between curriculum and political theory tend, of course, to put enquiry into a straitjacket . . . When Stalin was posthumously toppled from his pedestal, the new line of policy led to drastic revisions in the material used in the schools. In 1956, for example there were no history examinations for final-year pupils, the old textbook having been withdrawn and the new one still in the course of preparation . . . Changes of policy, even fairly minor ones, keep the textbook writers

busy; the Soviet schools seem to be full of brand-new books, especially for such potentially thorny subjects as the history of the U.S.S.R. (Grant, 1964, p.26).

These three examples are mentioned because it is important to remember that things go on in schools in other parts of the world at the present time, and have gone on in schools in past ages, the educational appropriateness of which we may well question. My present concern is to discuss questionable activities that may go on in various degrees in our own schools. For to talk about indoctrination is I think to talk about *degrees* of pressures and influences, pressures and influences that derive from the three interrelated issues of the teacher's intentions, the content of his teaching, and the methods used (*White, 1967*).

Intention

As the three quotations indicate, teachers at different periods of history and at different places in any period may have different intentions with respect to the materials they wish to teach their pupils or students. Amongst such intentions will be the following:

To get children:

1. to believe that something is true.
2. to believe that something is true and to have some understanding of it.
3. to believe that something is true, to have some understanding of it, to have some grounds for believing that it is true, and to hope that the children will reject belief in it if the grounds later appear to be untenable.
4. to believe that something is true, to have some understanding of it, to have some grounds for believing that it is true, and to hope that the children will believe it in such a way that nothing will shake their belief (*White, 1967*).

I have listed these various categories of believing, because I see a conceptual connection between indoctrination and belief. But in talking about intention we can of course distinguish various "to know" categories too. For example teachers may intend to get children:

5. to know, merely in the sense of holding a true belief.
6. to know in the more full-blown sense of holding a "justified true belief", as it is often described in the literature. (It is when teachers work with the intention that children will know in the full-blown sense, that I think we can often refer to what is going on as *education*.)

Whether any of the first four intentions is going to be acceptable nowadays in Western schools will surely depend upon just what the content of the teaching is. For instance, to teach that stars that implode through the white dwarf and neutron star stages eventually reach a stage of infinite density and zero volume, which we call 'black holes', would seem to be acceptable if a teacher has intention 3. To teach that King John was a bad king, with intention 4, would seem to be historically inappropriate even if the historical con-

sensus at the moment supports such a contention about John. To teach that God made the world in six days, with any of the first four intentions may be all right in the schools of some fundamentalist Christian sects, but I doubt whether it should be taught at all in state schools by state employed teachers.

So, some of the above possible intentions in connection with some of the possible contents will be acceptable, others will not. With some, we object that while the claim may be true it is not *enough* just to teach it as true; with others we object that it is not known if the claim is true or not, so we should not teach it as though it is or at least we should teach it in such a way as to expose its equivocal status. If we do teach as true, claims that are disputable, or if *we do fail to expose equivocal status* then I believe that we are slipping into the area of what I call indoctrination, for our intentions are then to say the least, suspect.

Now from certain parts of the world we can pick out some activities of teaching which many people in this country will call indoctrination in this sense. This is so in the case of schools of the U.S.S.R. when the subject is Marxist theory or of Mormon 'seminaries' for twelve to sixteen year olds in the state of Utah, when Joseph Smith's discoveries are being discussed. The point about such activities is that non-Marxists and non-Mormons see the doctrinal material of Marxism and Mormonism as equivocal, yet it is usually being taught with intention 4. It is this intention with such a content that helps make the activity indoctrination rather than mere instruction; indoctrination rather than education: there is an attempt to close minds rather than to open them.

I am aware that in using these two examples, I may be antagonising believers of these doctrines. What has to be said in defence is that when someone sincerely discusses such an issue as indoctrination, he can choose only those examples that he considers to be some of the paradigms; *there may be many other good examples*. Why I see such examples as paradigms has begun to emerge in my claim that these doctrines are usually being taught with intention 4; it will be made clearer as I explore further the nature of the content of doctrines and the methods used to implant belief in this content.

Of course, it may be suggested that Soviet or Mormon teachers may not have intention 4 at all. As John White writes,

"... many indoctrinators have themselves been indoctrinated. They believe that the doctrines that they hold cannot but be true. Therefore many of them are fully prepared to accept rational discussion of these doctrines in their teaching, for they do not believe that such discussion could ever undermine them" (1967, p.182).

Such teachers would claim to be motivated by something less than intention 4. Clearly, then, if they are motivated by less than intention 4, and we still feel entitled to call what they are doing, 'indoctrination', we feel entitled not because of their intention but because they are teaching political and religious *doctrines*. And we see their teachings as doctrinal because the status of the key claims they contain is equivocal (see below), since such key claims seem to be concerned with *belief* rather than with knowledge. Nevertheless, the indoctrination, if it is such, will not be indoctrination in any full-blown inten-

tional sense. The intelligent approach is to accept that there may be degrees of indoctrination.

Whether or not Marxist and Mormon teachers actually held intention 4 would of course be shown in what they did in the classroom in connection with whether or not they allowed rational discussion, whether they encouraged contrary opinions, and so on (see section D, Methods). I strongly suspect that if it looked as though they really were about to be undermined, with many such teachers the supposed rationality would go out the window, and they would resort to all the authority and power at their disposal. Hare puts my point this way:

The educator is waiting and hoping all the time for those whom he is educating to start *thinking*; and none of the thoughts that may occur to them are labelled 'dangerous' a priori. The indoctrinator, on the other hand, is watching for signs of trouble, and ready to intervene to suppress it when it appears, however oblique and smooth his methods may be (1964, p.70).

Content

I want now to discuss the sort of content that indoctrination is connected with. I have mentioned a political example, Marxism, and a religious example, Mormonism, because I feel that it is in such areas of belief that we can most appropriately talk of *doctrines*. The concept of indoctrination seems to have something to do with doctrines, i.e. with interrelated systems of *belief*. It does not make sense if for example we talk about indoctrination in the multiplication tables or the chemical components of common salt, because we are not dealing with beliefs.

The point about doctrines such as Marxism or Mormonism (and why I call them doctrines) is that they consist of interrelated sets of ideas and beliefs based upon certain belief statements or postulates that *cannot be demonstrated to be unquestionably true*, which taken together have repercussions for the way in which the believer views the world and for the way in which he lives his life. For instance it will be recalled that in the early days of the Mormon church, polygamy was practised. According to Mormon teaching it was revealed to Joseph Smith in the last year of his life that the practice of having multiple wives was acceptable to God. As the 'Revelation of the Eternity of the Marriage Covenant including Plurality of Wives given through Joseph the Seer, in Nauvoo, Hancock Country, Illinois, July 12, 1843 says:

Verily thus saith the Lord unto you my servant, Joseph, that in as much as you have enquired at my hand, to know and understand . . . as touching the principle and doctrine of their having many wives and concubines . . . Therefore prepare thy heart to receive and obey . . . If any man espouse a virgin and desire to espouse another, and the first give her consent; and if he espouse the second, and they are virgins, and have vowed to no other man, then he is justified; he cannot commit adultery, for they are given unto him . . . and if he have ten virgins given unto him

by this law, he cannot commit adultery, for they belong to him, and they are given unto him, therefore is he justified (Riley, 1967, p.83).

To many minds this may seem a strange dictate for God to pronounce. Did God in fact say it? Certainly it does not seem easy to demonstrate conclusively that God said it. Yet it has been taught to Mormons that God said it. It was part of Mormon doctrine during the nineteenth century, and thereby it had enormous repercussions for the Mormon way of life. Mormons, as I understand it, nowadays argue that there were good reasons why God gave that particular revelation at that particular time — the Church of Jesus Christ of the Latter Day Saints was under external attack, there was an excess of women in the church, etc. But even if these claims are true — and one recent analysis argues that there was an excess of men — the issue still remains, how to establish to the satisfaction of intelligent people of other persuasions (Chinese and Chileans, Anglicans and agnostics) that God indeed said it. I have here been discussing merely the most famous of Mormon beliefs, but the same problems of truth-status arises with respect to much of the rest of Mormon doctrine.

As stated above there are some statements or postulates within doctrines, that cannot be demonstrated to be unquestionably true. In saying that a statement cannot be shown to be unquestionably true, however, I am not saying it is untrue. *Statements of this sort cannot be shown to be unquestionably false either.*

The distinction is between propositions in relation to which, whether they are in fact true or not, there is no disagreement as to the sort of evidence that would count to show whether they were true or false (potentially provable propositions) and propositions in relation to which there is no such agreement (potentially unprovable propositions). (Woods & Barrow, 1975, p.66.)

On the one hand then, there are statements for which there is no disagreement amongst intelligent people as to the *sort of evidence* that would verify or falsify; on the other hand there are statements for which there is wide disagreement as to the sort of evidence that would verify or falsify. The simplest way of making the point is to list a set of typical statements.

Thus, on the one hand we have statements such as:

1. Human beings need oxygen to live.
2. Sydney was founded in 1788.
3. President Carter wrote 'Alice in Wonderland'.
4. 'Olympus Mons', a volcano on Mars is fifteen miles high and covers an area the size of Tasmania or Scotland.
5. The sun consists of burning coal.

These are all statements about which we could get agreement amongst intelligent people as to the verifying or falsifying tests, even if a particular individual might not know just whether the statement was indeed true or false. *We could get general agreement about the type of evidence that would count for or against such statements, even if we did not happen to have the*

evidence or even any way of obtaining it at present. Marxists and Mormons would both agree about the sort of evidence that counts here. It so happens that 1, 2 and 4 are true, 3 and 5 are false, but this is not the issue; rather I am concerned to emphasise the agreement that exists as to the type of evidence that makes them true or false.

On the other hand, we make statements such as:

6. God gave the revelation on the plurality of wives to Joseph Smith in Illinois in 1834.
7. Education involves the realisation of the divine potential of each child.
8. Development of the mode of production is the fundamental determinant of social, political and intellectual change.
9. The mind consists of the Ego, Superego and Id.
10. The Beatles are better than Beethoven.

With these, we cannot get general agreement amongst intelligent people about the sort of evidence that would count for or against. Marxists and Mormons would not agree about the sort of evidence that counts here. The situation is complicated even more because there are also tremendous conceptual and interpretational difficulties embedded in such statements. What is *meant* by 'God'? What is 'mind'? What *counts* as a mode of production? Such problems would need to be clearly sorted out before there could be any sensible discussion of evidence for or against.

What is more, the issue is further confused by the fact that doctrines like Marxism and Mormonism consist of some beliefs for which there *is* agreement as to type of evidence and some beliefs for which there is no agreement as to type of evidence, yet believers do not always see the difference. As far as purely empirical beliefs are concerned, the issue of truth or falsity is *relatively* straight forward. For instance, in the religious case, either Joseph Smith was born at Sharon, Windsor County, in the State of Vermont or he was not; either Jesus was born in Bethlehem or he was not.

These are empirical statements of the historical sort and we have no difficulty in agreeing what sort of evidence would count for or against such a belief: it would be of the same sort that historians normally use. Again Joseph Smith either did indeed teach the Revelation of the Eternity of the Marriage Covenant or he is misreported as having done so; Jesus either did indeed teach the Aramaic equivalent of the prescription, 'Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself' or he is misreported as having said this. Of course, it may be *practically* very difficult to establish the truth or falsity of such statements. But there is no difficulty in principle.

It is with beliefs for which there is no agreement as to type of evidence with what I call the 'metaphysical' parts of religious and political doctrines — that the great difficulties arise. Priests and proselytisers say such things as, 'God loves all his children'. But when the non-believer offers evidence to the contrary (e.g. that there is massive misery and suffering in the world), the believer, far from abandoning his belief, begins to qualify it in various ways. What seemed at the beginning of the discussion to be a straightforward assertion ('God loves all his children'), is progressively modified ('His love is dif-

ferent from our love', 'We cannot understand his ways', 'The ineffable is beyond our comprehension', etc.) The assertion is modified until it seems that no matter what contrary evidence the non-believer assembles, the believer will still go on saying, 'God loves all his children'. But if the believer will not allow any conceivable sort of evidence to count against his belief, we are not dealing with any normal sort of assertion. If nothing can conceivably count as evidence against, at least as evidence in principle, what sort of belief is it that we are dealing with? After all, for something to be asserted to be the case and in fact to be the case, something else is excluded from being the case. In particular, when something is asserted, then at the same time at least the denial of the assertion must be seen by the asserter as false. But an assertion that is both conceptually vague and that does not by implication deny anything at all is not an assertion in any normally meaningful sense. Certainly the sort of belief here being discussed is not a belief that is obviously true or false. So, for state school teachers to teach such beliefs as anything other than equivocal, i.e. to teach them as anything other than *mere* beliefs, is to teach more than is warranted, and to drift into the realm of indoctrination.

Of course it may be that there are dimensions to life in which it is difficult not to make such commitments or leaps of faith in accepting such equivocal beliefs; at the same time it should be admitted that people are no longer in the realm of obvious rationality. In other words, some people may find it a psychological necessity to accept this sort of belief in building their world view, but they should admit the debatable status of their position; and while they may be happy if other people come to see things in the same way, they have no clear justification for forcing such a belief system on others, or perhaps even for trying to influence other people in this way. So it seems to me that the teaching of doctrines as truths has no place in the state school system, though teaching *about* doctrines is another thing.

Also, it must be clearly stated that while for the above sorts of reasons I seriously doubt whether doctrinal beliefs can ever be shown to be true, such belief systems *may* be true.

Methods

As I see it, the third aspect of this concept of indoctrination has to do with the methods used to get pupils to accept particular beliefs about which there can be no general agreement as to their truth or falsity, or a way in which they can be adjudicated. It should be clear that if particular methods are used, then a particular intention and some particular content are already assumed. In other words, there will never be a case where the term, 'indoctrination' seems to be justified purely on the grounds of a teaching method: a method logically presupposes an intention and a content. But the issue of method is important because it is only on the basis of observation of particular methods that anyone is entitled to attribute some degree of indoctrination. (As stated early in the paper, whether or not teachers actually hold the intention to implant unshakeable belief will be shown in what they do in classrooms.) No doubt the more fanatical proponents of intention 4 would like to resort to the methods of the Hitler Youth Movement, or to 'brainwashing', as performed by the Chinese on their own people for some years after the revolution and on United

Nations prisoners during the Korean War (Huxley, 1965 p.52, Lifton, 1961); but such methods are hardly possible in Australian state schools today, given the influence of other staff members, parents and the community at large. It should nonetheless be noted that if a teacher is indeed hoping to work with intention 4, is trying to instill unshakeable beliefs about issues the truth or falsity of which cannot be established — then at least some parts of his methods cannot be fully rational. It should also be noted that all teachers have certain opportunities to hammer a line of thinking and to bring to bear upon children various sorts of subtle and not so subtle pressures. I know of several cases in Tasmania in which children have been strongly affected by the political views of their social studies teachers.

It seems to me then, that even if people do not agree with all of my substantive claims, they must at least concede that beliefs have various logical statuses, and that such differences in status should be brought out in an appropriate way in teachers' teaching. Where material and claims are equivocal, children should be made fully aware of their debatable nature. To do anything less, may not be to indoctrinate in the fullest sense, but it is certainly to step onto the slippery slope into it.

Misunderstanding

It is sometimes claimed that all schooling is indoctrination. Suggestions of this sort have been made in recent years about the systems of Australia, the U.K., the U.S.A. and so on. This is the view that the

curriculum is wedded to the political values of the establishment and power elite of the Western world, and that it is impossible to study critically the values embodied in the Western traditions and the manifold challenges to them, without proselytising for them (Hook, 1973, p.6.).

Such a view not merely misuses language in making the term 'indoctrination' so broad as to be almost meaningless, it also misdescribes the actual situation. As Hook argues

An unprejudiced survey of the general liberal education curriculum, so vehemently downgraded, discloses that it includes a study of the great revolutionary classics, movements, and events of the modern world. If its teaching entailed a propogandistic approach to, and indoctrination in, bourgeois values, it would be hard to explain the emergence of student radical leadership, most of which was nurtured on this curriculum (1973, p.7).

And in fact, any observer who looks at our schools with an unjaundiced eye will see that it is usual for children to experience a wide range of political and religious possibility in their school curriculum. Children encounter a range of materials and methods from teachers, who hold a variety of positions. The cases mentioned of the pupils affected in an indoctrinatory way by their social studies teachers fortunately remain few.

Indeed, education systems such as those of Australia and the U.K. are some of the few in the world in which teachers are in general committed to

education (Peters, 1966) and in which we find an active attempt at producing people who will criticise the system. We can say that the system, far from indoctrinating, has failed if it does not produce people who can see faults in the system.

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Study Behaviour and Tertiary Academic Achievement

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Abstract

Sufficient time and effort expended in study have been shown to be essential pre-requisites to satisfactory examination performance at tertiary level. This paper presents the results of an investigation into the relationship between academic achievement and the variables of student attitudes toward study, effort expended in studying, the availability of a study room and scholarship status. All these variables were significantly related to examination performance during various years of the courses studied. The effects of the study variables operated differentially for males and females in the sample.

Introduction

The term "study behaviour", for the purposes of this discussion, will be taken to mean not only the actual techniques of study but also the amount of time spent in study and the degree of organization demonstrated by a student.

Adherence to a systematic method of study has been shown to be highly significant for success in university and college examinations. Small (1966) investigated a group of New Zealand students and found that although not all of the study methods employed were the most efficient ones, the fact that a student devised and consistently used some sort of study system, even an inferior one, was of great assistance. In other words, any organization is better than none at all, when it comes to studying for examinations. Similar evidence in favour of some system of organization comes from Pond (1964) who found that high-achieving students were notably better organized in their work (and also leisure) activities than were low-achieving students.

An important part of the degree of organization of study activity is the actual amount of time spent in studying. Small (1966) divided students into three groups; those who pass all their examinations, those who fail some and those who fail most of their examinations. He found that the students who failed most of their examinations spent significantly less time in study than the other two groups.

Part of the explanation of the poor academic performance of most part-time students may be that they have much less time to devote to their studies, even though their subject load is smaller, as was found for British students (Parkyn, 1963). In the same study it was also found that students who spent part of their vacation periods engaged in studying obtained better examination results, indicating perhaps a seriousness of purpose and a desire to succeed. Of the considerable amount of research devoted to study factors, the consensus of opinion seems to be that it is the actual amount of time spent in study