

TEACHING WITHOUT INDOCTRINATION

Towards a Community of Reflective Practitioners

INTRODUCTION

This book began with an exposition of the historical developments of and educational problems associated with indoctrination in a liberal democratic context. It elucidated the concept of indoctrination and outlined how teaching without indoctrination is possible in values education. It was argued that a reflective framework where educators develop the students' rational autonomy within a primary culture was needed to avoid indoctrination. This concluding chapter draws our discussion on indoctrination in values education to a close by analysing the inherent tension in the triadic relationship among indoctrination, rationality, and belief inculcation. The second part of the chapter addresses the question of how educators can avoid indoctrination in a school-wide and sustainable manner. It is argued that the adoption of a reflective framework needs to be supported and fortified by a community of teachers who are committed to be reflective practitioners.

TENSIONS IN THE TRIADIC RELATIONSHIP

The thesis of this book is that indoctrination should be understood as the paralysis of one's intellectual capacity where one is unable to justify one's beliefs and consider alternatives. Such a person is a closed-minded person who accepts blindly values and beliefs that others impose on him or her. Holding to a dogmatic style of belief, an indoctrinated person is incapable of critically inquiring into any area, whether it is science, morality, religion and even critical thinking itself. I have also pointed out that the paradox of indoctrination is a problem specific to a liberal democratic society. The paradox is premised on a liberal interpretation of 'indoctrination' and 'rationality'. Many philosophers and educators believe that indoctrination is diametrically opposed to rationality. This contrast is brought into sharp relief in a liberal society where rationality, with its associates such as autonomy and open-mindedness, forms the cornerstone of liberalism. This opposition between indoctrination and rationality is complicated by the realisation that belief inculcation for children is necessary in any society. Before a liberal society can have autonomous participants who make rational decisions actively, the children must first be inculcated with liberal values in a non-rational manner. At this preliminary stage, there cannot be any appreciation of rational justification for the liberal belief in rationality, nor can the child accept this belief by engaging in critical inquiry. Herein lies the dilemma for liberals in this triadic tension between indoctrination, rationality, and belief inculcation.

THE FALLACIOUS ASSUMPTION OF CONCEPTUAL ANALYSIS

The Explicit Use of Conceptual Analysis for Indoctrination

There is an underlying assumption in the triadic tension that explains why philosophers fail to solve the problem of indoctrination. To see this, we need to recognise the persistent and obdurate use of the conceptual analytical approach for the definition of indoctrination. Many philosophers fail to fully grasp the connection between indoctrination and liberal democracy under the influence of conceptual analysis. To further understand this, we need to revisit the key issues in the indoctrination debate in the 1970s, and see the concomitant approach and underlying assumption between the debate then and now.

After the 1970s, philosophers increasingly realised that the conceptual analytical approach was flawed in its claim to value neutrality. A leading philosopher, R.S. Peters, for example, wrote in the 1980s, a decade after the indoctrination debate, that the conceptual analytical approach did not pay enough attention to the “historical and social background and the view of human nature which it presupposes” (as cited in Jonathan, 1985, p. 16). Likewise, Laura (1983) exposes the underlying ideological structures of the conceptual analysis of indoctrination and calls for the presuppositional dimension of such an analysis to be made transparent.⁷⁵ Neiman (1987), in his survey of the same debate, draws the same conclusion:

These philosophers, supposedly operating within a neutral sphere of conceptual analysis, are discovered to be engaged in projects within a social reality. They are, I want to suggest, acting as proponents of a liberal political ideology, which favours reason and autonomy ... as the major constituents of the good life (p. 58).

Naish (1984) disparages the alleged neutrality of standard conceptual analysis by calling it “a case of deception” (p. 151). Perhaps the strongest statement came from Ivan Snook (1989), one of the prime movers for the conceptual analysis of indoctrination:

Under the guise of neutral analysis we smuggled in a substantial idea of human excellence, (the rationally autonomous person) and hence a political programme which we did not acknowledge. It is clear to me that the analysis of ‘indoctrination’ (and of most other terms) did assume an educational aim and I completely agree that we ought to have been more explicit about it than we were. And by ‘political’ one refers only to the unexamined assumptions of an age, a group or a class, it is true that I was unaware of the political role which ‘neutral’ analysis was playing at the time (p. 63).

Despite the failure of the conceptual analytical approach, philosophers still rely on this approach in their discussion of indoctrination and values education after the 1970s. For example, Kazepides (1983) still argues for the content criterion by equating indoctrination with religious doctrines. McLaughlin (1984) still adopts the intention criterion while Callan (1988), Gardner (1988), Spiecker (1987) and