An "Indoctrination Dilemma" in Teacher Education?

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ABSTRACT: Most contemporary research in teacher education is focused on theories and methods of changing student teachers' beliefs, values, and practices. Unfortunately, researchers and practitioners have paid little attention to the ethical questions surrounding belief change. To stimulate dialogue in this area, this paper contrasts teacher educators desires to change student teachers' beliefs and values with their need to foster professional autonomy. While most teacher educators justify their practices on their good intentions, superior pedagogy, or the importance of their beliefs, enabling student teachers to gain critical competence during their preservice education is arguably just as important. For a variety of epistemological, sociological, and psychological reasons, doing both simultaneously is almost always impossible. This conclusion suggests an unrecognized 'indoctrination dilemma' inherent in preservice teacher education. The paper concludes by suggesting that teacher educators perhaps need to re-examine their intentions.

RESUME: Aujourd'hui, dans le domaine de la formation des professeurs, la plus grande partie des recherches est axée sur les théories et méthodes de changement de convictions, valeurs et pratiques des élèves-professeurs. Malheureusement, chercheurs et praticiens n'ont prêté que peu d'attention aux questions éthiques entourant l'évidence du changement. Pour animer le débat sur ce sujet, cet article met en opposition les souhaits des enseignants-professeurs de changer les idées et valeurs des étudiants-professeurs et leur besoin de développer une autonomie professionnelle. Alors que la plupart des enseignants-professeurs basent leur expérience sur leurs bonnes résolutions, sur leur excellente pédagogie ou sur l'importance de leurs convictions, les étudiants-professeurs, eux, sont incapables d'acquérir de sérieuses compétences pendant leur pré-activité professorale.

Ceci est aussi une question importante. A cause de toute une
kyrielle de raisons; épistémologique, sociologique et
psychologique, réaliser les deux en même temps, paraît
presque impossible. Cette conclusion suppose «un dilemme
d'endoctrinement» méconnu, inhérent à la pré-activité des
élèves-professeurs. Le papier finit en suggérant que les
enseignants-professeurs devraient, sans doute, revoir leurs
programmes.

Whoever fights monsters should see to it that in
the process he does not become a monster.
(Friedrich Nietzche, *Beyond Good and Evil*,
1886)

The spirit of improvement is not always a spirit
of liberty, for it may aim at forcing improvement
on an unwilling people. (J. S. Mill, *On Liberty*,
1859)

There seems to be a fairly fundamental dilemma, framed by the
preceding quotes from Nietzche and Mill, implicit in the work of
teacher education. My research and reading on the beliefs and
practices of teacher educators indicate that most see their main
aim as improving schooling and broader society. They believe they
have viable solutions to these problems, and seek to influence and
enable student teachers to address these problems. A great deal
of effort, thought, and research has been devoted to
understanding and implementing teaching methods and programs
that will better enable teacher educators to fulfill these goals
(e.g., Richardson, 1997). Unfortunately, while a great deal of
thought has been devoted to the normative basis of what teacher
educators would like to see their student teachers implement, too
little thought has been given to the ethical basis of teacher
educators' work with student teachers.

In this paper, I articulate a seeming dilemma between for
teacher educators in their attempts to do what they believe is
good for schools and society, and what is right for student
teachers. Here I mean 'dilemma' in the specific sense that Katz
and Raths (1992) articulate.

> The term *dilemma* refers to a predicament that has two main
> features ... (a) It involves a situation that offers a choice
> between at least two courses of action, each of which is
> problematic, and (b) it concerns a predicament in which the
> choice of one of the courses of action sacrifices the
> advantages that might accrue if the alternative were chosen.
> In sum, a dilemma is a situation in which a perfect solution
> is not available. Each of the choices is such that
> predicaments involve a choice of negative factors as well as
> positive one. (p. 377)

Katz and Raths argue that others who use the notion of dilemma
in their discussions of teacher education use the word in the much
more loose sense of 'very problematic situation' (e.g., Berlak &
Berlak, 1981; Cuban, 1992; Lampert, 1985). This looser sense is
usually used as a trope *en route* to a proposed solution to the
dilemma, or at least suggests that a solution is possible. It is
important to be clear whether the situation I have outlined is a
dilemma or a highly problematic situation. The dominant view in
teacher education is the latter. It is this presupposition that
drives most of the efforts to improve teacher education. In
contrast I argue that this is not a problem: it is a dilemma.

To demonstrate that this is a dilemma, properly understood,
I show that teacher educators must choose between two
competing normative positions. Either they must try to inculcate
values and beliefs that will benefit student teachers' future
students or they can respect their developing professional
autonomy. Of the two normative claims, the first is easier to
justify. Empirical studies of the beliefs and practices of teacher
educators (c.f., Ducharme, 1993; Grundy & Hatton, 1995; Wideen,
Boote & Mayer-Smith, in review; & Weber, 1990) demonstrate
that many, if not most, teacher educators believe that their
primary objective in teacher education is inculcating beliefs and
values to improve schooling[1]. To justify the other normative claim
I review concepts of indoctrination, and find that they provide a
language to discuss some ethical dimensions of changing
students' beliefs. Further, to demonstrate that teacher educators
face a dilemma, I show in that making one choice teacher
educators will inhibit the other. To justify this claim, I briefly
explore some epistemological, psychological, and social

constraints on these normative choices, which give rise to this fundamental dilemma in teacher education.

Framing the Dilemma

Consider the following case:

> As the term comes to an end, George is resigned and frustrated. It was the first time he taught Teaching Methods in Science Education, the subject of his dissertation research. The thoughtfulness of the work of some of his students impressed George. But it was an odd class to teach, with about half of the students in the teacher education program and the remainder from a wide variety of other undergraduate programs. It was mainly from the latter group that George found the impressive work. The student teachers, on the other hand, held their beliefs about Science Education dogmatically. George couldn't tell them anything because they already knew everything. Perhaps what George found most irritating is that they were very good at figuring out what he wanted to hear and giving him that. But he could tell that he was not 'getting through.' While George has some strongly held beliefs about Science Education, his main desire was to have his students appreciate the importance of a wide variety of perspectives. The students from other Faculties and programs were willing and able to engage George in this dialogue, but not the student teachers. After the term, George commiserated with another teacher educator in his program. "It was like they were indoctrinated." George said. "Especially the ones from Darla's class."[2]

As George's case demonstrates, the inability of teacher educators to influence student teachers can be quite disheartening. For this reason, many teacher educators are struggling to find ways of understanding this problem and to improve their ability to affect the beliefs of student teachers. But let's re-examine the case from Darla's perspective. If she had described her work with these students, she likely would have a happier tale to tell. Her student teachers seemed to have learned what she intended and maintained those beliefs well after her course.

Most of us have heard grumbling about our colleagues' practices, as George does about Darla. Practicum supervisors complain that university-based teacher educators fail to understand the realities of practice. University-based teacher educators complain that practicum supervisors abrogate their efforts. Curriculum professors complain about foundations professors, and vice versa. This mutual criticism among teacher educators is not surprising considering the fundamental paradigmatic differences within the teacher education community. However, there seems to be something more interesting here. Perhaps there is something to George's off-hand description of these students as being indoctrinated.

Indoctrination

Indoctrination is a loaded term, so I introduce it into the discussion of teacher education only after considering a myriad of other terms and concepts available to discuss mis-education. It is seemingly the very opposite of education properly understood. The small but robust literature examining this concept provides some useful distinctions as we try to understand the ethical basis of belief change in teacher education, and what George was pointing to in the practice of his colleague. This literature allows me to explore some implications of these distinctions.

Three Definitions of Indoctrination

As this literature comes from the research tradition of philosophy of education, writers are concerned to understand the necessary and sufficient conditions of indoctrination. This analysis provides a rich way of understanding how education can go wrong.[3] Three definitions of indoctrination are common (Snook, 1992). If person X has convinced person Y that proposition P is correct, when is this interaction properly considered indoctrination? One view holds that the necessary and sufficient conditions depend on the *intentions* of X. The second view is concerned with the *methods* X used to convince Y that P is correct. The third view argues that one need only consider the *content* of P.

Intentions

A teacher is educating when his or her intention is to help learners to come to think for themselves, and to think critically about their beliefs. Indoctrination occurs, according to this view, when an indoctrinator intends to inculcate her students with unshakable beliefs and to stifle critical thinking. A person indoctrinates P (a proposition or set of propositions) if teaching with the intention that pupils will believe P regardless of the evidence.

However, three problems arise with the argument for intentions as a sufficient criterion of indoctrination. First, it seems clear that there can be the intention to indoctrinate without indoctrination occurring. A science teacher educator may intend a student teacher to believe the importance of hands-on science without question, but the student may not adopt the belief. If the intentions fall on deaf ears, no indoctrination will have occurred. Intentions are contingent, not necessary. Second, the opposite circumstance can occur. Indoctrination may occur without its being intended. Taking a silly example, a multicultural education instructor wants her students to challenge her critically, so she plays devil's advocate. She tells the class that people from Asia are inferior to people from Africa, and gives some non-rational reasons, such as a taller population is better than a shorter population. If this assertion is consistent with a student's existing beliefs, he or she may not think critically and may accept this claim on the basis of authority, ignoring any other evidence which may dispute the claim. This student has been indoctrinated without the teacher having the intention to do so. Once again we can see that intentions are not necessary to indoctrination. Third, another problem for the intention criterion as the key to indoctrination is that it fails to delineate between different beliefs. There are certain things that a teacher would intend unshakable belief that we would not consider indoctrination. For example, a teacher educator can intend to teach his or her student teachers their legal responsibilities. This teacher may not show any evidence, simply telling the students the facts and refusing to discuss or elaborate them. We might call this poor educational practice, but do we wish to call this indoctrination? I don't think so.

As I mentioned above, much of the literature in teacher education is predicated on good intentions. Critical refection is widely seen as an important means of enabling student teachers to questions their prior beliefs, but I see little evidence that most teacher educators are concerned to enable student teachers to critically examine the teacher educators' beliefs. Seen in this way, intentions are not useful in helping us to understand the tension between George and Darla because each had excellent intentions. However, intention does play a role in unethical and illegitimate teaching methods, as I discuss shortly.

Methods

According to the second view, an indoctrinator intentionally or unintentionally uses methods of instruction that lead to indoctrination. The fact that this practice can happen unintentionally is important in cases in which the indoctrinator is him or herself indoctrinated, or is simply unaware or incapable of employing methods that would not indoctrinate.

Hamm (1989) divides the methods into three kinds: legitimate practices, poor teaching, and unethical methods. Legitimate practices include illustration, explanation, memorization, and recitation. To be legitimate, a teacher must teach in a way that enables students to understand the claim being made, evidence and warrants supporting it, and to see that these are consistent (c.f., Toulman, 1958). Education of this kind is presumed to dominate the disciplines in Faculties of Arts and Science, and is assumed to be the norm of university teaching. These rational norms are contravened by the use of poor or unethical teaching methods.

Illegitimate methods are seen when teachers refuse to discuss a controversial issue, use cynicism in place of evidence, or use personal charm or threat of sanctions to persuade students. Unethical methods include selective use of evidence, suppression of counter-evidence, and disregard for criticism. Both illegitimate and unethical teaching methods are manipulative. Like all forms of manipulation, illegitimate and unethical methods need not be intentional. What distinguishes the two is that unethical methods are deceptive, intentionally manipulating information presented

to students to cause them to hold certain beliefs (c.f., Noggle, 1996).

Both illegitimate and unethical methods are problematic because they contravene our assumptions about rational and moral behavior:

> Acting manipulatively toward someone, then, is an affront to her as a rational and moral being; for it is an attempt to thwart her moral and rational agency, which has as its goal the correct adjustment of her psychological levers. To attempt to thwart the goals someone has qua rational moral agent is to fail to respect her rational moral agency. And since a person's rational moral agency is crucial to her personhood, to fail to respect it is to degrade her; it is to treat her as less than a person. And for that reason it is wrong. (Noggle, 1996, p. 52)

Manipulative teaching methods, especially deceptive ones, fail to respect, maintain, and develop students' rational and moral agency.

It seems unlikely that legitimate methods could be indoctrinative. As well, poor teaching does not necessarily result in indoctrination, although it may if it is consistent and programmatic. However, unethical teaching methods possibly may be at the root of indoctrination. Indoctrination for most people connotes such detestable methods as distorting evidence, programmatic definitions, or intimidation to stop discussion. These methods should not be considered acceptable educational practices, and it can be said indoctrination demands such methods because of the nature of the content.

In the not-too-distant past, teacher educators tended to use illegitimate and even unethical methods: lectures with little opportunity for discussion, sanctions for not following prescribed methods or beliefs, and use of personal authority in place of clear reasons (Boote, Wideen, Mayer-Smith, & Yazon, 2001). While teacher education has shifted in the last several decades to emphasize good teaching methods (Boote, Wideen, Mayer-Smith, & Moon, 1998), I see little evidence that these ethically superior practices have been adopted primarily out of concern for developing rational beliefs. Rather, it seems that teacher educators are primarily concerned with the instrumental value of

these methods because they are deemed more effective for changing student teachers' beliefs and behaviors.

Unfortunately, unethical and illegitimate methods are inadequate to establish indoctrination. An indoctrinator can use a multitude of different methods, some of which are legitimate. As well, there is no consensus about which of the above methods can be considered indoctrinating. As I discuss in more detail below, rational teaching methods frequently fail, so teacher educators must occasionally use non-rational methods for legitimate purposes. Furthermore, there is no necessity that an indoctrinator must use nefarious methods. Rather, methods are always parasitic on doctrinal content.

Content

The words 'indoctrination' and 'doctrine' have a clear etymological connection. Indoctrination means literally imparting doctrines. However, the concept of indoctrination has evolved so the literal meaning need not take precedent. The contention that doctrines are essential to indoctrination must go beyond the etymological connection.

To understand the argument in favor of doctrines as necessary to indoctrination, we must have a clear concept of doctrine. Doctrines are particular kinds of beliefs (adapted from Kazepides, 1987, p. 235)

(1) Doctrines are unfalsifiable, concerning the existence of beings, states of affairs, or relationships that are not amenable to empirical consideration. For example, the constructivist nature of learning science is, in principle, unfalsifiable. We can find plenty of evidence that seems to support this view of learning and some evidence that methods consistent with this principle enable students to learn better. However, we cannot design an intervention what would show us that this principle is incorrect. More generally, Egan (1978) argues that all curricular positions make ethical, epistemological, and ontological presuppositions that are not amenable to empirical investigation.[4]

(2) Doctrines are neither criteria of rationality nor irrationality. While we might believe that a student teacher who fails to believe the constructivist nature of learning is incorrect, we

would not assert that she or he is irrational. Rather, it would be more appropriate to describe someone who rejects the dominant presuppositions of a community as a "heretic." In contrast, we would become concerned about the rationality of a student teacher seriously blaming her or his effectiveness on invisible little monkeys.

(3) Doctrines usually, but not always, act as guiding principles for interpreting the world or the existence of people in the world. Science teacher educators are not merely interested that student teachers believe that learning science is best seen as a constructive, they wish that student teachers see all learning (and failures to learn) in this way.

(4) While doctrines are descriptive propositions, they usually also have a prescriptive and proscriptive function. Science teacher educators want student teachers not only to see student learning as constructed, but also to design their curriculum to be consistent with this belief and avoid activities that are inconsistent.

(5) The institution or authority that upholds the doctrines uses them in a prescriptive manner over the daily lives of individuals. Science teacher educators use their positions of authority to insist that student teachers design their curricula and teaching practices to be consistent with a constructivist perspective. They also seek to influence provincial and national curricula for the same reason.[5]

Kazepides (1987) argues that all paradigmatic cases of indoctrination meet conditions 1, 2, and 5, and most meet conditions 3 and 4. Therefore, he argues, doctrines are essential to indoctrination.

Speaking of doctrines in teacher education may seem out of place. Except those teacher educators with overt religious or political convictions, I doubt that any see it as their job to teach 'doctrines' as such. Yet, many ideas that are fundamental to contemporary educational discourse – such as multiculturalism, constructivism, liberalism – fulfill Kazepides' criteria for doctrinal content. My point here is not to question these ideals, but to question the ethical basis of teaching them to preservice teachers.

Indoctrination – Strong and Weak

As I discussed, only with caution do I introduce the concept of indoctrination to describe the practices of teacher educators. I'm cautious because of the various ways the word is used. When some people use the word, they have certain exemplar cases in minds, usually involving ideological, religious, or political indoctrination. For this reason, Kazepides (1989) argues convincingly that the word indoctrination ought to be reserved for the most despicable trespasses on human freedom in which doctrine overcomes reasoned thought. At the same time, try as I might, I cannot find another word in the English language to convey what I believe people mean when they use the word indoctrination in a more loose sense. When George complains that Darla has 'indoctrinated' their common student teachers because they are unwilling and unable to consider his arguments, he is pointing at some very important phenomena for which we don't have a ready concept if we insist on using the word indoctrination in a narrow way.

For this reason I feel the need to distinguish between strong and weak senses of indoctrination, although the distinction between them is best described as vague. The strong sense is characterized by the teaching of doctrines *qua* doctrines, in which cases the content criterion is sufficient. This situation may seem to cover paradigm cases of religious and political indoctrination. If we accept this articulation of the strong sense of indoctrination, it is clear that any teacher educator who uses her or his position of authority to enforce these religious or political doctrines is guilty of indoctrination.

In contrast, Siegel (1991) puts forward an articulation of indoctrination distinct from the three positions outlined above. That is, Y has been indoctrinated if she holds that P is true without evidence to support it, or considers evidence against P to be irrelevant. Thus, it is Y's *style of belief* that is the crucial determinant of indoctrination – that is, dogmatic beliefs. A teacher has indoctrinated a student when that student does not or cannot question on the basis of evidence, or reason the validity or truth of the belief. In this way, questionable intentions, methods, and content, while neither necessary nor sufficient for indoctrination, all tend to promote non-evidential, non-critical

beliefs. If a student holds beliefs on a reasoned basis and is willing to critically examine evidence against the belief knowing that she or he may have to change that belief, then that student has not been indoctrinated. This definition of indoctrination is clearly much broader than Kazepides' and seems consistent with George's concern. I call this the weak case of indoctrination.

However, if we accept this articulation of indoctrination, it would seem impossible to teach many things without indoctrinating. For this reason, Siegel (1991) makes the critical distinction between indoctrination and *non-indoctrinative belief inculcation*. If we accept that education, in the true sense, serves to increase a student's ability to reason and be creative, then this distinction becomes important. We cannot teach the importance of reasoned thinking in a reasoned fashion; until a person understands certain things, reason is not possible. We must inculcate certain beliefs and attitudes so that students will be able to behave in a reasoned way later. I return to this important caveat below.

To more fully understand the concept of indoctrination, we need to identify why it disturbs us. Could it be simply the methods, content, intention, or style of belief that disturbs us about indoctrination? I believe not. While there may be some intellectual disdain for a religious or political group teaching certain beliefs, this practice is not enough to evoke the revile we have for indoctrinators. Nor are we simply disturbed by people who hold beliefs in a dogmatic fashion. Rather, what disturbs us is what indoctrinated people will *do* as a result of their beliefs. What bothers us is the universality, prescriptivity, and coercive social power of doctrines that I discussed above. George is worried about what his student teachers will do as a result of their dogmatic beliefs, not the beliefs themselves. He is worried about the way they will teach as a result of those beliefs. As well, he is worried that they may not be able to question those beliefs or be able to explore other ways of teaching.

In the paradigm cases, religious and political indoctrination requires people to do certain things and not do other things. In and of themselves, these practices *may* well be unobjectionable. They are more likely to be objectionable in two circumstances. First, when dogmatically held beliefs produce behaviors that

negatively affect the rights of other people, we become worried. Second, when beliefs are held dogmatically, people are unable to adjust their behavior to be contextually appropriate. Doctrinal claims are all embracing and contextually invariant.

I have argued elsewhere that the core criterion of being educated as a teacher is the ability to develop professional autonomy (Boote, in review). Teacher education curricula must enable student teachers to develop a generative core of competencies that will enable them to meet the complex, competing demands made of teachers. As well, it must enable them to develop the self-control and procedural independence required for acting upon their professional deliberations and decide among options without being unduly influenced by other's opinions. Student teachers' self-control may be compromised when teacher educators prevent them from being able to deliberate about their practice or act upon those deliberations. This practice gives rise to a tension (and perhaps a dilemma) between enabling specific competencies and dispositions that we as teacher educators believe student teachers should command, and the desire that they not be unduly influenced by us. This analysis makes it clear that understanding the nature of indoctrination is important in teacher education.

A clearly wrought concept, such as this conceptual analysis provides, is a lovely thing to behold. So too is an unambiguous (if still somewhat vague) normative proscription: thou shalt not induce thy students to hold dogmatic beliefs that will lead them to teach in contextually invariant ways. Amen.

A Reality Break

If we accept the claim for the importance of inculcating professional autonomy and the concomitant prohibition against leading student teachers to hold their beliefs dogmatically, we have accepted the other horn of a dilemma. Teacher educators have become rather anxious to find and improve their methods of changing beliefs and values, for very good reasons. In their review, Wideen, Mayer-Smith, & Moon (1998) found that most research describes student teachers as having firmly held, contextually invariant beliefs, a condition we might describe as 'indoctrinated' in the weak sense. Most preservice students are

unable to rationally defend their beliefs and practices, and tend
to exhibit an inability to adapt their teaching to changing
contexts. Further, all researchers reviewed agreed that those pre-
existing beliefs are not generally conducive to good teaching or
improving the quality of schooling. As a result of the beliefs they
develop before they engage in formal teacher training, their
educational practices would be viewed by most as objectionable.
As Ashton (1996) argues, while we may bemoan the inadequacies
of the dominant teacher education models, they are a significant
improvement over no training. On a broader scale, many teacher
educators are very concerned about social inequalities, and the
need to better socialize citizens or train employability skills. They
see their work with student teachers as a means of addressing
these social problems.

I suspect that even in cases where teacher educators explicitly
hold both of these normative positions, they do not believe that
they are contradictory. But these clear normative concepts need
to be tempered by reality – *ought* implies *is*[6] – because there is
ample evidence that teacher educators can only very rarely
accomplish both aims. I have identified three widely-held
descriptive claims about the nature of teacher education: the
ineffectiveness of most teacher education programs, the
overwhelming difficulty of changing beliefs in non-manipulative
ways, and the reality of epistemic dependence. These three
problems show that teacher educators cannot, in good faith, hope
to achieve both meritorious belief change and enable professional
autonomy in student teachers at the same time.

Programs
While the nature and structure of teacher education programs
vary greatly, a few generalizations seem to hold, especially for
programs that are deemed to be less successful. They provide
relatively little focused time on educational issues or their
relationship to practice, in piece-meal, lecture-based programs
which leave the students to integrate the (at times antagonistic)
beliefs they acquire through their disparate courses (Boote et al.,
1998). Taken together, these common characteristics of teacher
education programs make it very hard for student teachers to
develop well-reasoned beliefs about education and schooling. In

this kind of institutional climate, it is little wonder that teacher educators have difficulties.

The common response to programmatic problems is the frequent call to change those characteristics of teacher education programs. But as we show in a recent analysis of the history of Canadian teacher education these efforts at improving teacher education programs systematically underestimate the important tradition in program reform. The very features of teacher education programs that are the most problematic are also the hardest to change because they run to the root of the teacher educators' social power and authority (Boote, et al., 2001).

Persuasion

The picture is made even gloomier by Pajares' (1992) observation that on those relatively rare occasions when student teachers do change their beliefs, they exhibit a Gestalt shift from one paradigmatic position to another. While teacher educators have mainly used psychological constructivism (c.f., Richardson, 1997) to understand the difficulty of encouraging belief change, social psychologists have long understood the difficulty. As social psychologists such as Tversky (1972) have shown, even very well-educated people revert to heuristic (i.e., non-rational) means of reasoning in areas in which they have little competence. People are awash in information, and continually expected to make decisions about the truth or validity of ideas without having to engage in prolonged deliberations. Rather than considering all the complexities of an issue, people typically rely on one or a few factors, especially when issues are complicated. This is especially important to remember in teacher education where few issues are uncomplicated. Teacher educators typically have spent years studying the topics they teach; their students spend at best weeks.

Social psychologists have long understood how to manipulate these heuristic means of reasoning (Cialdini, 1987). These methods tacitly encourage people to adjust their beliefs, attitudes, and practices so that there is consistency among their sense of self, knowledge appraisals, values, and peer groups. This alignment is not least what made it so difficult for George to work with his student teachers. Intentionally or not, Darla managed to

inculcate in her beliefs about science education in a way that her student teachers found to be consistent with their notions of themselves as teachers, that expressed their values, and was socially validated. Teacher education practices which only account for one of the four are unlikely to have much affect. Yet teacher educators who revert to these non-rational means of persuading student teachers are open to charges of manipulating those students.

Epistemic Dependence

Setting aside these substantial pedagogical, programmatic, and psychological problems, there remains an important epistemological problem. My analysis of indoctrination presumes that intellectual independence is central to rational behavior. Hardwig (1985) analyzes the notions of intellectual independence and finds it significantly lacking in credibility. Whereas this notion of rationality requires each individual to understand the reasons and warrants for their beliefs, Hardwig correctly points out that most of our beliefs are not held in this way. For instance, I believe that the moon is a satellite of Earth, that HIV causes AIDS, and that schools are racist and sexist institutions. I am non-expert on these issues and I must, in varying degrees, rely on expert opinions. Hardwig claims that because I am a non-expert, I ought rationally to refuse to think for myself and passively accept the opinion of experts. As a non-expert on the moon, AIDS, and school racism and sexism, I have reason to believe that experts have better warranted reasons for their beliefs than I. Because I must rely on their expert opinions, my intellectual independence is suspect.

This said, I argued above that we must inculcate a generative core of beliefs so that students will eventually gain professional autonomy. But when we consider the great number of beliefs about students, education, schooling, and society, student teachers must learn to behave as educational experts believe they must. It seems utterly preposterous to assert that teacher educators can enable all their student teachers to have intellectual independence. The corollary of epistemic dependence, Hardwig claims, is that we must also reject the presupposition of individual cognitive responsibility. As a teacher educator, I

frequently lead my student teachers to believe that I am an expert on certain issues. I then encourage them to believe certain things about education because I, an expert, have told them that these are the rational things to believe. But if Hardwig is correct, it is now I, the expert teacher educator, who is responsible for their beliefs and, more importantly, the ways they act as a result of those beliefs. There's the rub – or at least part of it.

Fortunately, Siegel (1988) provides a little more nuance for this problem. He reminds us that student teachers are still responsible for their decision to believe that we, teacher educators, are experts. In so far as teacher educators do not mislead them about our expertise, they cannot be held responsible for student teachers' irrational intellectual dependence on us. We also need to remember that we are only responsible for their behavior in so far as it is consistent with the likelihood that we, the experts, are correct. Given the weak epistemic position of much of what counts for educational knowledge (Labaree, 1998), a certain degree of modesty is necessary and our students need to be aware of the highly contingent and contextual nature of the knowledge of educational experts. This said, I suspect that epistemic dependence is the least of teacher educators' problems. As I have already discussed, teacher educators have a greater difficulty persuading student teachers that they have any expertise whatsoever, let alone that they should act on it.

'Dilemma,' not 'Problematic Situation'

On one horn of the dilemma is a normative claim that teacher educators have a clear ethical injunction to promote the epistemic independence of their student teachers. On the other horn of the dilemma is the ethical injunction that teacher educators should inculcate values and beliefs that will improve the quality of teaching and learning in the school. Further, there are several reasons to believe that teacher educators cannot do both of these things at the same time, and that effort at one will contravene the other:

1) student teachers existing beliefs and values leave them poorly prepared to face the very difficult conditions of schooling;

2) most teacher education programs are poorly designed to educate teachers;

3) teacher educators have limited ability to persuade and influence beginning teachers in non-manipulative ways;

4) the reality of epistemic dependence and the poor epistemic position of the knowledge we seek to inculcate.

That is, teacher educators face a dilemma, not a mere problematic situation. Framed in this way, the teacher education community is faced with a seemingly bleak prospect. As Katz and Raths (1992) discuss, dilemmas cannot be solved but they can be approached dialectically and we can interrogate the questions themselves. Perhaps, then, readers might prefer to see the dilemma I construct as an invitation to reflexively examine our beliefs and practices, and an invitation to further discuss the ethical basis of our work. Two general approaches seem possible.

First, perhaps the ethical standards I have argued for here are too high, or miss the mark somewhere. Considering the present difficulties in changing the beliefs and practices of teachers, does layering this ethical principle on top make the job of teacher educators untenable? Perhaps. Surely, seeking only to avoid indoctrination is a barren ethics to apply to the difficult work of teaching teachers, but I am hard pressed to not see it as an absolute minimal criterion. Maybe the ethical claim to improve schools outweighs our uneasiness at manipulating student teachers. Remember that Siegel (1991) asserted that what and how we teach must 'eventually' lead our students to hold those beliefs in a reasoned fashion. If we are relatively incapable of enabling our students to hold their beliefs in non-dogmatic ways, which enable contextual flexibility, perhaps we are better to simply train them into the right beliefs and practices, and hope that they will eventually come to hold these beliefs and practices in a rational way. Or maybe promoting professional autonomy will naturally lead student teachers to better address the problems of schooling. I suspect that neither of these answers will satisfy most teacher educators.

Second, perhaps my empirical claims are contentious and there is indeed some means of accommodating both ethical injunctions at once. This second approach seems to be the focus of most attempts at teacher education reform. These efforts

include: reducing epistemic dependence of student teachers on their teacher educators by promoting reflective practice; improving the pedagogical practice of teacher educators to improve their ability to persuade student teachers; improving the quality of our programs to educate student teachers; and improving the quality of applicants to teacher education programs. The fact that a few students manage to graduate from teacher education programs not indoctrinated may lead us to believe that this is not a dilemma proper. If we can do it for one, the tacit reasoning goes, then we can do it for the rest – if only we get the conditions right. Our relatively few successes drive enormous efforts.

But, like the heuristic reasoning I discussed above, I question whether teacher educators are ignoring the mass of evidence by focusing on the cases they prefer. Behind this suggestion is the fear that we do more harm than good in our efforts. I do not believe that this dilemma is reducible to a mere difficult situation. Attempts at program reform and improving instruction may incrementally ameliorate the dilemma for some teacher educators in some circumstances, but this tension remains fundamental to the beliefs and practices of teacher educators in a modern institution in a post-traditional society. If this analysis is correct, teacher educators continue to struggle with a fundamental dilemma in their practice.[7]

NOTES

1. Of course, there is substantial disagreement among teacher educators about the nature and relative importance of the problems facing schools or possible solutions.

2. "George" is a colleague and friend who wishes to remain anonymous. He has examined the way I present his comments in the case and agreed to allow me to publish it. It should be noted that George usually gets good to very good teaching evaluations from his work with pre- and in-service teachers. I was unable to discuss the situation with "Darla."

3. Readers need to understand that while the explicit subject is indoctrination, what is actually being debated is the licitness of religious, and occasionally political, education. This seems to be an appropriate language for discussing the beliefs and practices of teacher educators when we consider the strong political and ideological agenda of many teacher educators.

4. More specifically, these metaphysical presuppositions provide the basic support for doctrines, and inculcating these presuppositions is prerequisite for indoctrination. For example, someone taking a psychological constructivist position in science education would generally presuppose: (a) that children are intrinsically good and able to make meaning without elaborate constraints on their learning, (b) that what is most important is a child's beliefs and what they come to believe, and (c) that it is what a child will be able to do in the future that is most important. These presuppositions are in stark contrast with more traditional views of science education which presuppose that (a) children need elaborate guidance to learn, (b) that accepted scientific knowledge is what is most important, and (c) that what is most important is that the child learn the dominant beliefs about science. Of course, neither the psychological constructivist position nor the traditional position are without internal dissent, but this descent is mainly at the level of unrecognized differences in presuppositions. My thanks to Kieran Egan for helping me to clarify this point.

5. While contemporary teacher education and schooling are relatively weak at enforcing sanctioned beliefs compared to traditional religious and political organizations, it is a difference in degree, not of kind.

6. For example, there is a clear normative proscription against killing other people. But if a killing happens because of extenuating psychological or social circumstances then the killer is not culpable of murder.

7. Another possibility, to be fashionably reflexive, is that this so-called dilemma is in fact an artifact of my methodology. My analysis may have lead me astray through my choice of distinctions, inappropriate normative weighting, or that the empirical generalizations my analysis rests upon are faulty.

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