



Higher Education of Social Science
Vol. 4, No. 2, 2013, pp. 37-40
DOI:10.3968/j.hess.1927024020130402.3380

ISSN 1927-0232 [Print]
ISSN 1927-0240 [Online]
www.cscanada.net
www.cscanada.org

Parallelism in Teaching and Indoctrination

Francis E. Ekanem^{[a],*}

^[a] Ph.D, Faculty of Arts, Department of Philosophy, University of Uyo, Uyo, Nigeria.

* Corresponding author.

Received 1 December 2012; accepted 14 January 2013

Abstract

Teaching has a pedagogical content that is often carried out by instructors (teachers) who drill, inculcate and transmit certain body of “established” knowledge to pupils. This activity is mostly carried out at the expense of critical and reflective thinking on the part of the pupils whose ability for a free and unhindered reflection is often eroded. This paper attempts to show how indoctrination thrives on the wings of teaching; it will further show that indoctrination is at the heart of the bane of teaching as a noble profession and that both concepts are at variance with each other even though they seem to be sublimely connected.

Key words: Teaching; Indoctrination; Parallelism; Critical and reflective thinking

Francis E. Ekanem (2013). Parallelism in Teaching and Indoctrination. *Higher Education of Social Science*, 4(2), 37-40. Available from: <http://www.cscanada.net/index.php/hess/article/view/j.hess.1927024020130402.3380>
DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.3968/j.hess.1927024020130402.3380>

INTRODUCTION

We shall not pretend in affirming that it is not really easy to draw a line of distinction between teaching and indoctrination as the two concepts are so closely knitted together making it susceptible for an easy swap in terms of transmission of erroneous beliefs and ideas to the pupils.

Indoctrination therefore, seems to find comfortable wings in teaching on which it thrives since teaching is a mode of transmission of ideas and knowledge. Little wonder, when one has a doctrine or dogma to transmit

it is usually carried out via teaching. It is still a puzzling situation to reconcile how certain body of knowledge after been taught can lead to a person tying a bomb around his/her waist ready to be blown up as the aftermath of such teaching. One may call such a scenario “brainwashing” but upon a closer reflection, it would be discovered that there is a lot of inter-connection between words and actions.

The issue of indoctrination is one that affects educational practice and the society at large. The pupils are often seen as banks where deposits are made by the teachers. In most cases, they pupils swallow all they are given hook, line and sinker without so much the opportunity to reflect upon what they are told by their instructors. Hence, they go about with all forms of unverified beliefs which have not been scrutinized either through reason or experiential proof. This perhaps informs Huttunen’s (2003) assertion that “in the philosophy of education, the concept of indoctrination refers to unethical influencing in a teaching situation”.

In other words, indoctrination refers to infiltrating the innocent minds of the students in order for them to view reality from a false perspective. It is also a means of misrepresenting reality and altering concepts, attitudes, beliefs and theories in order to achieve the immoral intention and goals of the teacher.

One of the values of philosophy of education is the critical tools it provides by which reflection about educational concepts and practice can be analyzed. Bah (1997) averring in line with this point, stressed the importance of philosophical reflection thus:

The truly philosophical mind is that which is neither happy because it possesses absolute knowledge, nor that which is unhappy because it is battling with irremediable scepticism. The truly philosophical mind is that which is anxious and unsatisfied with what it possesses now but which at the same time is eager to discover some relative truths, the object of its inquiry. Reflection may be regarded as a to and fro movement of the mind itself – whereby it puts in question the ideas it already possesses (p.6).

Our major focus in this work is to delineate properly in a context, the dividing line between teaching and indoctrination and to point out the gray area of indoctrination in a teaching process as these will enlighten our understanding about the moral burdens of indoctrination that the students need not bear. Let us begin by looking closely at the concept of teaching.

1. WHAT IS TEACHING?

Teaching is a concept that may at first sight, not pose a problem because it is somewhat very familiar to all especially as it designate what happens between a teacher and her pupils mostly but not restricted to a classroom setting. Here we have an instructor who stands before a class of pupils with a command of authority who in the process transmit certain body of knowledge to them. Teaching however goes deeper than a teacher standing before pupils and imparting knowledge to the students. It involves systems, procedures, methods and approaches that may be somewhat technical. This is where the concept of effective teaching becomes quite valuable and necessary.

Teaching has been defined severally by different authors depending on their ideological bent, beliefs or pure conviction. The school as a specialize institution is where teaching is formally carried out. This is not to say that teaching cannot be done in an informal setting. The whole idea of teaching suggests two important factors which are the teacher and the one being taught. We will agree that the one being taught has a mind that accumulates the facts that are deposited in him. This mind can be allowed to develop into a critical consciousness or it can be hampered when it cannot be engaged in free and independent critical inquiry. It is perhaps the plausibility of this position that made Uche and Kalu (2009) to opine that: an important aspect of teaching is its goal – oriented nature. Like most human activities, teaching is directed towards the achievement of specific goals. It is for this reason that teaching is considered a “purposive activity” (p. 239).

The afore-quoted will generally lead us to asking such questions as: what is really the goal of teaching? Is it to make the pupils see the world from the teacher’s lens? Is it for the pupils to recite and mimic what the teacher has taught? Does the pupil have the right to rebel against what he is being taught? Is the teacher always right such that his authority cannot be questioned? Is not the teacher also transmitting the beliefs and dogmas that he was once taught as a pupil? Can and should the pupil operate outside the box of the teacher? All these are philosophical questions in regard to the goals of teaching with enormous varied implications. Hence, Ornstein and Levine (1989) give the following advice: “...an awareness of the importance of the decision to enter the teaching field is essential. Your reasons for choosing teaching as a career will undoubtedly affect your attitude and behaviour with your students when you eventually become a teacher” (p.4).

From the above quotation, it is quite clear that the pupil is at the mercy of the teacher who can leave him enlightened or disillusioned because the pupil learns from the teacher. He is one who learns by being taught. If the pupil knows it all, he would have no need of a teacher. Following this basis, Oakeshott (1970) opines thus:

The activity of the teacher is, then specified in the first place by the character of his partner. The ruler is partnered by the citizen, the physician by his patient, the master by his servant, the commander by his subordinates, the lawyer by his client, the prophet by his disciple, the clown by his audience... Each of these is engaged in a practical activity, but it is not teaching; each has a partner but it is not a pupil. Teaching is not taming or ruling or restoring to health, or conditioning, or commanding, because none of these activities is possible in relation to a pupil... The teacher communicates something to his partner; his peculiarity is that what he communicates is appropriate to a partner who is a pupil. It is something which may be received only by being learned (p.157-158).

The authority of the teacher becomes quite pronounced from the analysis of Oakeshott and this authority has an end in view and that is to communicate certain body of knowledge to the pupils in a language they will understand that will eventually lead to their being learned. This is to say that teaching is not complete until the pupil has learned or retained something. Oakeshott (1970) going further defines teaching as:

The deliberate and intentional initiation of a pupil into the world of human achievement, or into some part of it. The teacher is one whose utterances (or silences) are designed to promote this initiation in respect of a pupil. That is, in respect of a learner whom he recognizes to be ready to receive what he has resolved to communicate. In short, a pupil is a learner known to a teacher; and teaching, properly speaking, is impossible in his absence (p.159-160).

We shall not so much bother about some of the claims made by Oakeshott here. But our concern is on the deliberate and intentional initiation of a pupil into the world of human achievement. These seems to be very true of teaching as most of what the pupil is taught is an already established body of knowledge about the world either by reason or experience. Hence, we will not be wrong to aver that it is from this pigeon hole that indoctrination is usually perpetrated via teaching. Before we devote some time to analyzing this position, let us briefly consider the concept of indoctrination.

2. THE CONCEPT OF INDOCTRINATION

The concept of indoctrination is usually held to be synonymous in meaning to teaching or instruction. This is why it could be argued that when a teacher teaches, what he is simply doing is indoctrinating the pupils into a particular body of knowledge who then sees reality from his lens view. However, indoctrination goes deeper than these. It involves the intention of the teacher in teaching especially when he is poised to distort knowledge either overtly or

covertly in order to achieve certain purpose(s). Thus, Uche (2009) sees indoctrination as involving “the transmission of doctrines, beliefs, attitudes, perception, etc that are considered suspicious through the use of instructional methods that are morally objectionable” (p. 253).

One would then ask: does indoctrination always tilt towards immoral actions or conducts? Is it not possible for pupils to be indoctrinated and yet not take to a moral course of action? May be it is due to the fact that indoctrination seem to find expression in immoral evil, that is why it is always associated with immorality.

However the power and connection of indoctrination via teaching and the execution of a particular course of action cannot be overemphasized. For instance, it is a well known fact that most terrorist and suicide bombers are often taught certain body of doctrine or “truth” that makes suicide bombing easy to execute. Why it becomes difficult most times for the pupil to probe into the truth of what is being taught to them is when those teachings are beyond empirical evidence and are metaphysical in outlook. Other reasons could be ignorance on the part of the pupils, lack of free discussion, irrationality, unverified belief and the shrouded intention of the teacher.

Akinpelu (1981) holds that indoctrination is more subtle than conditioning but not less unacceptable as a means of changing people’s beliefs or behaviour. He further avers that:

To indoctrinate a person is to make a person accept certain types of beliefs (doctrines and dogmas) in a way that shuts out the learner’s ability or freedom to ask questions or raise doubts about it...all these characteristics run contrary to some of the criteria of teaching. The most important is that they are not morally acceptable; they do not respect the right of the learner to do his own learning, they do not respect his intellectual integrity, nor do they involve his reason, understanding or judgement (p.198-199).

Indoctrination is often very pronounced in the military as a belief system. Such belief may also involve political ideology, religious dogmas and economic doctrines. Indoctrination is also common place in cultural and traditional setting. To be able to delineate indoctrination in education and especially in teaching will require a very thorough painstaking philosophical analysis that the mind is capable of. That we shall attempt in the preceding outline.

3. POLARIZATION OF TEACHING AND INDOCTRINATION

Prima facie, let it be reiterated that teaching and indoctrination are two parallel lines that ought not to meet. They are two distinct Polar Regions that are ontologically different. So if for any reason, indoctrination flourishes in teaching then, the teacher is at the centre of it.

Indoctrination subtly infiltrate into teaching and carries out its agenda via the teacher. This can be understood from the perspective that teaching is a more direct way

of transmitting knowledge. Thus, Davey (1972) gives us some insight into deciphering the subtle nature of indoctrination when a teacher:

Make rules without explanation, who command needlessly, who exact obedience without reason, or who consider that their authority can be established simply by appeals to convention and indoctrinate in the most fundamental way. They create a closed self validating judiciary and implant a distorted view of the relationship which obtains between the teacher and the taught, superior and subordinate, the government and the governed (p.55).

From Davey’s analysis, it becomes very pertinent that the teacher has certain duties and obligations to fulfil. By virtue of his stand-point as a teacher, it behoves on him to be professional in his words and conducts, leaving his ideologies and convictions aside in trying to present reality from a well balance point of view giving the pupils the leverage to free and unhindered critical thinking and reflection. This ought to be so because teachers are seen as custodians of knowledge in a noble profession. They are to preserve for posterity the right kind of knowledge that will be of great benefit to the pupils. Underscoring this point, Hirst and Peters (1979) makes the following submission:

Teachers, it is argued, should not regard their pupils just as potential recipients of knowledge and skill; they should enter into personal relationships with them. The classroom should not be like a parade ground in which generation after generation of reluctant recruits are lined into shape; rather it should be permeated by a happy atmosphere which is a by-product of good personal relationships (p.88).

A very important question we must try to answer at this juncture is: how is knowledge to be transmitted to the pupil without it leading to indoctrination owing to the fact that a teacher must teach his pupils and that rationally? One truth that cannot be altered is that the pupils to be taught are still pure and tender at heart. They are at the receiving end of the teacher who is to provide guidance and enlightenment to their ignorance since they may not be intelligent or rational enough to think outside the box. Thus, the teacher will obviously be an indoctrinator and his conduct reprehensible when according to Schofield (1980) he: attempts to inculcate into the minds of his pupils his own beliefs and attitudes, and also ideas which are by no means certain without the suggestion of possible alternatives (p.181).

Getting across “essentially disputatious propositions” according to Woods and Barrow (1975, p. 71) such as the aspect of teaching literature, history, civics, moral or religious education may pose a contentious issue to indoctrination because of the very nature of these subjects via their truth contents. Thus, the teacher may find himself indoctrinating the pupils in the course of teaching. A major confusion this situation will lead to is closely captured in the following lines:

If the teacher provides too much guidance and leadership, if he tells the pupil everything he needs to know, if he exercises an indisputable and weighty authority, the pupil is liable to

find himself on a path with the sun in his eyes, blinding him and preventing him from picking out the route for himself. On the other hand, if the teacher gives no guidance or leadership, if he tells the child nothing, and makes him find his own way unaided, the child finds himself on the same path, this time in total darkness, without even the minimal light necessary to see his way (Schofield, 1980, p.273).

It follows therefore that indoctrination however subtle can still part ways with teaching. Firstly, the two concepts have two different ontological pinning and are not in any way contemporaneous. Hence, indoctrination can be easily discerned if certain sets of beliefs are held to be absolute without any room for critical reflection. This kind of conclusive teaching will necessarily make the pupils to see the world from the point of view of the teacher. If these go on for a long time, the pupils may begin to construct a world that is illusory, deceptive and erroneous.

The discourse on indoctrination is a worrisome issue that should be taken very seriously as it has the potential to destroy worthwhile educational pursuit and progress. Since every grown up adult has certain prejudice, belief system or idiosyncrasies, it behoves on the teacher to know when to draw the line between teaching and creating room for interaction, questions and opinions about a matter which should be an open-open one. This is very instructive because the teacher is seen as wielding tremendous authority and influence over the pupils because he has acquired certain knowledge and has certain power vested on him by those who accept him into their society as a teacher. This authority can be used for good or evil. It can make “harmful content harmless or harmless content potential dynamite” (Schofield, 1980, p.182).

Finally, it must be clearly stated that indoctrination is condemned on the premises that it alters reality, misrepresenting truths and taking advantage of the innocent minds of the pupils thereby dehumanizes the personality of the victim by stamping it with doctrines that are immoral and closed up to private reason. As Morris and Pai (1976) will say “belief has consequences”, we may so add that the consequences of indoctrination on the pupils, leaves so much to be desired.

CONCLUSION

From our analysis so far, it is at least clear that indoctrination thrives on the wings of teaching so much that without teaching, such erroneous doctrines may be difficult to transmit. Another finding of this work is that both concepts are different and cannot be used as meaning one and the same thing.

Furthermore, it is a truism that while discussing the evil of indoctrination, the pupils becomes the major focus

of protection as they are tender and mild at heart and may not by their standing, have enough information about a particular matter and thus cannot question the authenticity of the claims made by the teacher.

As we conclude, the major point to note as far as this work is concern is the negative consequences that indoctrination breeds especially as it has the potentials to place in the heart of the pupils, a dangerous position that may have a destructive effect on a large scale. In as much as the line separating teaching and indoctrination is very thin, it becomes necessary for the teacher to adopt an open door policy where the pupils mind can be engaged in free critical reflection and thinking that will not erode their innate potentials and ability. The teacher, on a large scale should be a guide to the pupils and not a dictator.

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