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CAN TEACHER CANDIDATES BE INDOCTRINATED?

Mordechai Gordon[1]

[1]*Professor of Education, School of Education, Quinnipiac University*

Abstract

This essay begins to address the issue of indoctrination in the context of the education of teacher candidates based on the author's decades-long experience of working in a teacher preparation program in the northeastern part of the United States. After reviewing the relevant literature on indoctrination and education, the author introduces the reader to Professor K, an imaginary instructor in a teacher preparation program who assesses her teacher candidates, among other dispositions, on their ability to "commit to equity and social justice" and "advocate with courage for disadvantaged students." The author analyzes Professor K's expectations of her students as a case study of actions that border on indoctrination. He argues that such actions may lead to harming rather than helping teacher candidates develop into independent thinkers and responsible educators. Based on his analysis of this case study, the author concludes the paper with some implications and recommendations for teacher preparation programs.

Keywords

Indoctrination, Teacher Education, Teacher Candidates

Introduction

The issue of indoctrination in education is not a new topic of research and has received a considerable amount of attention from both philosophers and educators in the past fifty years. Ever since I.A. Snook's two books were published in 1972, *Indoctrination and Education* and *Concepts of Indoctrination: Philosophical Essay*s, philosophers of education have investigated this issue from a variety of perspectives. For instance, Harvey Seigel (1988), Alven Neiman (1989), Chris Hanks (2008), Rebecca Taylor (2017) John White (2017), Ruth Wareham (2019 & 2023), David Lewin (2022), Luke Armstrong (2022 & 2025), Chris Martin (2023) and Michael Hand (2025) have all conducted significant research on the topic of indoctrination and education. Still, most of the research on this topic analyzes the issue of indoctrination in the context of the education of children or adolescents, not adults. Virtually no research exists on the possibility of indoctrinating teacher candidates, which are adult students that are enrolled in a teacher preparation program, on the way to becoming teachers in their own classrooms.

This essay begins to address the issue of indoctrination in the context of the education of teacher candidates based on the author's decades-long experience of working in a teacher preparation program in the northeastern part of the United States. After reviewing the relevant literature on indoctrination and education, I introduce the reader to Professor K, an imaginary instructor in a teacher preparation program who assesses her teacher candidates, among other dispositions, on their ability to "commit to equity and social justice" and "advocate with courage for disadvantaged students." I analyze Professor K's expectations of her students as a case study of actions that border on indoctrination. I argue that such actions may lead to harming rather than helping teacher candidates develop into independent thinkers and responsible educators. Based on my analysis of this case study, I conclude the paper with some implications and recommendations for teacher preparation programs.

Literature Review

I mentioned in the introduction that most of the studies on indoctrination and education have been conducted in the context of the education of children. Exemplifying this trend is Snook's conceptual analysis of indoctrination, which emphasizes that education must be concerned with human rationality. In the conclusion to *Indoctrination and Education*, Snook (1972b) wrote:

> It seems to me that whenever a person sets out to educate he commits himself by the very fact to the importance of rationality. For what else could he mean by educating children other than to want them to know what is true rather that what is false and to do what is reasonable rather than what is unreasonable? (p. 109)

For Snook, education is incompatible with the goal of encouraging children to think or act irrationally. Pursuing such a goal, he believed, could not be properly called education and would most likely fall under the category of indoctrination.

Although Snook makes a fair point that education ought to assist students to think rationally, many scholars of indoctrination have recognized that when teaching children, the requirement to share reasons with them might not always make sense. Lewin (2022), for example, writes that "when we inculcate beliefs without sharing our reasons, it may be because young children are not yet capable of understanding them" (p. 619). David Copp's (2016) article "Moral Education versus Indoctrination" also focuses on the education of children and on comparing indoctrination to what he calls 'moral socialization.' For Copp, moral socialization is a matter of teaching children how to feel and how to behave:

> In moral socialization, among the things we aim to teach children is not to bully, not to cheat, and not to take advantage of others. We can do this in ways that do not involve teaching children what to believe. We can involve them in games that require cooperation, for instance. We can issue imperatives, such as 'Don't do that!' We can punish those who bully, cheat, and take advantage and reward those who refrain from these behaviors. (Copp, 2016, p. 158)

Copp's point is that much of what we teach young children regarding appropriate behavior and sentiment should not be considered indoctrination but rather socialization as it is aimed at helping them learn to cooperate and work together with others.

If it is indeed the case that indoctrination is different from socialization, how can we account for it in the realm of education? Snook's conceptual analysis considers four distinct criteria of indoctrination—method, content, consequences, and intention—and explains his reasons for rejecting most of these criteria. According to the method criterion, teachers engage in indoctrination when they conduct themselves as authoritarians, drilling content into their students' heads devoid of rational explanation, requiring students to memorize the material taught, and refusing to allow debate or critique of this content. However, Snook argues that the method criterion is vague and ambiguous and, therefore, fails to provide an adequate account of the phenomenon of indoctrination. Snook (1972b) writes that "the teacher explains concepts and rules, defines terms, poses questions, keeps order, sets homework, clarifies instructions, writes on the blackboard, supervises assignments, marks projects, acts as discussion leader, and so on. What method is he using?" (p. 22). His point is that in any given lesson, teachers typically use a variety of methods to instruct and engage their students. This simple fact makes it difficult, if not impossible, to distinguish the 'indoctrinating' techniques from those that are not or the 'educational' methods from those that undermine education.

The content criterion emphasizes the etymological connection between indoctrination and the word *doctrine*; those theorists that advocate this criterion insist that to indoctrinate implies the passing on of some form of doctrine. Snook points out that doctrines are types of beliefs that are transmitted to people without the possibility of questioning or critiquing them. The most frequently cited examples of such doctrines are various religious teachings or the Nazi and Communist ideologies. Yet Snook's analysis demonstrates that there are plenty of cases that could be considered instances of indoctrination that do not entail the transmission of doctrines. For example, we can imagine teachers that deliberately present students with erroneous information in math, geography or science. For Snook, we would be correct to call such teachers indoctrinators even though they are not transmitting any beliefs or doctrines. His conclusion is that indoctrination should "not be restricted to the teaching of doctrines, however these are defined" (Snook, 1972b, p. 37) and that, therefore, the content criterion cannot provide an adequate account of this phenomenon.

Snook's third criterion focuses on the consequences of the process of indoctrination, namely, the person that is being indoctrinated. What is at stake in this case is an individual who exhibits a closed mind and maintains one's beliefs despite all evidence to the contrary. As Snook (1972b) notes, "in this area at least, evidence, argument, and logic make no impression on him. He listens courteously perhaps while we present our case but when he speaks again, the impression we get is that what we have said has made no impression" (p. 38). The problem for Snook is that to label a person that displays closed-mindedness as 'indoctrinated' is not warranted without further evidence since there could be a host of other reasons that could account for this condition including intelligence, mental problems, and drugs. Moreover, he points out that since indoctrination refers to a process, it follows that we can fail to indoctrinate despite our efforts to do so. As such, Snook concludes that consequences are neither a necessary nor sufficient condition of indoctrination.

The final criterion of indoctrination considered by Snook, the one that he ultimately supports, is intentions.

Intentions refer to the motivations of the indoctrinator, that is, to whether he or she *intends* to transmit beliefs that cannot be questioned or debated. Snook (1972b) defines this criterion as follows: "*A person indoctrinates P (a proposition or set of propositions) if he teaches with the intention that the pupil or pupils believe P regardless of the evidence*" (p. 47). However, Snook acknowledges that in an educational context, this definition holds only if certain conditions are in place. First, the person teaching needs to be in a relationship of authority to the person taught, a relation that gives the teacher a privileged role in the educational process. And second, the teaching situation must be extended over a period of time; it cannot be an isolated incidence. Thus, Snook believes that only those teaching situations in which these two conditions exist does the possibility of indoctrination arise. This means that there are many educational encounters that preclude indoctrination (e.g., a lesson in which the students enlighten their teachers or when teachers merely introduce various topics to their students).

Snook's conceptual analysis of indoctrination is instructive in that he examines the four major criteria of indoctrination as well as various objections for each criterion. At the same time, his analysis leaves many unanswered questions about the context, process, and results of indoctrination, which many scholars that followed him have taken up and investigated. In "Indoctrination: a Contextualist Approach," Alven Neiman denounces the objectivist approach of analyzing indoctrination adopted by Snook and argues that such an approach is sterile and has led philosophers of education to a bunch of dead ends. Instead, Neiman argues that a contextualist approach is much more promising since it regards people as historical beings living in the world and raises a host of questions about indoctrination that have not been addressed. In Neiman's (1989) words, "the historicity stressed by contextualism makes it necessary for all of us, including philosophers doing philosophy, to view ourselves as human beings embedded within a life being lived" (p. 55)

In light of ideas of thinkers like Dewey and Wittgenstein, a contextualist approach is based on the "realization that all inquiry is shaped, at least to some extent, by historical and social realities" (Neiman, 1989, p. 54). From a contextualist perspective, questions of method, content, consequences, and intentions should not be considered in the abstract, devoid of any meaningful context. According to this view, one cannot determine whether a specific method is indoctrinating or if a particular content being taught can lead students to be closed minded without first making sense of the goals of education or the context in which the educational encounter is taking place. In addition, a contextualist approach insists that before being able to respond to the question whether a particular practice is indoctrinating, we need to lay bare and defend our underlying assumptions about the aims of education. As a contextualist, Neiman takes issue with Snook's assumption that the rational subject is the supreme goal of education and asserts that this goal is never adequately justified.

A different contextualist approach to the issue of indoctrination than the one taken by Neiman is that of Rebecca Taylor in her 2017 article "Indoctrination and social context: A system-based approach to identifying the threat of indoctrination and the responsibilities of educators." In her essay, Taylor challenges those theories of indoctrination in education that focus narrowly on the indoctrinator–student relationship. Instead, she proposes a system-based account of indoctrination, one which recognizes that indoctrination occurs within complex social systems that include inputs, processes, and outputs, which need to be articulated and understood. Taylor (2017) defines indoctrination "*as a complex system of teaching in which actors with authority contribute to the production or reinforcement of closed-mindedness*" (p. 40). Based on her analysis of indoctrinatory teaching systems, Taylor asserts that there are two necessary conditions for indoctrination—the outcome of closed-mindedness and an asymmetry of authority.

Taylor's system-based analysis demonstrates that indoctrination harms students by contributing to their closed-mindedness (CM), a vice that threatens students' development as inquirers and as autonomous agents. She writes that:

> Teachers and other agents with authority in educational systems are expected to use their authority to benefit and not to harm students; they are expected to help them develop the virtues of inquiry that will aid them in their academic careers and in their pursuit of the good life. As part of this social role, they are obligated to avoid indoctrinating students and may be held accountable when their actions contribute to the production or reinforcement of CM in students. (Taylor, 2017, p. 53)

Hence, even as Taylor espouses a system's model of indoctrination, she recognizes that individual teachers can harm students and contribute to their development of closed-mindedness. Her analysis shows that although teachers may have good intentions and seek to benefit their students, they may be inadvertently operating within a system of education that ultimately damages their students' cognitive and moral maturity.

Extending Taylor's analysis of system-based indoctrination is Christopher Martin's recent article titled "Educational Institutions and Indoctrination." In his article, Martin attempts to identify the conditions under which an educational institution can be rightly described as indoctrinative. Martin (2023) opens his essay by noting that:

> An institution fails in a specifically indoctrinatory sense when it legitimizes a particular style of engaging with other citizens about the truth or rightness of beliefs in the public sphere. That is, an educational institution

> indoctrinates when it exercises its authority in order to support a culture of (or fails to exercise its authority in order to discourage a culture of) closed discursive norms. (p. 204)

By closed norms, Martin means that an institution is promoting a particular belief in such a way that challenges to this belief are not permitted. According to this view, a university in the United States would be engaged in indoctrination if it prohibited any discussion about the legitimacy of faculty tenure or about the possibility of professors organizing into a union.

Martin insists that it is important to distinguish between the type of indoctrination that individual teachers might be guilty of and institutional indoctrination. Teachers, after all, have a direct relationship with their students and can impact their knowledge and understanding (or lack thereof) in explicit ways. However, Martin claims that institutional indoctrination is different. "It tracks something that is not (yet) so morally salient. In order to anticipate what institutional role actors need to do in order to prevent indoctrinative outcomes at a collective level, we need to understand exactly how it is that an entire institution can fail in an indoctrinative manner to begin with" (Martin, 2023, p. 208). Thus, Martin's article is designed to provide some conceptual clarity about the notion of institutional indoctrination in order to help us distinguish between cases where concerns about indoctrination are reasonable and those where they are ideological. His aim is also to help educational leaders recognize why and how to mitigate indoctrination of the institutional, and not merely the individual type.

To conclude this brief literature review on indoctrination in education, I would like to highlight Michael Hand's new piece in *Educational Theory* titled "Does Indoctrination Still Matter?" In this article, Hand (2025) seeks to refute the various critiques of the conventional view on this issue, namely, that "indoctrination is a serious threat to the enterprise of education and a distinctive vice of teaching" (p. 276). Hand's essay examines three forms of indoctrination skepticism—the *impossibility objection*, the *unavoidability objection*, and the *desirability objection*—all of which downplay the threat of indoctrination. He argues that all three of these objections miss their mark as well as a fourth position, the *third-party objection*, which diverges from the first three yet denies that indoctrination is a distinctive vice of teaching. Hand (2025) concludes his analysis of the four objections by noting that indoctrination still matters. He argues that "it remains a distinctive and serious form of miseducation, against which anyone who teaches must be on their guard. Notwithstanding recent protestations to the contrary, the standard view of indoctrination is the right one" (p. 291).

This brief review of the literature on indoctrination in education is not meant to serve as a comprehensive examination of this issue. My goal in starting this essay with a review of the literature is much more limited and designed to highlight a few salient points about indoctrination in education. First, as illustrated above, the issue of indoctrination in education has received quite a bit of attention in the past fifty years from philosophers and educators. Second, my review underscores the fact that this issue has been controversial, that there is no agreement among scholars on how to account for indoctrination as well as about how much of a threat it poses to education. Third, and most important for my purposes, the vast majority of the studies on indoctrination have been conducted in the context of the education of children rather than adults. Hence, there is a need, in my view, to investigate indoctrination in the context of adult learners and specifically the education of teacher candidates.

The Case of Professor K

The following incident describes the case of Professor K[1], an imaginary instructor in a 4+1 teacher preparation program. Professor K, whose expertise is in the teaching of science, is regarded by her peers and students (teacher candidates) as a master teacher, one that challenges them to reach her high standards and step out of their comfort zone. The incident that informs this case study occurred in the course "ED 485: Teaching Science in the Primary Grades," a required course for seniors enrolled in the Elementary Master of Arts in Teaching program. ED 485 focuses on the methods and materials of teaching elementary-level science. The course covers scientific concepts, scientific inquiry, active investigation methods, and a deep understanding of the influence of the Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS) on contemporary science education.

The culminating assignment for ED 485 requires teacher candidates to create a *unit plan* for primary Elementary students in which they display their grasp of NGSS as well as how these standards can be integrated effectively into a science lesson. In addition to assessing the quality of their understanding of NGSS, Professor K requires her teacher candidates to demonstrate that their unit plans reflect a "commitment to equity and social justice" and that they show that they are attempting to "advocate with *courage* for disadvantaged students." The requirements for the unit plan were introduced by Professor K to the teacher candidates three weeks before the assignment was due, but no discussion was conducted about them. Some of the students in Professor K's ED 485 course seemed confused about the requirement that their unit plans need to reflect a "commitment to equity and social justice," yet they did not raise any questions about this issue when it was introduced by their instructor.

At the end of the semester, four teacher candidates in Professor K's class came to speak with her during her

[1] This case study is inspired by an incident that occurred in the author's teacher preparation program.

office hours wondering why their grades were deducted on the unit plan. Professor K explained that she decided to decrease their grades on this assignment because their unit plans neglected to show any commitment to equity and social justice. Some of these teacher candidates complained that they do not see the connection between NGSS and commitment to equity and social justice. Professor K responded that this issue was covered in several lessons during the semester. When Professor K examined her end-of-the-semester student evaluations, she discovered that some of the teacher candidates that were enrolled in the ED 485 course reported that they were still confused about the relationship between NGSS and a commitment to equity and social justice. Other comments on the evaluations suggested that several teacher candidates were frustrated about the grades they received on their unit plans.

Analysis of Case Study

The incident described above—of students in Professor K's ED 485 course being required to demonstrate on their unit plans a commitment to equity and social justice—is designed to serve as the context and a springboard for my analysis of the question about the possibility of indoctrinating teacher candidates. For the purposes of this analysis, we should assume that Professor K had no *intentions* of indoctrinating her students and that she was motivated by a desire to help them develop into informed and caring teachers. Still, as Hand and other scholars have shown, indoctrination need not be, and frequently is not, intentional. Hand (2025) writes that it is quite possible "for well-meaning teachers to bypass pupils' reason inadvertently, to insulate imparted beliefs from criticism while sincerely intending the opposite" (p. 279). Thus, Professor K's intentions cannot shed much light on the question of whether the teacher candidates that took her course were being indoctrinated. Hand's legitimate concern is that when teachers transmit beliefs to their students in a non-rational way, whether it happens by design or by accident, the potential for indoctrination exists.

Despite Professor K's noble intentions, it is clear from the incident described above that several of her teacher candidates did not meet at least some of the requirements for the unit plan assignment. What are we to make of the four teacher candidates who had a difficult time seeing the connection between NGSS and a commitment to equity and social justice? Perhaps Professor K's teaching methods failed to make an impression on these candidates with respect to the goals of demonstrating a "commitment to equity and social justice" and "advocating with courage for disadvantaged students." Perhaps the four candidates unconsciously resisted implementing these goals because they conflicted with their own value system. However, the fact that Professor K may have missed the mark with a few of her students, does not prove that no indoctrination was taking place in her lessons. As Snook (1972b) argues, "since indoctrination refers to some process, it follows that we can fail to indoctrinate" (p. 41). His point is that a person subject to indoctrination may not succumb to the efforts to influence (in our case, the four students who complained). Much like a failed robbery attempt is still a crime, a failure to indoctrinate is still concerning from an educational point of view since the effort to instill uncritically certain beliefs may impede students' capacity to think for themselves.

At this point, it is worthwhile to take a minute to distinguish between beliefs and realities in education. Beliefs refer to *ideas* or *convictions* that may or may not be supported by evidence and rational argument. By realities, on the other hand, I mean issues and information that are considered factual by the scientific community or other experts. Researchers of indoctrination in education have spent a great deal of time talking about the transmission of beliefs, but relatively little about the teaching of what I call realities. For example, Hanks (2008) writes that "efforts to instill beliefs that simultaneously lead a person to ignore the force of reasons for or against the belief, or to believe counter to the weight of evidence and reason, are clear-cut instances of indoctrination" (p. 195). Likewise, Wareham (2019) notes that "indoctrination is best described as a teaching process, pertaining to the transmission of beliefs, which directly results in an illegitimate barrier between the beliefs an individual holds and the evidence or reasons she has for holding them; a barrier which causes her to be closed-minded" (p. 44). On this view, two ways in which teachers can avert the potentiality for indoctrination is to make sure that they are only transmitting those beliefs that are supported by substantial evidence while also welcoming rational discussion about them.

Unlike beliefs that tend to be controversial, realities are issues for which there is widespread agreement and are regarded as factual and settled matters. For instance, in my undergraduate educational research methods course, I present the various forms of research methods in education (qualitative, quantitative, mixed-methods, and action research) not as beliefs, but as settled facts or realities. To be sure, many researchers may have a preference for one type of educational research method versus another, but there is no dispute about the existence and legitimacy of these methods along with their different assumptions, characteristics, and processes. In the same way, a history professor teaching about the American Revolution or the U.S. Civil War does not present these events as beliefs but rather as historical realities. It might be the case that good history professors introduce their students to different interpretations of these historical events, but it is also the case that they would never present them as mere beliefs or doctrines.

Returning now to the case of Professor K, the distinction between beliefs and realities is meant to shed light on a potential problem in the requirement that her students' unit plans reflect a "commitment to equity and social justice" and show that they are attempting to "advocate with courage for disadvantaged students." The problem is that in presenting these requirements as realities that are beyond dispute rather than as mere beliefs that some people

value, she may be unconsciously indoctrinating her teacher candidates to just accept certain views as self-evident, as issues that cannot be questioned. Although the case study presented above did not provide much information about *how* Professor K explained to her students the requirement to demonstrate a "commitment to equity and social justice," the details that were provided suggest that the issue was presented in such a way that precluded an open debate about it. The danger of such an approach, as Lewin (2022) acknowledges, is that "teaching with a non-rational method, without providing reasons for what the teacher tries to do" often results in indoctrination (p. 618).

To be fair, few people object when teachers routinely use "indoctrinative" methods of teaching when working with children. For instance, when teaching the timetables in math or how to read words, Elementary school teachers typically instruct students to follow certain rules or procedures without bothering to provide rational explanations for these methods. John Thiessen (1985) argues that since, "children learn by imitation and identification, the use of indoctrinative teaching methods is inevitable" in some areas (p. 238). Moreover, many psychologists and educators believe that because children's rational capacity is not fully developed, it makes sense to teach them various beliefs using non-rational methods. Armstrong (2022) endorses this view when he notes that children "have little ability to critically assess the values they are being taught" (p. 286). As such, he believes that every system of education in which children are taught is likely to be at least partly indoctrinatory.

Still, these arguments about the inevitability of relying on indoctrination in the education of children do little to alleviate my concern about Professor K's tactics when working with her adult teacher candidates. I am concerned because, as demonstrated above, despite Professor K's good *intentions* and the limited *impact* that some of her requirements had on four of her students, she may have been inadvertently transmitting beliefs to her teacher candidates in an indoctrinatory manner. Specifically, the expectation that teacher candidates demonstrate on their unit plans a concern for equity and social justice and that they advocate with courage for disadvantaged students assumes that currently there is a problem with equity and justice in the U.S. public school system. Although I am quite sympathetic with this belief, it needs to be presented to the teacher candidates in such a way that they understand the evidence that supports it. In addition, concerted efforts ought to be made to provide teacher candidates an opportunity to question this belief as well as why it is important to work to remedy it.

Aside from intentions and consequences, what do we know about Professor K's *methods* and the *content* (Snook's other two criteria) of her teaching that might shed some light on the possibility of indoctrination taking place in her course? Regarding methods, we know that Professor K did not initiate a discussion about the requirement that the unit plan reflect a "commitment to equity and social justice" and that her teacher candidates show that they are attempting to "advocate with courage for disadvantaged students." Likewise, it does not appear as if Professor K's students were given the opportunity to *question* the validity or relevance of this requirement. Notwithstanding the importance of equity, social justice, advantage and disadvantage, the way in which these values were transmitted by Professor K to her teacher candidates (as values that *must* be embraced) may have opened the door for indoctrination to occur.

With respect to the impact of the *content* that Professor K required her teacher candidates to internalize, it is difficult to come to any definitive conclusions on whether that content contributed to their indoctrination. However, I believe that it is fair to refer to a requirement to show a "commitment to equity and social justice" as a doctrine or belief rather than what I have called a reality. As much as we may support the belief in the need to work toward equity and social justice, we also need to acknowledge that, at present, this belief is controversial in the United States. To the extent that Professor K transmitted this doctrine to her teacher candidates without the possibility of questioning or critiquing it, then the possibility of their indoctrination increased. One important lesson that should be stressed here is that the issue of indoctrination illustrates that it is difficult to separate between Snook's two criteria of method and content. The method in which an instructor uses to deliver the content in a given lesson has a significant impact on the question of whether indoctrination is taking place. In other words, the phenomenon of indoctrination in education illustrates that method and content often go hand in hand and should, therefore, be judged together rather than separately.

Conclusions and Implications

In light of the imaginary situation described above that occurred in Professor K's ED 485 course, can teacher candidates be indoctrinated? My analysis of this case study suggests that it is possible for teacher candidates to be indoctrinated to uncritically accept certain beliefs as factual even if the instructor did not intend for this to happen. Put bluntly, Professor K's requirement that her teacher candidates demonstrate on their unit plans a commitment to equity and social justice and that they advocate with courage for disadvantaged students may be hurting rather than helping their chances to develop into independent thinkers and responsible educators. Unlike children whose rational capacity is not fully developed, adult learners should always be provided with sound reasons for what the lesson is trying to accomplish or what the assignment is designed to assess. In Professor K's case, it does not appear that such reasons were given in a clear and compelling manner; or perhaps they were given but not understood by at least some of her students.

What concerns me most about the case of Professor K depicted above is not that some of her students may have left her course *confused* about its content or about the expectations for the unit plan. Confusion about course objectives, content, or requirements can happen in higher education as in other educational settings and does not signify that students are being damaged. Students' confusion might be regarded as a missed opportunity for impactful learning, but not as a deliberate attempt to damage them. However, in this case the harm that was inflicted on Professor K's teacher candidates was in the obligation to adopt beliefs that she wanted them to hold in a way that disconnected the students from the relevant evidence and an opportunity to engage in critical debate. As Hand (2025) points out, the requirement to embrace contested beliefs uncritically "directly interferes with the capacity of pupils to think for themselves" (p. 279). In short, by requiring her teacher candidates to demonstrate various beliefs about equity, social justice, advantage and disadvantage, Professor K may have undermined their capacity to develop into independent thinkers and mature educators.

To be perfectly clear, my contention is *not* that issues of equity and social justice, advantage and disadvantage should be kept out of the teacher education curriculum. It is rather that when introducing these issues, educators should acknowledge that they are dealing with contested beliefs and not with settled matters. And my contention is that issues of equity and social justice should never be taught using indoctrinative methods, that is, ones that preclude questioning, critique, and debate. These two conditions—acknowledging controversial content and using rational methods of instruction—do not seem to have been consistently maintained in the case of Professor K described above. To the extent that educators can embrace and safeguard these conditions, they can mitigate against the potential for indoctrination when working with adult learners in general and teacher candidates in particular.

With respect to the education of teacher candidates, my analysis in this paper points to several recommendations that can benefit teacher preparation programs. First, teacher educators need to become *aware* of the possibility that indoctrination can happen (despite instructors' best intentions) not only when teaching children but also when working with adult learners. My decades-long experience working in a teacher preparation program suggests that the issue of the indoctrination of teacher candidates is not something that is thought about very often let alone seriously debated. Since teacher educators are tasked with preparing the next generation of teachers, we tend to see ourselves as fulfilling an essential service that advances the public good. Thus, my assumption is that most teacher educators have not thought about the possibility that indoctrination can take place in their courses as well as about how to prevent this from happening. Second, since indoctrination is more likely to occur when instructors fail to acknowledge contested content and employ non-rational methods of instruction, teacher educators need to be mindful about *how* they address controversial issues in their classrooms as well as about *what* it is they are asking their students to know and be able to do. The distinction provided here between beliefs and realities can help remind teacher educators that when addressing the former in their courses, they should not treat them as settled facts but as issues that are contested. Teacher educators need to recognize that contested issues, as the case of Professor K illustrates, may be difficult for teacher candidates to understand and apply in an assignment. In addition to acknowledging the challenges that come with addressing controversial issues in higher education, we also need to recognize that non-rational methods of instruction can only exacerbate these challenges. Thus, when addressing contested topics, teacher educators need to be especially mindful of providing ample opportunity for questioning, discussion, and critique in their lessons.

Third, since teacher candidates will before long be working with students in their own classrooms, it is essential to model for them methods of instruction that are non-indoctrinative so that they can gain confidence in using these methods themselves. My career of working in higher education suggests that it can take time for teacher candidates to become comfortable using rational methods like asking questions, responding thoughtfully to their peers, and facilitating a discussion. For this reason, it is incumbent upon teacher educators to model non-indoctrinative methods of teaching in their lessons. Teacher candidates need to be given plenty of opportunities to practice using rational methods of instruction so that they can hone these skills and be prepared to use them once they take over their own classrooms.

Finally, because this investigation was based on an imaginary case study that occurred in a particular science education course, it is fair to assume that more studies need to be done on the topic of indoctrination in the context of the education of teacher candidates. I can imagine other researchers adopting a theoretical, case study approach (akin to the one employed here) that explore how indoctrination can impact different aspects of the education of teacher candidates, ones which were not considered in the present study. My sense is also that scholars might be able to employ additional research strategies (ones that do not invite ethical concerns) to investigate this important issue. The goal of such studies would be to examine how indoctrination can creep into, albeit unconsciously, the education of teacher candidates and what can be done to prevent this ill-advised event from happening.

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