

The media are concerned about a threat to education from the so-called religious right. There was no such outcry when the left began its pervasive brainwashing.

Indoctrinating the children

BY THOMAS SOWELL



Dr. Thomas Sowell is an economist and a senior fellow at the Hoover Institution in Stanford, Calif.

ANY BOY who grew up in a rough neighborhood has probably had the experience of having another boy punch him in class, with the teacher turning around just as he hit him back.

It did no good to say, "He hit me first!" because the automatic answer was: "Two wrongs don't make a right."

It is much the same story in the media today, as editorials warn that "the religious right" is "taking over" school boards. Alarms are being raised that conservative or religious indoctrination will be imposed in the public schools.

Where have the media been all these years, while the most blatant, deliberate and pervasive indoctrination by the political left has been taking place in public schools all across the country?

Hypothetical dangers from conservative or religious groups attempting to fight back do not begin to compare with the dangers from the enormous apparatus already in place, and continuing to conduct classroom brainwashing, to the detriment of academic education.

The techniques of brainwashing developed in totalitarian countries are

routinely used in psychological-conditioning programs imposed on American school children. These include emotional shock and desensitization, psychological isolation from sources of support, stripping away defenses, manipulative cross-examination of the individual's underlying moral values, and inducing acceptance of alternative values by psychological rather than rational means.

These techniques are not confined to separate courses or programs, but also intrude into academic subjects like history or social studies, as well as being pervasive in programs ostensibly dealing with special social issues, such as sex education, death education, drug prevention, nuclear education, or multiculturalism.

Shock and desensitization procedures range from taking children to morgues and funeral homes to see and touch dead bodies to pairing boys and girls to have conversations with each other about sex, showing ghastly movies of war, or raw movies showing sexual activity or close-ups of childbirth.

Verbal examples include classroom discussions of lifeboat dilemmas, where the limited capacity of the boat forces decisions as to who should be left to drown. Sometimes children are asked to decide whom they would sacrifice among members of their own family.

These are not the isolated idiosyncracies of particular teachers. They are products of numerous books and other "educational" material in programs packaged by organizations that sell such curricula to administrators and teach the techniques to teachers. Some packages even include instructions on how to deal with parents or others who object.

Psychological isolation can be

achieved in a number of ways, and stripping away psychological defenses can be done through assignments to keep diaries to be discussed in the group and through role-playing assignments, both techniques used in the original brainwashing programs in China under Mao.

Mobilizing school children for the political crusades of the left has also been going on for years. At one time, the largest number of letters received by the President of the United States on any subject came from school children writing to him about nuclear issues, as part of their classroom assignments.

All this is barely the proverbial tip of the iceberg. There is, for example, the whole Alice-in-Wonderland world of multiculturalism, where the very photographs and drawings in textbooks must propagandize the multicultural message. There are math textbooks where the pictures of famous mathematicians and scientists would suggest that virtually no white male had ever had anything to do with either of these fields.

The pettiness of the education establishment's detailed instructions and taboos for pictures in textbooks might seem funny to an observer, but they are deadly serious matters of financial life and death to the publishers.

Many parents who have been appalled to discover what has been going on in the schools have fought lonely and frustrating battles against the education establishment. Eventually some have begun to organize, which at least deprives the school bureaucrats of their favorite line: "You're the only one who has complained."

That line will be used, even when controversies and lawsuits are raging all across the country over a particular brainwashing program. Parents are also likely to be told that all the educational experts support the program. What they are unlikely to be told is that these "experts" are often the ideological gurus who pushed these programs in the first place, or consultants who profit from them.

When the futility of individual protest leads to organized activity, that is when the cry of "censorship" goes up from the education establishment and the media rush to the rescue, invoking the specter of "the religious right." What has caught their attention is someone trying to fight back. ■