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Committee Secretary
Senate Education, Employment and Workplace Relations Committee
Department of the Senate

SUBMISSION TO SENATE INQUIRY INTO ACADEMIC FREEDOM

I am pleased to be able to make a submission to the Inquiry into Academic Freedom.

I will do so by:

1. Relating my experiences at school;
2. Relating my experiences at university;
3. Providing a short analysis of university teaching courses.

My High School Experience

One of my high schools (a well-established public selective high school) was a stellar example of how bias works in practice. The graduate they were most proud of was "Justice" Michael Kirby, they have "Not happy, John!" signs posted prominently at the front gate, our keynote speaker at our graduation was Gough Whitlam, and Carmel Tebbutt seemed to be a reasonably frequent visitor there in my final year. The themes of Mr Whitlam's, Ms Tebbutt's and Mr Kirby's speeches were overtly political and critical of conservative view points. While I have no problem with people having a different point of view (its great to have intellectual diversity) there was by these sorts of things a cultural cringe encouraged at school towards all things politically or ideologically conservative. Political elitism and holier than thou attitudes were fostered at school with respect towards mainstream values.

Worse than the culture of the school was the content of the syllabus. Combined, the culture of the school and the syllabus created a potent "indoctrinating" force. Some examples from HSC English:

- We deconstructed Shakespeare and other seminal texts in a way that should be left for tertiary-level English. I've spoken to many people who ask why we should be discussing Shakespeare in feminist, Marxist, postmodernist, Freudian etc. terms when a lot of the time we have only a superficial understanding of the language and language techniques Shakespeare used, the context in which he wrote, and indeed the themes of the plays themselves. Would it not be inherently more useful to gain a thorough knowledge of Shakespeare within his context first, as opposed to skipping straight through that and going onto 'critical readings'? Perhaps the only exception to this is a religious/Christian reading of the text, simply because that was immensely relevant to the time in which Shakespeare wrote - I'm not religious but I still recognise its importance.

- The school treated classic literature in a way that diminishes its meaning - I am of course referring to the 'transformations' module. By placing texts such as teen movies, comics, websites and other such things alongside Austen, Dickens, Shakespeare and others, we elevate the importance of said popular culture texts and assume they're equal to the classic literature that forms the backbone of Western canon - and to those who insist Western canon is useless, I submit that since we have much British heritage, and our culture is largely derived from British and European sources, an understanding of the canonic texts is rather important for any scholar of literature/English - particularly at high school level, where a broad overview of the important literature is much more useful than esoteric or politically-charged readings such as we have. I believe that since the cultural relativists tend to come from a leftist perspective, and don't tend to have much respect for western traditions, they wish to subvert them through elevating popular culture... but since when is a comic or a movie 'English'? Is it not cultural studies (or film studies?) If popular culture is important in its own right, give it a Cultural Studies subject of its own and keep English for what is important.

A basic understanding of a text is more important than deconstruction of it into various paradigms. I would further suggest that a basic understanding of the English language is even more essential.

English should be first focused on writing, grammar, debating and public speaking, as well as poetry, drama and classic and certain strands of modern literature.

We have a situation whereby many Year 12 students can waffle on about why an absent Mrs Lear means Shakespeare was a misogynist who ignored women, but who cannot use correct tenses and punctuation

In English Extension One it was actually worse, because we were studying the Postmodernism option and the teachers spent excessive amounts of time on whatever agreed with their political leanings, but when it came time to study David Williamson's *Dead White Males* (which satirises both postmodernism and feminism) we spent a total of two weeks on it and received next to no study material besides a student-developed sheet of quotes, a list of questions printed from the Internet and a teacher-authored sheet which essentially was an exercise in author-bashing on the pretext of telling us what to do in the exam.

My University Teaching Degree

In first year, we studied a subject called Human Development and Education. The lecturer there was openly left-wing and stated that he believed "the will of the collective is more important than the freedom of the individual" within the first week of classes.

This sort of sentiment was also repeated in the compulsory core reader. He also marked people down in the final exam when they were asked what type of child-rearing they believed was most beneficial (this is taken from an educational theorist named de Mause's six modes of childrearing) if they said anything other than "helping" mode, which can essentially be summarised as a progressive "let the children do what they want and don't discipline them" theory (and which, in my opinion, actually does more harm than good). I know this because I had a conversation with him after the exam and he was unimpressed that I picked something called "socialisation" mode, which is

exactly what it sounds like - parents helping their children to become functioning members of society.

In second year we did Educational Psychology. This wasn't as overt but had a strong emphasis on "constructivist" learning methods, which is where children "construct their own knowledge". Basically, anything that involved teachers actually transmitting knowledge was dismissed as outdated "teacher-centric" learning, and collaborative/group work was seen as the holy grail of learning because it involved children allegedly constructing their own knowledge and teaching each other, as well as ensuring people were placed in "mixed ability" groups (which of course means struggling children aren't recognised and helped, and bright students are being held back because they're not being allowed to learn at their own pace, but of course, everyone is equal!).

In other words, it caters to only the collective (or the average student), rather than the individual learning needs of each student. Furthermore, the course was explicitly against final exams (e.g. the HSC) and preached that academic competition was wrong; teachers should instead apparently use continuous assessments such as small group tasks and portfolios because failing at exams can lower children's self-esteem.

The worst of the subjects was a subject called Social Perspectives on Education. This course may as well have been called Socialist Perspectives on Education because the lecturers spent more time bashing John Howard and the Liberal Party than they did actually teaching anything useful.

The course content was exactly what it sounds like: left-wing perspectives on class, race, indigenous issues, private schooling, gender and other such matters. The textbook for the course was written by the lecturers, so it was also overtly left-wing and didn't try to pretend to be anything else. It was disparaging of what it called "neoliberalism" - there was a seminar topic on that very subject which I signed up for, only to find that every recommended source was extraordinarily anti-Liberal (including a gendered perspective on neoliberalism, which I completely don't understand), without anything even resembling balance in the reference list.

I ended up abandoning the list and delivering a seminar on the benefits of school vouchers. This very same subject also taught that when educating indigenous children in isolated areas one should teach them in Aboriginal English rather than in standard English because it was racist to do otherwise.

I became so fed up and disgusted by the continual barrage of criticism of mainstream values, the lack of focus on practical ways of teaching and being a good teacher, and the continual focus on minority groups, postmodernism, gender, queer and other studies that I abandoned my teaching degree. I hope that one day I can go back to being a teacher without having to sit through that garbage. Its not fair and needs reform.

Further Evidence of Bias in University Teaching

I have not had the time to do a complete analysis of course requirements for university degrees for the purposes of this submission. However, I can give you a few examples of how indoctrination is firmly embedded into the ethos of teaching degrees at the three major teaching faculties in Sydney. I would be happy to expand in any committee hearing.

For the five-year combined degrees at Sydney University (for example, Arts/Education), the structure is as follows ([link](#)) and ([second link](#)) and ([third link](#)). I have also attached the Faculty Handbook which gives more detailed information about individual subjects.

According to the University of NSW online handbook, students are required to complete a subject called Social Perspectives on Education ([link here](#)) which is of much the same content as the one at Sydney University. They also offer a subject called Power and Resistance in the Classroom ([link here](#)) as well as one called Culture, Diversity and Education ([link here](#)), which both reflect current left-wing trends in educational theory. You may want to look into the subject Ethics and Education ([link here](#)), which is described as "*The aims of education and the justification of compulsion. Social Justice, equality and fairness. Children's rights, democracy and multiculturalism. Controversy and values in schools.*" The description says it all, really. However, that university offers a fair amount of variety in educational psychology and method classes which gives their education programs seemingly greater balance, at least on paper. I have also attached their Faculty Handbook.

Macquarie University also has a similar ethos (see page 10 of the attached handbook for examples), and strongly suggest students take units in both Indigenous and Environmental Education (see page 13) as well as offering individual subjects about policy, gender, social contexts, social development and multiculturalism.