

Pedagogical Reduction and The Power of The Image: Propaganda and The Post-Truth Era

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Purpose – It is not unfair to suggest that we live in the apex of the photographic age, where the ubiquity of technology allows for the instantaneous capture and dissemination of images across the globe. The image can be powerfully exploited to show what the creator wishes the audience to see; that which has been captured remains eternally spotlighted, while that which lies outside of the frame remains obscured. This is not dissimilar to the concept of pedagogical reduction, where the educator shows the student what they deem to be important and, consequently, obscures what is unimportant.

Given the similarity between pedagogical reduction and the power of the image (to show the necessary and obscure all else); and given the use of the image as a tool of propaganda (Berger, 1980) and its prominence in our post-truth society, it is pertinent to now ask whether propaganda itself can be considered pedagogical.

Methodology/Approach – In order to ascertain whether we can justify a description of propaganda as pedagogical, and how we can apply this to post-truth, a hermeneutic inquiry will be conducted into each of the four main concepts in the paper: pedagogical reduction, image, propaganda, post-truth. Once each concept is fully delineated, comparisons are made between each to identify areas of similarity and difference which may offer a speculative answer to the research question. As the concept of image is involved, visual examples feature throughout.

Findings – There is a thread running through this paper concerning our relationship with truth. Pedagogical reduction and the reduction in images make both concepts inherently untrue, yet we accept these untruths with little question. However, if untruths are found in the political sphere (propaganda) or on social media (post-truth), the creators are held to account, often virulently. In answering the overall question, the differences between types of truth will be implicitly addressed. An understanding of how we relate to truth has implications for everyone, not least researchers aiming to communicate with a variety of audiences.

Originality/Value – The potential alignment of education (and its hitherto perceived positive value) (Peters, 1966) with propaganda (and its hitherto perceived negative value) (Taylor, 1942) may encourage disruptive discourse in which common ideas around both concepts come to be questioned. We can then go further as we apply the notion of pedagogical reduction to what we may describe as post-truth – how much does post-truth resemble propaganda, and, as such, can it also be described as pedagogical?

Keywords – Education, Images, Propaganda, Post-truth, Truth

Paper type – Conceptual paper

References

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