Political Correctness

By:

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How is a democratic society defined? During class we have discussed that it is a society that allows everyone with the equal opportunity to be responsible for their actions, talk freely, to do what is good for the people, and that people are on an equal level. The Movement for a Democratic Society believes that a democratic society is when “people have control of the decisions which affect them and the resources on which they are dependent” (2009.) I believe that both of the ideas sound like a great combination to create a wonderful democratic society.

Even though that this idea sounds like a cherry on top of the sundae, I believe that students are treated as if they do not have any plausible ideas about different things taught in class. If we had equal say in classrooms, then information could be drawn by many people, yet in the classroom usually the person who knows “everything” is the teacher. Everyone would like to be seen as equals but no one is truly equal. Someone always has someone higher than them, just like a principal has more power than a teacher. If students and teachers were able to say exactly what they would like to say, I believe that we will turn into a better-rounded nation. There is something that can always be learned from each other. I have thankfully experienced some times when my information that I share with a class is not challenged by a teacher, but my sister was shot down by a teacher once. When a teacher was giving a lesson about King Henry VIII, she gave false information to class at which point my sister corrected her, but the teacher told her that she was wrong without re-examining the information. Why can’t a student in fifth grade understand more about a subject than that teacher? If the teacher gave her the time to explain where she received the information from, then maybe the teacher would have understood that she read the information from a book solely on the subject of Queen Elizabeth and her family.

Information given in schools has to follow the guidelines set by the government. Some subjects are not allowed to be taught in schools because people have to be “politically correct.” Political correctness is when certain things are not taught because it could offend different cultures, religions, or backgrounds of someone. In schools some things have to be excluded because people are afraid of offending people. If we are afraid of offending people than there are some subjects that shouldn’t be taught at all such as how people during the time of the civil war believed that African Americans were worthless and some people still believe that today. It seems that we could be offending African Americans because of that statement; am I right? This is taught in the classroom, but it is not right to be talking about this, correct? It is not only in the classroom where we must be politically correct. In life we cannot call an African American “black” because they would be offended and call people racist, but at the same time people can call Caucasians white and not be harmed by this. I believe that the role of schools in a democratic society allows people to speak freely and people can decide what can affect them. How can they do that when people have to make sure that they are politically correct? In this paper I will discuss how the ability to learn inside and even outside of the classroom is affected by the government telling people to be politically correct. I believe that if people could be open-minded, then many other things may be learned inside the classroom.

Over the years, I have compared the activities that my old first grade teacher did with my class and that of her classes of the present. Many of the activities have diminished not because she believes that the children are not mature enough for the activities, but because the government does not think it is “politically correct” to do them. I have not seen anything that really deals with the holidays for decorating for many years in the classroom. I believe that it is the students’ right to understand and learn about different cultures. Sometimes to fully learn, some people have to step over the line and I believe that it is time that someone does.

Socially this is not right for people to be deprived from learning about different things because of not being politically correct in the classroom. The way people learn is not only by looking in a book, but also through discussions of experiences and of what other people have learned. As discussed in class, people have different views of things. When people from Britain report about the news here, it sounds different from what the reporters of America are telling its people. Let us say that we are not allowed to hear what Britain is saying because it might offend someone here in America. Is that really fair that we are not allowed to hear or read about their ideas? Shouldn’t we be able to learn what a non-American thinks of us?

Why do people try to avoid being offensive to just keep things civil in life? Many times in the classroom debates are used to learn the points of views of people while causing people to re-think their opinions. During some class debates, teachers had to stop some discussions because they were getting close to going over the line. If we are to learn from each other, then we should be able to discuss anything, but we cannot because of teachers and also the No Child Left Behind Act. These days the No Child Left Behind Act is another reason to be politically correct. The NCLB Act restricts what can be said because everything has to be taught “by the test.” In some ways this is a good thing because people had no choice but to be politically correct, but once again people cannot express their true feelings.

There is one good thing that I believe came out of people having to be politically correct. When I was in elementary school, I always wondered why letters that were sent home were addressed to the “parent/guardian.” This is because of political correctness. Every student does not either live with a parent or they do not have parents. I understand that in this sense that having these letters addressed this way is important because it is the right thing to do and by seeing the letter just addressed to a parent could upset the student. For example, what if the student doesn’t have any parents or even worse their parents got killed. I know that if I was in that situation I would wonder what happened to my parents and I would be so upset to get letters addressed to them. To be politically correct with this was a smart idea with this situation. If not every student has a parent, then letters should not go out just to the parent.

Philip Kovacs, the author of Education *for Democracy: It is not an issue of dare; it is an issue of can*, explains that because we focus on test scores, it is pushing us into the direction of being authoritarian (Kovacs, 2009.) He believes that if we are to guide students in education to grow into a democratic citizen then we must teach them to be tolerant (Kovacs, 2009.) I agree with him, but the problem is that to be tolerant, the student must be able to learn about everything. This means that we should not be politically correct. In the movie Pocahontas (1995,) when the men searching for new land came over to America, they were not friendly at first with the Native Americans. Then John Smith learned how to be open-minded about how the Native Americans acted and lived. We need to learn how to be tolerant of different people too. Teachers are supposed to teach students how to be tolerant of different races, cultures, and people, but they have a small chance to do that as long as they need to be politically correct. To be tolerant is a life lesson because there could be times that you do not like how someone acts or what they do, but you have to be open-minded about why they are that way.

The pamphlets that my home-town’s school district hands out, The Master Teacher, are used to help teachers understand different strategies that can be used inside and outside of the classroom. In one that I happen to pick up, it explains in detail how teachers should keep an open-mind about different subjects (Defruyn, 2009.) If teachers are supposed to do that then doesn’t that mean that teachers should teach their students the same? The pamphlet says that having an open mind can be difficult because sometimes hearing people’s opinions can seem to turn into facts (Defruyn, 2009.) We need to be aware of the difference of what people’s opinions are and the facts. I understand that there could be a possibility of having people be raciest, sexist, etc, but this is where the teachers need to step in and explain the difference between someone’s opinion and fact. I would just like to know why people cannot learn about other people’s opinions and why can people that might get offended just get over it?

Is there really academic freedom anymore in schools? I believe that schools have been changed into an authoritarian way of learning. Nobody is on the same level, people are only watching their own backs, and people have to watch what they say now, so that they are not “going over the edge.” In an article, *Is academic freedom under threat in UK and US higher education?*, by David Palfreyman he says that “conflict between freedom of academic expression and any prevailing orthodoxy of political correctness” is a threat to diminishing academic freedom(Palreyman, 2007, pg 10.) I believe that to have academic freedom means that you do not have to be politically correct. In the book *The Myth of Political Correctness* by John K. Wilson, he writes about Sidney Hooks opinion “that ‘there is less freedom of speech on American campuses today, measured by the tolerance of dissenting views on controversial political issues, than any other recent period in peacetime in American history’” (Wilson, pg 12, 1995.) Less academic freedom suggests that many people have probably have become less tolerant to different points of view. I believe that during that time and even now people believe that we need to “walk on eggshells.” For example, one parent was furious that her son got in trouble for talking back at a teacher and she said that it was racist for the teacher to do that. Is it really right to assume that someone did it because they could be racist? I personally know the teacher and they are not racist at all. People still feel like others are not being politically correct in the sense that they are looking at the bias things about the person’s race, religion, or culture rather than the actual person. I understand it was the person’s right to freely speak to the teacher, but when the teacher cannot be as strongly speaking as the parent was, it is un-fair. The teacher needs to think if they talk freely that it could affect them having their job being taken away. This whole idea is like academic freedom. Why can people not have educated arguments and discussions about anything anymore?

After reading our midterm book review, *When School Reform Goes Wrong* by Nel Noddings, the book opened my eyes up to new ideas of political correctness. In addition, it was the main reason I picked this as my topic. Nel Noddings wrote, “An education worthy of the label *education* should promote open discussion of controversial issues and language…. and refrain from language that insults or demeans anyone” (Noddings, 2006.) This quote fully explains my point of view of political correctness. As long as no one is rude to any other race or religion, then we all should be able to learn about all different subjects. The teacher holds the power in their classroom, so they could decide to stop a discussion whenever they would like to. In addition, their power allows them to even change the subject or move it into another direction if the teacher starts to feel awkward about the discussion. After many years of being in a classroom, I can state that I have never seen a classroom get to a point where a discussion had offended someone or even that the discussion had gotten out of hand. The government needs to understand that it is our right to learn about everything and if we hit some rough spots in the road that it is a learning experience, not some way of exploiting our feelings about someone or some people. Nel Nodding’s also talks about a woman named Diane Ravitch who believes that text books today have watered down the curriculum (Noddings, 2006. Pg 23.) Ms. Ravitch additionally says that the material has been weakened by these books (Noddings, 2006 pg 23.) There is nothing left to talk about once the material from the book has been reviewed. These books are the guidelines to the education learned in the classrooms. In most books, you will not see a question written to ask students to discuss their own opinions about the subject. I believe that they do this to defer away from any chance of getting into a bad discussion that could cause people to be racist, sexist, and/or talk badly about someone’s gender. Most of the time, the question will ask them to discuss a specific point that was covered in the section.

During class we have talked many times about Apple and Bean’s view of education. They believe that education is an open flow of ideas. People have said through the years that you must be careful of what you say at certain times. I agree that sometimes it is not appropriate to say things at certain times, but we need to be able to say what we want in the classroom. Students’ ideas can either further engulf a lesson or it could allow a point to be relooked at. With open flows of ideas going through the classroom, the students have the ability to make their own assumptions and comments on what they or their other peers say. In addition, we talked in class about Apple and Bean believing that democratic schools are marked by participation. Some participation in classes has been taken away because people need to be aware of what they are saying. We are not allowed to take the chance of by accident offending someone. This is why it seems that our way of democratic schooling has diminished to more of an authoritarian schooling. The students are, in some ways, not free and open anymore in schools. Why do students need to be quiet about what they say? Why can’t they decide to possibly hurt someone’s feelings? The real questions are why does everything have to follow what the government wants and why do we have to be politically correct?

 Schools can be defined now as test-taking, rule following, politically correct, undemocratic schools. Yes, it would be nice to get rid of things being based off of tests, being politically correct, and some of the rules, but we need to keep order. I believe that in some ways students could get some knowledge of things by being on equal levels with each other. If a student does not want to learn about a subject, then they are missing out on some education. Most of the time, I enjoy having teachers being ranked above me and my peers. This gives the chance for students to learn about many things while the teacher tries to keep things in order in the classroom. Of course, it would be great to also be on the equal level of the teacher sometimes, but in the classroom there needs to be someone there to get the students to learn.

Political correctness has affected the lives of students inside and outside of the classroom. Without political correctness, we students would be able to speak our mind without watching what we are saying. As stated in the paper, political correctness is good in some ways, but it is disabling the education that we learn. Are we getting the full truth or not by not allowing us to speak our own minds? Political correctness is keeping us away from all the truth of ideas that we are missing because we are afraid to offend people. We need to forget about hurting people’s feelings for once. I believe that education is endless and without being politically correct all the time we will be able to follow that endless path.

Sources

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