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Dimitris Zachos ¹
Sofia Douvleka ²

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¹ Associate professor, Aristotle's University of Thessaloniki, Greece, dimzachos@eled.auth.gr

² Postgraduate student, University of Nicosia – Cyprus, sofiadouvleka@gmail.com

Political Correctness and Education: The case of the primary education trade unionists of Thessaloniki - Greece

Dimitris Zachos <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9416-9023>

Sofia Douvleka <https://orcid.org/0009-0009-4972-5591>

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ABSTRACT

In recent years in Greece, the term political correctness has increasingly appeared in the media, in social networks and in academia. As with other social science concepts, there is no consensus among those who use the term. In the first part of this paper, we explore the historical development of the concept of political correctness, the different meanings given to it by those who use it and set out in detail our own approach. In the second part we present research, the purpose of which was to investigate the views of the members of the boards of the teachers' associations of primary education in Thessaloniki on political correctness in education. The strategy of our research was the Case Study, and the research technique was the semi-structured interview. Our research participants were thirty-five (35) male and female members of the Thessaloniki school boards. According to the results, most of the teachers who took part in our research are aware of the concept of political correctness, use politically correct language and consider that the curriculum of primary education should be improved a lot and change the way it presents the "different" social, ethnic, cultural, religious and linguistic groups.

Keywords: Political correctness, education, social justice, Greece



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Introduction

As with other social science terms, there is no one content for "political correctness" on which all those who use it agree. There are even differences of approach on the origins of the term. For most scholars, the term political correctness draws its origin from the willingness shown by some members of left-wing parties to censure or deride beliefs, attitudes, and actions of their comrades (Scatamburlo, 2021). More specifically, the term *political correctness* was first used after the 1917 Soviet Revolution to describe the commitment of some members of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union to its principles, even when they were at odds with their own (Roper, 2020). In roughly the same way the term was used in the late 1940s in the United States of America, where socialists ironically referred to *politically correct* positions of Communist Party members, when the latter uncritically and fervently supported the official positions and attitudes of the Communist Party (Kohl, 1992; Weigel, 2016). The term was even used to describe Nazi orthodoxy (Battistella, 2019), and in the mid-1970s it was associated with the feminist movement (Gauthier, 1997; Andary-Brophy, 2015).

Ideologically, political correctness is based on the principles of equality, ethics, and tolerance (Lichev & Hristoskova, 2017). Therefore, the issues it addresses and covers are largely in common with those of multiculturalism theory and multicultural / intercultural education. Indeed, Spencer (1994, 548) has argued that multiculturalism can be seen as a particular aspect of the wider political correctness movement, while Hughes (2010, 70) has argued that multiculturalism has in many cases been identified with political correctness.

According to the content given to it by those who support it, political correctness indicates one's intention to avoid language, policies and actions that disadvantage members of various subordinate social groups (Dobson, 1997; Gauthier, 1997; Wilson, 1996). Common to the groups advocated by political correctness is that their members have historically suffered racism, persecution and discrimination because of their social class, ethnicity, nationality, gender, sexual orientation or disability, as well as religious, cultural, or linguistic community to which they belong.

The political correctness movement was a request, an expression of desire of the members of the disadvantaged and marginalised social groups to eliminate discrimination and exclusion against them. It was also a demand of the social justice movements. It was precisely towards the fulfilment of this goal, namely equality, that the demand for the use of non-harmful language in work environments and public discourse was aimed (Mills, 2003). The struggle and victories of this movement, especially the favorable legal regulations, gave many women as well as members of other disadvantaged groups the right to claim and obtain better professional positions (Ely, Meyerson, & Davidson, 2006, 2), as well as to raise their social status.

The use of the term political correctness today

The public use of the term faded away towards the end of the 1990s, a period during which it was mainly retained in circles of the people of show business, in particular comedians, who used it to make fun of themselves and mock political parties (Roper, 2020). During this time political correctness became a movement without followers, since almost no one was willing to be called politically correct (Wilson, 1996, 517). Political correctness became a pejorative label and was used derisively, to the extent that Lukianoff (2022) argued that it officially became a joke. Over time, however, the concept of political correctness lost its satirical content and was incorporated into the rhetoric of political parties. This development shows that the issues political correctness covers are highly contentious and thus cause intense political controversy (Beyer, 1994).

Conservative and far-right academics, politicians and media people have linked political correctness with cultural Marxism (Lind, 2009), to which they attribute destructive values, intentions, attitudes, and goals. Indeed, according to a widespread - originating in the United States of America - conspiracy theory, cultural Marxism was created when various Marxists realized that they were losing the political power struggle in Western countries and set their sights on taking over their key cultural institutions

(Busbridge, Moffitt, & Thorburn, 2020) in order to destroy the traditional cultural and social pillars of Western society (Bolton, 2018, 274).

Opponent of political correctness argue that those who support it, they wish to discriminate against the privileged (Pidluzny, 2023), dismantle the foundations of American democracy, rewrite history, reintroduce racism, create new privileged classes, as well as determine what can be said in public discourse (Gonzalez, & Gorka, 2022). Characteristically, Raehn (2004, 14) states: "Political Correctness is Marxism, with all that implies: loss of freedom of expression, thought control, inversion of the traditional social order and, ultimately, a totalitarian state". Political correctness is the enemy among us that undermines the youth of the United States of America (Piliawsky, 1994, 47), an anti-capitalist, pro-third world and minority movement, but it is also anti-American, and generally against Western and political interests (Roberts, 1997, 85).

The term political correctness was even used to enter the imagination of ordinary people the idea that there is a gap between them and the political elite and that members of the latter try to control their language and thoughts (Weigel, 2016). The figure of the confrontation between the people and the liberal elite, which tries to serve the dark interests of its members, is a construction on which the rhetoric of all populist far-right leaders, from Trump to Orban, is based. This liberal elite, according to the narrative served by this schema, has decided to show its sympathy for certain minorities (Andy McCarthy, as cited in Allan, 2012, 3) and attempts to impose multiculturalism (Scott, 2013), as its philanthropist members aim to overthrow Western democracies and make it impossible for governments to maintain their country's order, identities, and values (Bolton, 2018, 283). Thus, the term political correctness has become a word that describes the way the elite censor almost everything, stripping society of spontaneity and honesty (Marques, 2009).

In our view, conservatives and far-rightists use political correctness as a scarecrow, as a new bogeyman in place of communism, in order to discredit the struggle for social justice, to create fear and loathing of those who support and promote it, and to turn the spotlight exclusively on identity politics. More analytically, their opponents use the concept of political correctness to: First, ridicule the liberal project and reject multiculturalism and cultural pluralism (Crawley, 2007). That's way they exaggerate and distort any extreme statement, behavior or action taken by people, who in most cases do not represent any institution or collective, but its' opponents include in the political correctness movement. They also use this term to invert reality, portraying the winners as losers, the perpetrators as victims, those who work for inclusive schools and universities as trying to close them down, and to accuse those involved in anti-racist, anti-sexist and anti-homophobic movements of fighting to divide society. Second, to attack ideas of social equality and justice and to promote their political agenda, a key element of which is the maintenance of economic and social inequalities and hierarchies. Third, to establish as a right to insult, mock and belittle the poor, members of nationally, ethnically, culturally, religiously, and linguistically diverse groups, women, people with disabilities and people of different sexual orientation.

Political correctness and education

In education, the term political correctness refers to a set of ideas about how schools should be structured and run (Glanz, 1996). The main issues related to political correctness in education are the use of non-offensive language and the changes that need to be made in school and university curricula.

The use of non-offensive language is closely related to political correctness, to the point that a portion of those who use the term think that it is exclusively about the use of language (Wilson, 1996). This close relationship starts from the fact that those who support political correctness embrace Whorf's theory of linguistic relativism (McAfee, 2004), according to which language influences thought. Accordingly, language can help all people understand the structures and contents of the world, as well as social phenomena. It can especially help members of historically disadvantaged groups to escape the marginalization and exclusion they suffer. To do so, the language should be used in such a way, which will also help members of other groups to discover their prejudices and try to eradicate them, as well as to change their attitudes and beliefs. Concluding, language shapes our reality and tells us how to think and respond to it (reality). For example, the use of sexist language produces sexism, which it promotes,

just as the use of racist language produces and promotes racism (Roper, 2020, 2). The production and reproduction of prejudice and racism occurs through every day public discourse, as it is shaped and reflected in the media (Van Dijk, 1997).

Politically correct or incorrect views and linguistic references may relate to social groups that enjoy the sympathy of people who hold conservative or liberal views. For example, conservatives want poor whites not to be called as deplorables or white trash, and believers in a religion not to be called religionists, as well as liberals and libertarians want undocumented immigrants not to be called illegal immigrants (Rosenblum, Schroeder, & Gino, 2020).

Political correctness is therefore primarily a conscious attempt to initiate social change through intervention in language (Fairclough, 2003), since it is based on the notion that if language is changed, then thoughts, attitudes and practices will change. In this context, a set of informal norms were developed particularly in the fields of education and psychology (Halmari, 2011) that filtered out contentious language references (Ravitch 2004). Characteristics: From Black to African American, from Gypsy to Roma, from retarded to differently abled, from backward to developing countries, from prostitutes to sex workers, from abortion to termination of pregnancy, from mother tongue to first language. We note that, as in all movements, there were extreme voices and proposals, some of whose were indeed amusing, such as the one whereby black people should be renamed as people with rich melanin!

Those who oppose political correctness raise two objections to the changes it brings to the use of the language. According to the first, these changes (in language) cannot reduce offensive attitudes or change people's perceptions (O'Neill, 2011; Roper, 2020, 1). For example, the life of a blind woman will not improve when she is called visually impaired, and neither will the life of illegal immigrant women when they are called undocumented persons. According to the second, language boundaries lead to restrictions on freedom and behavior, self-censorship (Roper, 2020, 2) and loss of spontaneity.

Changes in school and university curricula were discussed and took place when social movements, organizations and parties recognized the injustices and marginalization suffered by various social groups. Until then, most narratives of social reality in education came from white males of European descent and excluded facts and issues concern marginalized groups (Beyer, 1994). In other words, official knowledge did not include the historical experiences and cultural representations of the work of women, people of color, and others who were less powerful (Apple, 1992). Therefore, various academics, educators and activists argued that curricula needed to change and incorporate knowledge and perspectives of previously 'invisible' groups, namely the poor, women, members of different ethnic and racial groups, disabled people, and people of different sexual orientation. They also argued that education as an institution should establish measures of positive discrimination in favour of members of groups that have historically been disadvantaged.

In this context, policies and regulations were introduced prohibiting hate speech and actions that belittle or stigmatize those from non-dominant groups (Beyer, 1994). Affirmative action measures were also introduced concerning the admission of students from historically disadvantaged groups to schools and universities, as well as the recruitment of staff members. In addition, new academic disciplines such as Women's Studies, African American and Africana Studies, Ethnic Studies and Gay and Lesbian Studies were created as part of this concept.

Conservative academics, journalists and politicians have opposed and continue to oppose the creation of positive discrimination measures and in the (aforementioned) scientific fields, as well as the spread of educational programs and courses with the same aims and directions. They (conservatives) saw and see in them a threat against Western history, literature, and culture in general (Banks, 1993), a threat against democracy in the United States of America and a decline in academic standards and requirements (D'Souza, 1991).

According to its' opponents, political correctness by slowly eliminating meritocracy and intellectual authority, as the main standards in the country's culture, seeks to flatten (American) culture and diminish the role of elite culture (Epstein, 2019). In addition, opponents of political correctness treat with

suspicion any criticism of the classical texts of Western culture (Bennet, 1984), that is, "the traditional literary canon and the pedagogical values it embodies" (Kimball, 1990, xii). Therefore, they reject disciplines, as well as curricula that include writings and texts by women, African Americans, Native Americans, and members of other minority groups. Opponents of political correctness also believe that education should give students access to high quality works (Mack, 1994, 8), such as those of the "tradition of high civilization embodied in the classics of Western art and thought" (Kimball, 1990, xi), which relate to timeless truths and values that should be transmitted unchanged from generation to generation (Bennett, 1984).

Another reason why conservatives oppose changes in curricula is that they, by promoting achievements of other -non-Western- civilization, pose a threat to the common culture, lead to ethnic fragmentation (Ravitch, 1990) and the balkanization of university life and society (Calleros, 1992).

Concluding, at the political and ideological level conservatives and the far right accuses those who support political correctness that they aim to suppress dissent and freedom of opinion and speech. According to their view, while political correctness ostensibly a tool of civility and respect, actually it silences the foundation of a free society and more specifically the free exchange of ideas and dialogue (Cornforth, 2012, 1). Furthermore, in societies that are regulated by political correctness, many people are afraid to express themselves for fear of being judged for doing so (Ely, Meyerson, & Davidson, 2006, 2).

In our view, those who launch the above accusations against political correctness are the ones who react to dissent with bans. It is they who fight to suppress academic departments, specifically those that systematically study racism, post-colonial history, African American studies, feminism, and have made their flagship the war on one scientific discipline, namely Critical Race Theory (Morgan, 2022). They are the ones who -when and where they can- ban courses and books (Shearer, 2022; Savage, 2023), exclude diverse perspectives, understandings, and values, and leave students without inclusive solutions (Wagner, 1994, 409). They are the ones who -when and where they take power- implement policies that deteriorate public education, distort history in favor of white males, colonialists, and oppressors of all kinds, and marginalize students from diverse backgrounds, students with disabilities and different sexual orientations. We stress that disagreement, different approaches, and dialogue are important elements in understanding social reality and developing critical thinking. When these are absent from the classroom, students look like individuals trying to understand a conversation by listening only to one speaker (Graff, 2000, 27).

The research

The purpose of our research

The aim of our research was to investigate the perceptions, attitudes, experiences, and opinions of the members of the boards of primary school teachers in Thessaloniki regarding political correctness in education.

Research questions

Our main research question was: What are the perceptions, attitudes and practices of primary school teachers' unionists in Thessaloniki on issues related to political correctness.

Our secondary research questions were:

- 1) What is the perception of the teachers in our study about the Elementary School Curriculum in terms of its content related to the life, work and action of the different social/cultural groups that exist in Greece?
- 2) What are the opinions of the teachers in our research the special weight and the content of the liberal arts subjects (literature, religion)?
- 3) How do the teachers in our research present current social issues, political issues and decisions in their classroom?
- 4) Do the teachers who participated in our research use non-sexist language?

Research design

Since our research had this orientation, namely, to explore and interpret, we chose a qualitative research design and more specifically the Case Study, one of the -according to Creswell (2011)- five strategies of qualitative research. The Case Study gives us ample data to describe and interpret social reality, but not to extract laws and regularities. Our case study was the "group" of members of the boards of primary school teachers in the prefecture of Thessaloniki.

As it concerns our research technique, this was a semi-structured interview. This research technique relies on a predetermined and finite number of questions asked to all participants. However, it allows for an out-of-context discussion in which additional themes and perceptions can emerge.

Participants in our research

Our research took place between January and April 2022. Thirty-five (35) from a total of 42 teachers elected to the boards of their associations, twelve women and twenty-three men took part in it. In terms of the service characteristics of the participants in our study, these are as follows:

Table 1. Years of Service

Years of service	Participants
20 - 30 years of service	11
30 - 40 years of service	25

Table 2. Occupation / Position

Occupation / Position	Participants
School principals of general primary schools	11
school principals of special primary school	1
Early years teachers	3
General education teachers	18
Other	2

Thirty-three interviews took place in person and the other two were conducted online. Thirty-one interviews took place in teachers' workplaces and two in non-school settings. Participants were informed of the purpose of the research and received a written statement in which the researcher undertook that ethics would be observed, i.e. that their personal data would not be disclosed, nor any information would be published that would lead to the identification of views with a particular person. The length of the interviews ranged from forty-five to seventy-five minutes and all but two were recorded with the teachers' consent.

Limitations of our research

Our research is qualitative and as such does not claim generalizability. In other words, the findings of our research cannot be generalized to all trade unionists in Greece or elsewhere.

The analysis of the data

The recorded interviews were transcribed, and data analysed using Thematic Analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Thematic Analysis helps the researcher to process large amounts of data, as it is an active process of understanding and coding the ideas, themes and meanings that are repeated. More specifically, after

reading and re-reading the data, we highlighted and coded the words, ideas and concepts used by the teachers. We then grouped the codes and came up with six themes, which we present below by quoting relevant verbatim excerpts from the interviews.

1. The concept of political correctness
2. The use of "politically correct" language by teachers
3. Sexist language in textbooks
4. Curricula and "different" social groups
5. Curricula and religion
6. Teaching of controversial social issues

The concept of political correctness

Our assessment is that the concept of political correctness is not very well known in Greece. This can be seen from the fact that more than one third of those who took part in our survey stated that they were not familiar with the concept. As for the opinion of those who were aware of political correctness, it ranged from skeptical to negative:

"I find the concept a bit hypocritical in the sense that we are in a state that condemns and puts people aside no matter what it says, since the use of political correctness intend to mitigate any problems with a very nice overlay using language" (K.M.).

"If political correctness leads to anchoring slavery, then we who want to change things become slaves of anchoring If political correctness is used as a tool for us who want to change things and fight injustice, then it is acceptable" (M.B.).

Some of our participants showed that they know a little more about how the concept of political correctness has been used historically:

"I think it started out with very good intentions, but it has become oppressive and overstepping the boundaries, kind of silencing people who can't express themselves freely" (M.M.).

"Yes, it depends on how it's used each time, it's incomprehensible to people, it's hypocrisy sometimes because the practice is different" (S.D.).

Finally, there was one (only) participant whose assessment of political correctness was only positive:

"Yes, I think it's very much right that all people of any race should now use political correctness in their daily lives so that they don't offend or marginalize people."

The use of "politically correct" language by teachers

The teachers who took part in our research use non-offensive language, because most of them have realized that this is required by modern social and political conditions, their pedagogical role and the respect that all people should enjoy:

"I'm very careful about the words, the language I use, because our society is multicultural, there is poverty, violence, etc. I will try to help students understand these issues, convince them to avoid language and actions that do harm to people and live by rules, morality love, respect and above all democracy" (L.K.).

"Always, a student who comes to school with fear is a failure of the teacher, the child should feel comfortable and happy in the school environment, this is truer, this is more so for those from different cultural backgrounds, who should not be offended" (L.M.).

"Yes, yes I careful about the way I speak, that's basic for me, everyone has the right to belong where they belong, to feel as they feel, to express themselves as they express themselves, but through dialogue you can solve their problems and keep balance" (S.D.).

There were some participants who also invoked the fear of the reactions from parents or politicians that some offensive expressions might cause:

"We were forced to adapt to this new trend, because political correctness has now led to fundamentalism, and you can find yourself in trouble where you least expect it. if, say, if he was referring to fat students, then may the mother of the obese child come along and turn us upside down. Say nigger and the father of the black kid comes along? Unfortunately, things have gone badly wrong, so I have to be careful" (K.M.).

"Over the years things have changed, a great effort is made, and many things depend on us teachers. I personally have reached a level where I do not offend social groups, no matter what I say. Things weren't like that when I started out as a teacher, now I do not have to pay attention " (M.P.).

Sexist language in textbooks

Teachers who participated in our research highlighted as an important issue for political correctness the use of non-sexist language, i.e. language that is not limited to the use of the masculine gender to describe any human activity, and they considered that the textbooks, as well as themselves, do not meet its standards:

"...at least in writing we refer only to boys - students and not to girls - students, as if the latter do not exist. The same in the textbooks, referring only to the masculine gender" (S.P.).

"This is wrong for me, both genders should be used, both masculine and feminine, indeed only the male - student is used, the male - teacher etc." (M.M.).

"Generally, we only use the masculine gender and not the feminine or neutral, I don't agree with them there should be an equal treatment of all people" (K.M.).

Regarding the efforts made in recent years by institutions such as universities and the state to promote non-sexist language, a significant part of our teachers has taken a negative stance:

"I think there is an exaggeration in this, when we use it to say that there is a prejudice against women. Using language in this way does not has a negative meaning, it is a grammatical phenomenon" (T.G.).

"Because when I was young, we spend 3 years to learn anti-sexist language at the university, I do not consider it essential. If the curriculum is aimed at gender equality, then using both genders during the lesson, I think does not offer anything substantial" (N.D.).

"It doesn't bother me, but I find it a bit tedious to always use both genders" (H.S.).

Curricula and "different" social groups

The participants in our survey recognize that school curriculum has a strong political dimension, and they consider that the knowledge and skills it provides and promotes favour the dominant ideology and the preservation of the current economic system. Consequently, the "different" groups are not represented in the curriculum, or their picture is incomplete and distorted:

"The Curriculum is never politically neutral, the interests of government policy depending on which policy prevails change the Curriculum and the texts used in the school textbooks" (S.D.).

"It is mainly Greek-centered, as can be seen from its general objectives, the way it promotes the national spirit. However, there are some scattered references to other cultures, as well as recommendations to respect diversity. Ethnocentric with a touch of multiculturalism" (A.V.).

"It is outdated, it must be changed, it does not respond to the needs of society and our students. It creates problems especially for our students with differ ethnic background and with special needs, because there is no alternating curriculum for them. This curriculum must be change, it is fascist because we must apply it the same throughout the country" (B.G.).

In more detail, as far as the different social groups are concerned: First, as far as people living in poverty are concerned, the teachers of our research estimate that they are hardly or not at all presented in the curriculum of the Greek primary school, and that the data for them are misleading:

" Not even close to being in the curriculum, even in the math's books there are only people from the middle class and above, people who can shop for goods, go to a theater etc." (L.L.).

" People living in poverty are presented in the traditional way, as people who have little goods and make do with little and live a measured and happy life" (S.S.).

"As good people who work from morning till night to have a piece of bread, like the breadwinner who struggles for his life" (P.P.).

Regarding people from different ethnic, national, ethnic, cultural, religious, and linguistic groups, the teachers who took part in our research have the same -as for the poor- assessment, i.e. that they too appear very little in textbooks and even with falsified data:

"They are largely absent. When a stimulus is given by the textbooks for these people, teachers grasp at it and try to extend it" (H.T.).

" They are barely represented in the curriculum, which is not designed to promote diversity at any level, not only in ethnicity" (S.D.).

The teachers in our study have a similar assessment of the way women are presented in the curriculum of the Greek primary school, who appear to play:

"a traditional role in the home, housewife at home, dad works, classic Greek family" (M.M.).

"...like a stay-at-home mom, cleaning. But it seems like she's the one taking care of the kids, not the dad. She doesn't appear inferior but within the family she is the one who has to take care of the children a lot" (H.S.).

We underline, however, that some teachers, evaluating positively the efforts made in education on women's issues, had a more optimistic view:

" Some attempts were made, we got away from the curriculum where mom wears an apron and cares about food and most of the time the man decides " (CA).

"Twenty years ago, there were a lot of sexist elements within the curriculum, where the man was higher than the woman. In the last 20 years women are finding their role they are gaining what they should, and I think things will get even better in the future" (G.C.).

The teachers who took part in our research found that people with disabilities appear little or almost completely absent from the curriculum and textbooks of primary education:

"More or less, there are some modules in the large classes, but people with disabilities are not presented as equal individuals who can also contribute to society. However, they are not to be pitied. They have abilities and can contribute to society. This is not shown in these classes" (K.K.).

" Little, the first time they are presented is a reference to diversity. Disability is hardly mentioned at all" (D.D.).

Finally, according to the teachers who took part in our research, people with different sexual orientation are completely absent from the curriculum and textbooks of Greek primary schools:

"No, they don't exist, it's a taboo subject, even parents say to us to not talk about sex education. There is a lot of negativities from parents, books and teachers, Greek society is not ready for it" (L.G.).

"They don't show up at all, we are we are a backward society. Sex education was not established but only spasmodically. Very small steps have been taken and these students are suffering" (B.L.).

Curricula and religion

A key issue related to people of different religions is that of the nature and content of the religious education curriculum. Most of the teachers who took part in our research believe that this subject should cease to have a dogmatic content:

"There is an insistence on the catechetical character. A course that is not addressed to all students cannot have a place in school, it must be removed from the curriculum. On the other hand, religion is a phenomenon you cannot ignore. Thus, a literacy course in the religious phenomenon is necessary in school" (K.Z.).

"Religion books fill children with guilt. They create children without judgment since they have dogmas in their heads all the time. Of course, this has to stop with the religion books and of course teachers should turn them into something else or not open these books at all and only introduce some concepts, but with a sociological approach" (M.M.).

The teachers in our study proposed the replacement of the religion course with a new one, i.e. a course that would help all children to learn about different religions and that would not exclude children of other religions:

"Yes, since we have religious tolerance in our country, at least the constitution of Greece claims this, I believe that elements of other religions should be included in the curriculum" (G.N.).

" it would be better to have a course of Religious studies. Such an attempt had been recently made, but unfortunately it was stopped, because there is pressure from the institution of the Greek orthodox church, which is shaking many things. Certainly, religious studies should be referred to our religion, but the student should be able to learn what each religion stands for and freely decide which religion to follow" (G.M.).

Teaching of controversial social issues

Teaching controversial issues in schools is essential to enable teachers to help students to form their values and ethics, to learn to debate with arguments and to develop their critical thinking. However, due to the nature of these issues, teachers often face problems:

"Many times, when I took a stand on an issue, there were some reactions from parents who disagreed. I always let both opinions be heard, I just said my own. But after a certain point, because of the reaction of the parents, I stopped stating my opinion. Now I listen to the children and say in the end I agree or disagree" (H.S.).

"Yes, yes, because there are many opportunities and the children have a lot of knowledge, I give my opinion. I listen to the children, but I always give my opinion within the framework of political correctness because the last thing I want is for a parent to come the next day and tell me why you told the children this or that." (K.A.).

The teachers in our research said that they use every opportunity presented to them to develop such topics:

"Often, and when the right opportunity is given, i.e. when a child has to be given a reason from the lesson or to say something, I take the opportunity and go to the current issues. I always let the children's opinions be heard. I am very interested to create reflection and dialogue, but I do not take a position" (N.F.).

"Yes, the children themselves often provoke the discussion because, for example, they see something on TV. I try to take part in the discussion, but without influencing them and, first, on many issues I want them to respect the opinion of their family. I can't always give my opinion, because there are issues that we have to be careful about" (K.L.).

Finally, the teachers who took part in our research stated that they develop the topics with great care so as not to be accused of proselytizing or indoctrination:

"Yes, yes, of course you can't guide children ideologically. However, I will listen to them and make them think about other parameters. Especially the social issues I discuss with them. It is methodologically wrong to direct; I ask questions I listen to their own opinion and prompt them to think about something they don't have in their perspective" (F.F.).

Instead of epilogue

Over the last twenty years, while poverty and economic inequalities are increasing, those who control the media, together with influential people in social networks, as well as various politicians and parties, have organized a long and apparently successful campaign to discredit diversity and fight social justice. Furthermore, by scapegoating different people, the above-mentioned actors in public life have managed to distract a large part of the population in many countries from their real problems and turn their attention to issues of identities. By making their ideology dominant, they have promoted policies that violate and nullify the rights of people belonging to different national, ethnic, cultural, and religious groups, as well as women, people with disabilities and people with different sexual orientations. This is the context in which we understand the attack on political correctness, which is not a defined movement with specific demands, but is supported by people who advocate social justice. Conservative and far-right politicians, as well as some media, over-use the term as a message in favor of maintaining discriminations, economic and social inequalities, as well as in favor of unequal distribution of power. Some of them have even made political correctness a leading social problem, as for example Donald Trump, who during his 2015 political campaign stated that "the big problem this country has is political correctness" (Milbank, 2015).



In Greece, the concept of political correctness has begun to be used in public discourse, but not -as our research has shown- to any great extent. Therefore, there is a gap in social research, which we believe our research helps to fill.

Our research aimed to explore teachers' perceptions, attitudes, experiences, and opinions regarding political correctness in education. We believe that our findings are important for a better educational policy related to an inclusive and democratic school, because they give the actors who formulate educational policy (politicians, senior education officials), evidence that they can use to promote the issues covered by political correctness. In addition, our research gives a 'voice' to teachers, whose opinion and suggestions should be considered in relation to educational issues.

In conclusion, we stress that believing in the emancipatory potential of education, we advocate the notion that that schools can play an important role in achieving a better society. In other words, we are convinced that education, together with other institutions can play an important role in combating racism, discrimination, exclusion, and economic inequalities. For this, however, it requires broad recognition of its (education's) role and sustained effort by all the institutions and individuals involved.

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Biographical notes:

Dimitris Zachos's scientific subject is pedagogy - intercultural education for social justice. At the center of his theoretical and research work are the issues of socio-economic inequalities, unequal distribution of power, racism, nationalism and discrimination..

Sofia Douvleka is currently a Postgraduate student at the University of Nicosia – Cyprus. Her research interests focus on issues of social justice in education.