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The Political Classroom: Evidence And Ethics In Democratic Education (Critical Social Thought)



Synopsis

WINNER 2016 Grawemeyer Award in Education Helping students develop their ability to deliberate political questions is an essential component of democratic education, but introducing political issues into the classroom is pedagogically challenging and raises ethical dilemmas for teachers. Diana E. Hess and Paula McAvoy argue that teachers will make better professional judgments about these issues if they aim toward creating "political classrooms," which engage students in deliberations about questions that ask, "How should we live together?" Based on the findings from a large, mixed-method study about discussions of political issues within high school classrooms, *The Political Classroom* presents in-depth and engaging cases of teacher practice. Paying particular attention to how political polarization and social inequality affect classroom dynamics, Hess and McAvoy promote a coherent plan for providing students with a nonpartisan political education and for improving the quality of classroom deliberations.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

The authors raise many questions about ethical problems teachers confront, not only in terms of what issues they choose to discuss but also how they ensure that all sides of a controversy are presented fairly and decide whether to reveal their own political leanings. Learning to respect those who have different perspectives is an important component of students' experience, as is using evidence appropriately. Readers of this book will gain a deeper understanding and appreciation of these complex issues. ... Summing Up: Highly recommended. Upper-division

undergraduates and above. - S. Sugarman, emerita, Vermont State Colleges, CHOICE, June 2015

“ How can schools prepare students to become knowledgeable and engaged citizens of our democracy? Hess and McAvoy provide a deeply researched and philosophically sophisticated answer to that challenge. In our increasingly polarized time, McAvoy and Hess show how the need for education in deliberation about controversial public issues has never been more urgent. This brilliant book could not be more timely. - Lawrence Blum, Distinguished Professor of Liberal Arts and Education and professor of philosophy at the University of Massachusetts, Boston This astute, rigorously researched, original, and timely book describes how teachers can effectively teach civic knowledge and skills in today’s highly polarized times. The vivid and engaging portraits of teachers and schools and the seamless ways in which it blends theory, research, and practice make this book a unique and compelling contribution to the literature on the civic engagement of youth. It is an indispensable reference for educators who want to strengthen democracy and increase the civic literacy and participation of youth. - James A. Banks, Kerry and Linda Killinger Endowed Chair in Diversity Studies and Founding Director, Center for Multicultural Education University of Washington, Seattle The Political Classroom uses powerful research to reveal the complexities of engaging students in “best practice” discussions of the controversial political issues they will confront throughout their lives. In doing so, Hess and McAvoy show how important teachers are to fulfilling the promise of democracy in our time. - Michelle M. Herczog, President, National Council for the Social Studies Hess and McAvoy’s research is forward-looking in two important senses: in its focus on the political education of youth, who will soon be voters and otherwise civically engaged adults; and because it offers badly needed, evidenced-based guidance about how we can cultivate citizens who thoughtfully reflect upon their values, and who respectfully engage with others across differences of opinion. - Anne Newman, Research Director at the McCoy Family Center for Ethics in Society at Stanford University ”

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THE POLITICAL CLASSROOM is a great book. Hess and McAvoy argue that “democratic education requires teachers to create a political classroom in which young people develop the skills, knowledge and dispositions that allow them to collectively make decisions about how we ought to live together.” (p.11). In our increasingly polarized

society, the authors show how to teach students to argue and listen to other points of view on controversial issues in what they term “deliberations” (p.5). In short, they propose strategies for dialogue across the political divide, so crucial for the survival of our democracy. Improved dialogue will not be achieved by lecturing at students, no matter how entertaining. Their critique of lecturing, based on their own interviews of what students recall from classes, is devastating. It’s even more disturbing because many of the lecturers were extremely knowledgeable and entertaining, known as “legends” in their schools. Any teacher reading this book will have second thoughts about the efficacy of lecturing. The authors lay out a framework for professional judgment for teachers in coaching students how to deliberate. They show great respect for teachers, empowering them to shepherd students along in discussion. They “find it foolish to reduce the teacher’s role to one of simply enacting the curriculum decisions made by others.” (p.208) The authors take on tricky elements of running a deliberative classroom. For example, when if ever should teachers give their own views on these controversial subjects? Hess and McAvoy give examples and evidence about this dilemma, rather than recommendations about which way is best. If you care about democracy, if you want to improve the learning of your students, or if you want a book for professional development, this is the book for you. It is original, practical, carefully researched, well written and above all, insightful in pointing the way to improving the education of students in social studies.

Hess and McAvoy deftly bring together rigorous social science research and philosophic analysis to address ethical issues within teaching. Grounded in these two complimentary frameworks, their work directly confronts what they term, “the political education paradox.” That is, they examine tension between providing students with non-partisan political education while simultaneously preparing them for a highly partisan society. As Hess and McAvoy explain, “Part of the ethical challenge of teaching about politics is determining where political education ends and political proselytizing begins.” (p. 4). Through their examination of a mixed-methods, longitudinal study of high school social studies classes that explore controversial issues, the authors investigate how political classrooms address the guiding question, “How should we live together?” Throughout, Hess and McAvoy maintain a keen focus social inequality and political polarization and their roles in the political classroom. This book is an invaluable

resource for practicing teachers and administrators, scholars of education, those within teacher preparation programs, philosophers of education, and, significantly, policy makers and others outside the academy and the field of education. Simply put, this unique and timely book is a must-read.

The Political Classroom is one of the best books I have read in a long time. Paula McAvoy and Diana Hess have written a book that brings together the theory and practice of democratic education in a way that few other books have. Their case studies paint a beautiful portrait of what goes into engaging students in discussions of controversial political issues. All the while, they are interrogating the normative dimensions of teacher practices from the case studies and providing the reader with a broader picture of democratic education based on their larger study. And, if that isn't enough to make The Political Classroom stand out among its academic peers in education, the fact that it is a genuinely enjoyable and compelling read surely separates it from the pack. There is nothing quite like this book in the educational world. If you're even remotely interested in what good, discussion-based teaching look like, do yourself a favor and read this book!

An essential read for educators navigating the current state of things. I am thankful that McAvoy and Hess have written this book. I will definitely be bringing more deliberation into my classroom.

While the author of The Political Classroom makes it clear that any discussion or opinion critical of Democratic Party beliefs and talking points is forbidden by teachers and children, the real gem of this book is the actual data and testimonials by teachers and students of every possible combination of ideology of the community and teacher. The book has teachers and students, in their own words, articulate their beliefs going into the class, a play-by-play during the class, any big moments, after the class, and even interviews students five years after the class. The teachers really show their wisdom - which is a heck of a lot more than the author. If you are looking to advocate for a politics in the classroom curriculum in your school, this book has every possible combination of situations that will address concerns of indoctrination for the school board. Overall, I think this book would be more widely accepted if the author wasn't such a typical liberal educator who wishes to indoctrinate. This overshadows the excellent research effort of this topic.

Great book. Very compelling argument and very well written and organized.

Good but is not a five star book.

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