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Towards a developmental conceptualization of education of citizens as promoters of social justice

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Abstract

This paper presents an outline of a new framework to analyze the relations between citizenship education and the promotion of social justice. It is suggested that the scarce long term effects of many educative programmes oriented toward the promotion of attitudes and key-concepts concerning social justice, can be explained by the lack of a developmental view in many of them. It is proposed four main relevant dimensions for taking into account this developmental view: a) educative dimension that includes formal and informal programmes or contexts, b) scaffolding dimension relating with the practices of adults c) social-cognitive development dimension, and d) a peer cooperation dimension. We concluded that in this general framework, citizenship education must go beyond cosmopolitanism, taking a further step: the promotion of social justice.

Keywords: *Social Justice; socio-cognitive development, peer relations, formal and informal education; citizenship education.*

Introduction

In a general sense, Social Justice Theories (Fraser, 2008, Sen, 2009, Nussbaum, 2011) stress, the high relevance of education and citizenship. But it is necessary to link social justice theories more deeply with the educational practices in relation to a citizenship education. One first step to promote social justice in citizenship education must be based in the analysis of the legal framework and social and educational decisions to combat exclusion, discrimination and violation of the rights of children and youth. A second step involves promoting changes in social relations and interactions that have impact in the attitudes and behaviour to reduce social injustice. That means that it is necessary that the programmes have long term effects. But, this is un-common. After reviewing 900 studies and reports on multicultural education, cooperative learning, peace education, intercultural education, promoting diversity intercultural training, etc., Palluck and Green (2009) conclude that only very few programmes shown to be really effective. They also have showed that a high number of these programmes are designed from disciplines such as political science, sociology and social psychology, and most of these programmes are primarily focused on intervention with adults rather than children. Another important point to note also is that the vast majority of the studies reviewed do not consider developmental or life-span psychological dimensions involve in process of

social exclusion, prejudice and discrimination, or how the factors that promote equity and justice could be have to do with the lives of boys and girls. In our opinion, these developmental data are important to effectively promote justice, equity and respect for all. For that it is necessary to take in account socio-cognitive developmental dimensions to explain how prejudice, discrimination and exclusion, change throughout human development. This approach will allow understanding in more depth, for example, the role of developmental changes that occur in the moral and prosocial thinking of children, when they explicitly reject exclusion, but implicitly promote it; or when they are able to assess and analyse situations of injustice and to make decisions that promote social justice.

Citizenship and Social Justice

As Rawls (1971) said, what remains to be done is to elaborate a psychological - and educational *we add* - model that explains how people construct their representations of social justice. This was the main task of his “Political Psychology” (Nussbaum, 2011). We try to walk in this direction analysing the psychological construction of the main concepts from the Social Justice Theory. Especially, we try to focus on the psychological interphase between the three-dimensional model of social justice (Fraser, 2008) and the Capabilities approach (Sen, 2009 and Nussbaum, 2011) of social justice, and its relationship with the construction of citizenship.

The three dimensional model of Social Justice in Education - or the 3R model, described by Murillo and Hernández-Castilla (2011) based on Fraser (2008) - notes three basic components: Redistribution, Recognition and Representation/Participation. But it is necessary also to know: a) what is the core of redistribution of resources; b) how must be the recognition processes in relation to others; and, c) what are the representational procedures and the participative contexts in education.

The Capability approach talks about goods and resources in order to deploy the basic capabilities and their functionings in real contexts. Within this view, Nussbaum propose ten basic capabilities that should be supported by all democracies. Some of them have a strong relation with education processes, such ‘Senses, Imagination, and Thought’ and ‘Practical Reason’, and others relate to developmental and life-span process, such as ‘Affiliation’, ‘Emotions’ and ‘Play’. But in all cases the main task is to promote human development in a global and individual sense; to have availability and access to goods and resources in order to make possible the process of individual agency of every human being. From our point of view this capability approach has to be included in a more broad perspective of Citizenship Education.

As Prilleltensky (2012) notes, a Social justice optimal context promotes personal (and social) wellbeing, lack of comparisons and personal (and social) achievement. This also means the full functionings or deployment of Basic and Combined Capabilities. In our view, the nexus between Social Justice and Citizenship is tied to Global cosmopolitanism (Banks, 2011). That is to say that personal well being is linked with social (in context) wellbeing and in ‘global wellbeing’ or welfare and with the respect to Universal Human Rights. From our view, citizenship education, in a global cosmopolitanism view, must be taking in account as a main objective the promotion of Social Justice. For this, it is necessary not only to design educational programmes

committed to the advancement of human rights and social justice. It is also necessary that these educational activities are designed taking in account knowledge from the different dimensions involved in the children construction of notions of Social Justice.

Dimensions of a Social Justice Developmental view for Citizenship Education.

We propose to analyze the development of social justice core concepts using four dimensions. These dimensions are a) Development of thinking and feelings for Social Justice, b) Scaffolding for social justice, c) Formal -and also informal- education for Social Justice and d) Peer Cooperation for Social Justice. Obviously these dimensions are related between them. Also, some of them have received a high concern. But we think that is relevant to see their specific contributions, for analytical reasons, obviously without losing sight of its mutual interaction. We try to outline the main characteristics of four dimensions in the process of construction of social justice core concepts.

Development of Thinking and feeling to Social Justices

This dimension refers to how children construct the representation of Social Justice in relation to other aspects or social dimensions, including aspects are related to the understanding of others, prosocial reasoning and moral development, as well as in the case of adolescent, identity development and, on the other hand, political thought. It is a dimension whose study can draw on other nearby areas of social development. For this reason, and given its rich tradition in developmental psychology, we can predict, roughly, what aspects, concepts, or situations that promote social justice can be understood or not by children, adolescents or young adults. A good example of the important contributions that can offer this evolutionary dimension of the representation and understanding of the various areas of social justice, are the contributions collected in Wainryb, Smetana and Turiel (2008).

Scaffolding for Social for Social Justice

It seems obvious to note that this dimension is closely linked and related to the previous, but for analytical reasons, should be describe independently. This dimension refers to the types of formats and interactive scaffolding deploying adults (but not teachers) who are responsible for the care of children. These adults usually deploy those formats of interaction of interpretation when their children see or face situations in which it is committed his rights or freedoms, or the rights of others. This dimension also includes the answers and interpretations offered by adults to the progressive understanding of disadvantage or injustice that children show in everyday life human poverty, injustice, inequality, discrimination or prejudice. The interpretation and comments of the parents and relatives has and deep impact, and not always in the desired direction by adults, because children construct their own social justice representations, besides of their parent and their families and communities. It is relevant to remark that the behaviour and representations of social justice of parents and relatives can be a model to copy, but also may lead to the rejection of those views. Therefore, to analyze this dimension we need

to analyze and deal with psychological and educational scaffolding formats to promote social justice, for example, in adult interaction with children and with adolescents and young adults.

Formal and Informal Education for Social Justice

In this dimension we focus on the analysis of the role of formal educational context and also in non-formal activities, especially those have to be to complementary activities relating sport, music or other activities plan by adults for children learning. In this dimension there are different levels or subsystems that can promote the elaboration of social justice representations by children and adolescents. First, we mention the curriculum as basic source and organizing principle of educational activities throughout the period of compulsory education. The curriculum it is a guide and a main reference. Cases like the debate on education for citizenship and human rights as an independent subject, or the introduction in this curriculum of "social and cultural values" from a specific moral and ideological view, clearly put in evidence this subsystem. We can also see the important role promoting Social Justice in Education has meant programmes like Head Start (Zigler and Styfco, 2008) and other compensatory education programmes aimed at primary education. So, in this context, we use the term curriculum a very broad sense.

We can also easily point some other subsystems within this dimension. One of these subsystems, which traditionally has been given more attention (Shakman, Cochran-Smith, et al 2007) is the training of teachers for social justice. The different teacher training models (from kindergarten to post-secondary teachers) can promote in a greater or lesser extent, attitudes and skills that enable teachers to make decisions in the classroom or in a professional way that promote social justice or allow help students to make that reflection.

In addition to this subsystem, it is also clear the role of principals and heads of the school as leaders and promoters of actions and decisions that promote social justice. One study made by our research group (Hernández-Castilla and Murillo, 2013) on the personal and biographical characteristics of principals who work in schools that actively promote social justice, shows how there are different training profiles or personal trajectories that leads to different representations on how to promote social justice in schools.

Under this dimension, we identify other subsystems such as those related to the educational environment and the role of the school as a whole community as an active promoter of social justice beyond the academic school work or every day activities.

While formal education has been given much attention, this is not the case in the field of informal education. Activities, especially in the field of sports or complementary cultural training, that occur outside school time schedule could be an opportunity but, in some cases, could be an obstacle and have the opposite effect in the promotion of social justice. Although the subject of fewer of studies, a fundamental part of this subsystem is the role of local councils in the promoting social justice programmes and activities (Seguro et al 2012)

Peer Cooperation for Social Justice

Under this dimension we include the role of peers and their cooperation for the promotion of social justice. Clearly, this dimension is closely related to the first of the dimensions described. But we believe that it is relevant to describe this independently. Consider for a moment the first attempts to regulate the actions in traditional games – such hide-and-seek - by children and their gradual progress towards cooperation in making decisions by Primary Education students. We can also take in mind the long and profound collective reflection of adolescents about possible worlds. These examples and many others allow us to identify that peers necessarily play a specific and highly relevant role that is different to the role of parents, tutors and teachers. It is debatable to what extent this peer effect can be complementary or not with the influences of parents or the influence of the school system itself. But it is possible to say that sometimes the influence of peer groups can in fact counterbalance the role of these other actors. The specificity of this dimension is easily seen in adolescence where the role of peers has a greater effect, especially in relation to the achievement of personal identity. It is easy to identify some of the subsystems that can be analyzed in this dimension. On the one hand, we see one subsystem concerning gangs, having a profound effect as agent of change in attitudes and values. Another relevant subsystem is the friend group (or the best friend group). And a third relevant subsystem is dating. Girls and boyfriends have a high effect with regard to personal and intimate dimensions of social justice, as highlighted by studies on abuse and harassment among peers. We believe, therefore, that there are also areas and decisions that promote social justice that fall within the scope of privacy.

Conclusions

In our view, these four dimensions converged in a Social Justice Dimension that includes concepts and representations about redistribution of goods and resources, recognition of diversity, a representation and participation in decision taking. We also think that the role of citizenship education must go in the direction of promoting social justice representations and actions oriented to the development of capabilities and their functionings in personal, social and global contexts.

In our view each person (child, adult, teacher) can be located in a loci of a continuum that goes from lowest to highest promotion for Social Justice, in the bases of his or her representation of Social Justice. We also think that this representations can be evaluated contrasting each person to hypothetical dilemmas concerning social justice issues and analyzing their answers.

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