Social Justice: An exploratory study of representations of Social Justice in Secondary Training teachers

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Abstract

The aim of this survey was to determine the prospective teachers´ representations of Social Justice and its three dimensions (Murillo and Hernandez, 2011, Jacott and Maldonado, 2012): Redistribution, Recognition and Representation / Participation). We researched whether there were differences in the representations, in terms of gender, the study area (Humanities and Social Sciences or Science), or previous teaching experience (with or without) among participants.

For this we designed and validated a questionnaire that allowed us to evaluate those representations in students of Master in secondary teaching education, from the Universidad Autónoma de Madrid.

The results did not show significant differences in terms of gender representations, nor as to the field of study. However, differences were found between subjects with regard to the presence or absence of previous teaching experience.

Keywords: Social Justice, training teachers, Redistribution, Recognition, Representation/Participation, dilemmas, education.

Introduction

In recent years, there is increasing concern to achieve Social Justice in all areas: educational, social, personal, etc. The philosopher and essayist Julian Marias even said that "the twentieth century would not be understandable without that term" (the Social Justice) (Marias, 1974). Similarly, the teacher Juan Carlos Tedesco (2010) told us that "the century can (and should) be the century of Social Justice".

According to the author, we are in a time when there is great uncertainty and lack of sense about our future, which may result in an individualistic society, asocial, or from radical authoritarian rules. The alternative to these two fundamentalisms therefore requires build fairer societies, where quality education is the key to social inclusion, so as to achieve learning outcomes, not dependent on class or social status.

For this quality education is fundamental commitment both to the allocation of financial resources to the collective efforts of all those involved in the teaching-learning process: students, teachers, families, the media and the state. As teachers, Juan Carlos Tedesco argues that they are in a paradoxical situation, because while they are recognized as a fundamental part in the quality of education, apply measures that discredit their profession.

One way to avoid this situation is to design comprehensive policies covering them work conditions, initial and ongoing training, and design of the teaching career. In addition, it is vital to incorporate methodologies that enable students to discover the passion for knowledge, experimentation and mastery of logical reasoning as part of their scientific, always accompanied by a full confidence in the ability of student learning and engagement and accountability for results by teachers. All this combined with the importance of promoting civic education aimed at enhancing critical thinking, global citizenship and Social Justice in this century (Nussbaum, 2010; Westheimer and Kahne, 2004).

Therefore, to build a just society is essential to go for a quality education for all. Quality education necessarily includes Social Justice education, as a key point in our society. Today's students need to be well informed and know the different realities that exist, in order to acquire their own criteria and attitudes in their development. This becomes even more necessary in the present age, that the crisis, globalization and migration, are appearing more injustices and inequalities (eg, in terms of gender, social class, culture, ability, sexual orientation, etc..) and in turn, these are more complex. It's uncertain future we spoke Tedesco.

Fortunately, as we have indicated, there is also an increased concern to achieve Social Justice and ultimately build a more just society.
Thus, we consider really important to know the previous ideas that are currently practicing teachers and especially those in training, to in the future from these in teaching. In our opinion, one must begin to analyze what are the representations of teachers about Social Justice and how these representations affect their educational practices in order to implement an education that promotes Social Justice.

The school is the primary unit in education, so that to achieve Social Justice Education, schools are required to work for justice and for this, as research shows us to be detailed below. But before discussing these works, it is essential to unravel the concept of Social Justice and identify how a school must act to achieve this, since it depends on the actions carried out in the school.

Current approaches to the concept of social justice

As can be appreciated, the concept of Social Justice cannot have a unique meaning, because it is used for different purposes on issues closely linked to politics and the economy. Furthermore, the definition of Social Justice in the educational context is more

ambiguous. Griffiths proposes that Social Justice is a verb, a dynamic project never finished, always subject to reflection and improvement. And from our study, we investigated Social Justice based on three dimensions: Redistribution, Recognition and Representation / Participation.

Redistribution (Rawls, 1971; Sen, 2010) is based on how primary goods, resources or capabilities are distributed in society. Their claims are intended to make a more just distribution of these goods.

Recognition (Fraser y Honneth, 2006) refers to the social and cultural respect to every single person up on the earth, and also having social fair relationships within a society.

And finally, the Representation (Fraser, 2008) mean the full participation of people in society.

Castilla and Hernández-Murillo have contributed to that there is a theoretical framework for integrating Social Justice these three dimensions as dimensions of Social Justice and indicating the urgent need for a framework that integrates them. Meanwhile, Maldonado and Jacott have established a system practical knowledge representations around the three dimensions of Social Justice, used by teachers. This knowledge is based on profound ideological values on education and experience and academic training.

Objectives:

The objectives of our study were two:

Firstly, the construction and validation of an questionnaire to know the conceptualizations of three dimensions of Social Justice in Secondary training teachers.

And secondly, analyze the differences between these representations by gender, university degree and teaching experience.

This research is part of those developed by the Research Group for School Change, Educational Change for Social Justice" (GICE) of the Faculty of Teacher Training and Education of the Universidad Autónoma de Madrid. This objective arises from the need to extend the age range and educational level of the subjects in their representations of Social Justice, as this same team is working in parallel with other research that tries to see these concepts in school students.

The main idea of this research is to see if these students have conceptions of Social Justice, which in the future may be applied in teaching high school students, or on the contrary have no points integrated into these issues.

Hypothesis:

We expect to find differences between the representation of Social Justice (and their dimension) by:

- Gender: We expect more complex representations in girls than in boys, according to the results obtained by different authors. They indicated that girls are more prosocial in her behavior, thinking and affective response. (Metzger and Smetana, 2010; Eisenberg, 2006; Jaffe and Hayde, 2000).

- University degree: Initially, we would expect that participants with formation in the field of humanities have greater representation of Social Justice that participants in the field of science, because they have taken more subjects related to Social Justice in your training.

- Teaching experience: There will also differences between subjects who have previous teaching experience and those without.

Table 1. Participants: 92 Secondary Training Teachers (N: Women= 80,2%. Men= 19,8 %)

	Without teaching experience	With teaching experience
Humanities/ social sciences	19 22,1 %	36 41,9 %
Science	14 16,3 %	17 19,8 %

Method

We have designed a Social Justice questionnaire with 24 dilemmas: 8 of each dimension with 3 alternative responses: promoter of Social Justice, non-promoter or intermediate.

As example, the following dilemma is the one used in the interview. In this case, the dimension of Social Justice is Recognition and the topic is bullying:

Pablo is a student in 2th grade of secondary education, who is continually pestered and mobbed by a group in his class. Santiago knows what his friends are doing and wants to stop it. What should he do? :

  a. Tell them they can´t do that to Pablo and if they do not listen, ask an adult for help.

  b. Not to interfere with disputes, in order to avoid losing friends.

   c.   Talk to Pablo to help him avoid these situations.

Analysis

We have calculated the total number of dilemmas in which each teacher selects the most Social Justice promoting answer. This means a maximum value of 24.

Main results

Significant differences were founded with respect teaching experience: The teachers with experience have a more elaborated representation of Social Justice.

However, no significant differences exist between neither gender nor university degree. The results are shown in the following graphs.
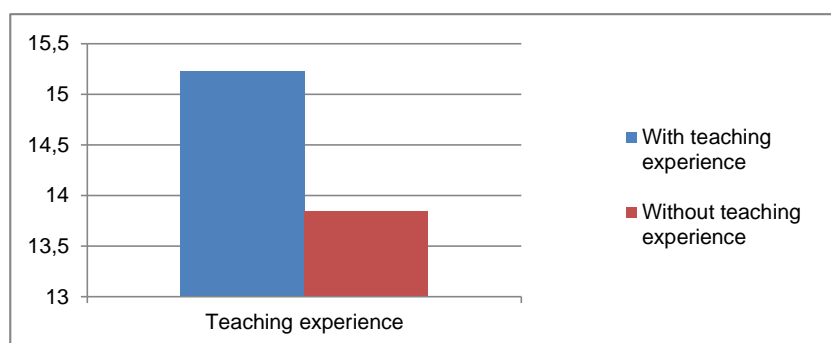
Graph 1. Means of Social Justice by gender
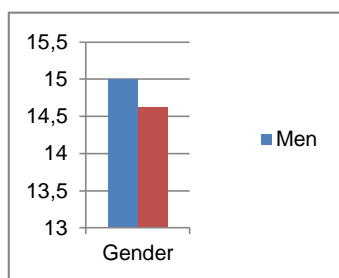
Graph 2. Means of Social Justice by University degree
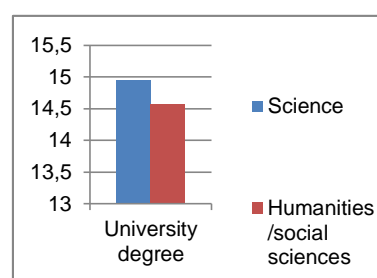
Graph 3. Means of Social Justice by teaching experience

Conclusion

The questionnaire allows knowing the three representations of Social Justice (Redistribution, Recognition and Representation) of secondary training teachers. This research provides a first general approach indicates differences at previous teaching experience.

We think that the failure to find significant differences by gender and by university degree may be due in part to our sample. They are students in training to be teachers, who are assumed some motivation and interest in providing quality education. Thus, it is more likely to have a representation of Social Justice than the rest of the population.

Our research based on student teachers was made with the idea of contrasting the representations of these subjects, with those of secondary students for whom you are designing a questionnaire with dilemmas applied to them, based on the same dimensions and categories.
Therefore, as already noted, this work is the first analysis of them.

The research has also served to verify the fact of giving a definition of Social Justice is quite complicated and in the field of education, especially as we indicated the authors (Griffiths, 2003; Cochran-Smith, 2008, Murillo and Hernandez, 2011).

In our design of the questionnaire, it was expensive to find dilemmas in which all researchers we had a very clear response alternatives and appropriate dilemmas and the subsequent validation of the questionnaire by experts. The idea of Social Justice may seem simple and intuitive but when implement specific strategies, it is difficult to operationalize. Therefore, we believe that it is essential to future teachers to think about it, for their future practice.

In conclusion, we emphasize the importance of this type of research in current society. As is well known, education is one of the pillars of society and we cannot be taught knowledge only school issues. Without denying the importance of such knowledge, we think that we have to lay the foundation to a quality education, in which Social Justice is an imperative part.

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