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Social justice representations of training teachers

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Abstract

Based on Fraser (2008) and Murillo and Hernández-Castilla (2011) conceptualization of Social Justice in Education, a specific questionnaire was designed to explore the representations of social justice by training teachers. This questionnaire contains 39 dilemmas about the main dimensions of Social Justice in education and everyday contexts. In each dilemma, first, we describe in short a problem or situation relating to social justice dimensions, and later we ask to elect one of three possible responses: one that is highly promoting of social justice, other which is against social justice and a third response that is neutral or less promoting of social justice. 130 Spanish future teachers attending to a master in secondary teaching education were participants in this study. The results show differences by gender in the representation of Social Justice. Also we found differences in the accessibility to the three dimensions of Social Justice: Representation, Recognition and Representation.

Keywords: *Social Justice, training teachers, Redistribution, Recognition, Representation, education.*

Introduction

In the last decades, several events like globalization, migration, economic and political crises, have caused an increase in the complexity of our society and producing inequalities and exclusion for reasons of gender, social class, culture, capacity and sexual orientation. On the other hand, it has been increasing the sensibility and the common interest to construct a more just society. In this heterogeneous context, there is an obvious need to constitute Social Justice as one of the fundamental aims of the society. Social justice reflects our desires for a better world. Probably, for this reason, we should consider the social justice like a dynamic project, never finished or reached. Therefore, the social justice always should thinking and getting better.

In this study, we have assumed the concept of Social Justice based on proposals of Sen (2010) as redistribution of competitions, added to Fraser's ideas (Fraser, 2009), about recognition and participation as complementary elements, as it were proposed by and Murillo and Hernández-Castilla (2011). Therefore, these three concepts are the base of the Social Justice in our study:

- *Redistribution* of material and cultural resources or primary goods.
- *Recognition* and cultural respect of all people with just relationship.

- *Representation or Participation* in decisions that concern their own lives.

For these reasons, we are going to focus in Social Justice about redistribution, recognition and representation dimensions. These concepts are highly related and share common aspects. Within this triadic we also integrate other aspects concerning social justice as prejudice, discrimination, racism, sexism, citizenship, protection of environment, access to ICT (information and communication technologies), fiscal politics, democracy, educational politics, relations between States - ONG's, globalization and migration. With this double perspective, it expects to have a global image about Social Justice from the constituent dimensions and from the real situations or problems in different contexts.

In relation with school context, we can say that probably the most important mission of education is to promote social justice (Bolivar, 2012). Constructing a just society is essential to get a quality education for all. With respect to education, schools have possibilities for compensating, in some extent, social and personal differences in learning results and to contribute to the social mobility. Schools must form students as citizens to be able to denounce and intervene in unjust situations.

From our approach, we think that education for Social Justice must be based on the following principles (Bolívar, 2005; Murillo, Krichesky et al, 2010):

- *High quality and just distribution.* An education with the same aims for all, which makes more effort and apply more resources to those students that are in a more disadvantage situation with respect their origin, culture, mother language or capacities.
- *Recognition and identity.* An education that promotes recognition and respect of individual, social and cultural differences of students and their contexts.
- *Full participation.* An education that promotes and ensures participation of all in an environment of freedom and participative coexistence, especially in the case of students at risk of exclusion.

In addition, committed and participative education must form students to be able to denounce and intervene in unjust situations.

Besides this, teachers and students' representations about social justice are elements that will have an effect in their actions (or inactions) of their own schools. There are several studies that prove it. For example, in the study of Miller et al. (2008), it was found a clear relationship between the concept of students about social justice and their implication and commitment with the school. In the case of teachers, studies like MacDonald (2005) or Baldwin, Buchanan y Rudisill (2007) with training teachers, or Applebaum (2004) or Cochram-Smith (2005), with in-service teachers, show a high relationship between both ideas. Nevertheless, there are not so much quantitative studies about the concept that teachers have about Social Justice and their implications in classrooms.

In addition, there are some teacher behaviors that promote social justice in classroom. For example, some of them show high implication in the learning processes of their students, high expectations for all, promoting equitable and just environment, cooperative work, active implication of students, varied strategies of teaching and evaluation, etc. Nevertheless, schools have lacks and teachers sometimes have not solid formation to solve problems and daily difficulties.

We consider that it is very important to know the representations of students and teachers to promote transformation in schools that work for social justice. In order to know the representations of secondary training teachers about social justice, we present in this paper a pilot study. This is a first phase to validate the questionnaire that later is going to be applied to in-service teachers of primary and secondary education.

This study is part of national research project (EDU 2011-29114) funding by the Spanish government: "Schools for social justice" conducted by a research group from Universidad Autónoma de Madrid: GICE.

Objectives and Hypothesis

This study has two main general objectives: a) to verify the validity of the social justice questionnaire designed for teachers and b) to know and to analyze the representations of training teachers about social justice.

The main hypotheses of our study are the following ones:

1. We expect to find differences on the representations about social justice of training teachers in the three main dimensions (Redistribution, Recognition, Representation/Participation) of Social Justice.
2. As in other similar studies, we assume that women will have a more prosocial view than men in this dimensions
3. We also think that training teachers who have some previous teaching experience will have a more elaborated representation of social justice.
4. At last, we expect differences on the representations about social justice of training teachers based on their academic field of expertise. It is reasonable to foresee that teachers of social sciences will have a more elaborated representation about social justice than teachers of experimental sciences.

Methodology

Method

A specific questionnaire was designed to explore the representations of social justice. This questionnaire contains 39 dilemmas about the main dimensions of Social Justice in education and everyday contexts. In each dilemma, first, we describe in short a problem or situation relating to social justice dimensions, and later we ask to elect one of three

possible responses: one that is highly promoting of social justice, other which is against social justice and a third response that is neutral or less promoting of social justice.

Using this questionnaire it is possible to obtain a global index of quality of social justice representation and 3 specific index for the three dimensions. These indexes were adapted to have a range from 1 to 100. It is mean than we have a scale that indicates the elaboration of general representations of Social Justice, and three independent scales for Redistribution, Recognition and Representation/Participation issues.

Participants

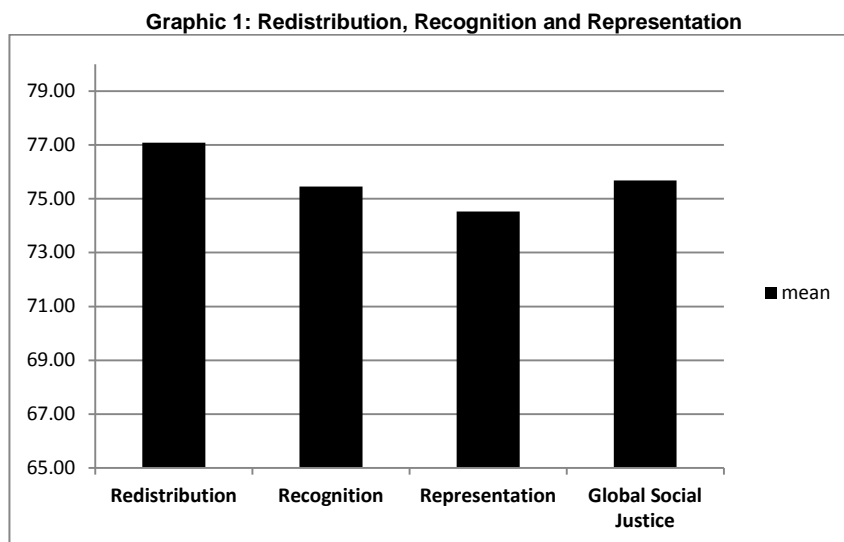
130 Spanish students of a master degree in secondary teacher training education were the participants in this study. They are training teachers of different subjects and each one have a different grade diploma in mathematics, physics and chemistry, arts, geography, history, music, biology or linguistics. They are 81 women and 49 men.

Results

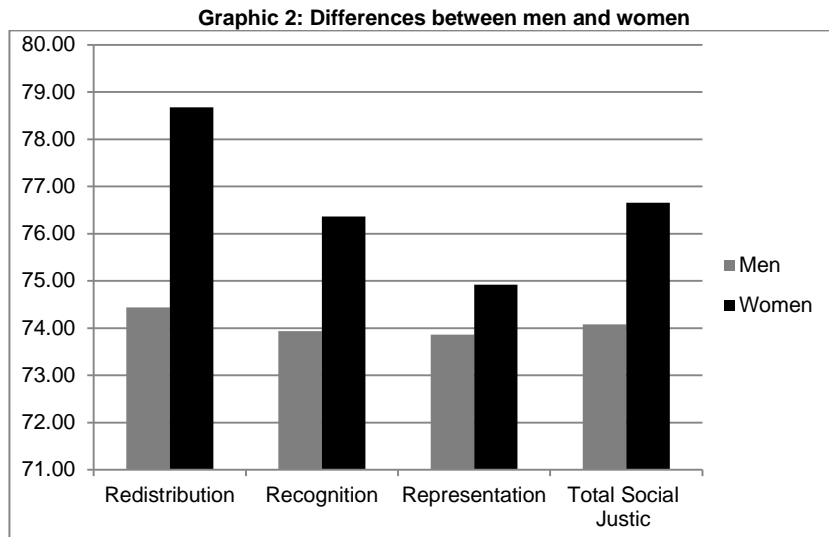
In this study, we have obtained the following results:

First at all, the Cronbach's alpha coefficient of the social justice questionnaire show a good result (0,74), showing that this questionnaire has an adequate internal consistence and reliability.

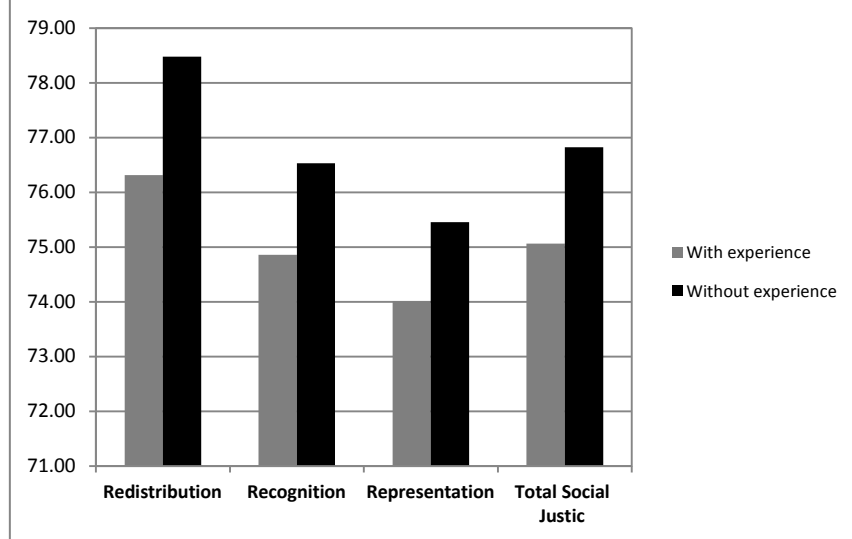
With respect to the first hypothesis, we found some differences between the three dimensions of social justice but they don't reach statistically significant levels. However the mean value for Redistribution is higher than Recognition and Representation/Participation. We can see these results in graphic 1.



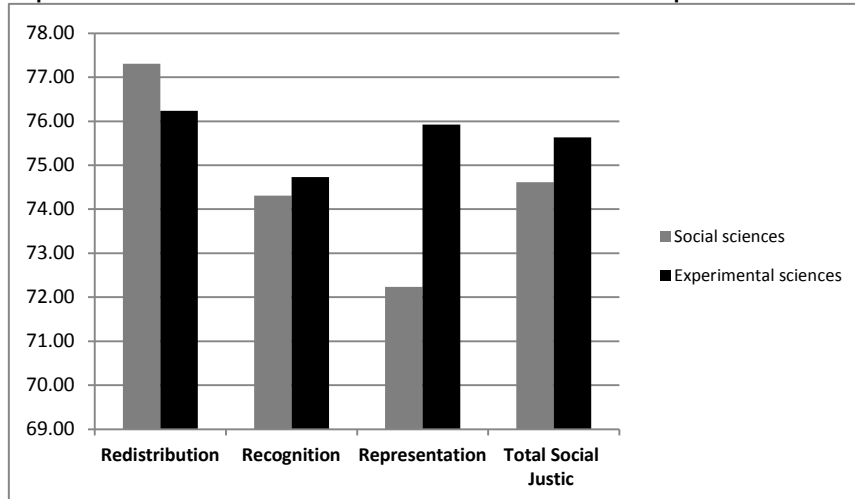
With respect to the second hypothesis, there are significant differences on Redistribution between men and women. In all dimensions women have a more elaborated conception of social justice, as can be seen in Graphic 2.



With respect to the third hypothesis, we did not find significant differences between the representation of social justice of training teachers who have a short previous teaching experience and this representation of training teachers without previous experience. This is an unexpected result that needs a more detail analysis.

Graphic 3: Differences between training teachers with and without previous experience

With respect to the last hypothesis, there are not significant differences on the concept of social justice in relation to the teachers' fields of expertise. However, teachers of social sciences have more elaborated the dimension of Redistribution and teachers of experimental sciences have more elaborated the dimensions of Recognition and Representation as can be seen in Graphic 4.

Graphic 4: Differences between teachers of social sciences and experimental sciences

Conclusions

Our pilot questionnaire has a good reliability for evaluating social justice concepts of training teachers. As other studies show women have a more prosocial conception of justice. At least in the case of training teachers, the dimension of Redistribution in Social Justice is easier to access and to think about than the Recognition dimension. The Representation and Participation is the more difficult dimension in this triadic Social Justice framework. These results show a similar pattern as the historical trend in the development of the concept of Social Justice (Fraser, 2009). Finally, we want to add that we should continue exploring the representation about social justice of students and teachers in next studies.

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