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Social justice and citizenship education¹

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Abstract

This paper seeks to contribute to the development of a multidisciplinary framework for conceptualizing social justice in the field of education and to explore its relationships and links with citizenship education. This paper explores the different conceptualizations on education for social justice developed in this field, analysing the tensions and links that arise when various conceptualizations of social justice and citizenship collide. Based on this approach, we consider the importance not only of participation, but also of the recognition of differences and inequalities and the proactive processes to improve conditions of access to resources and redistribution. As a result, what emerges is a different way of looking at citizenship from a more global perspective, one more oriented to the promotion of human rights and social justice.

Keywords: social justice, redistribution, recognition, participation, citizenship, citizenship education

Introduction

In the last decades, social justice has become a revitalized theme of debate and discussion from different approaches and domains such as political philosophy, education, moral philosophy, advocacy and the theory of human rights, among others. This paper seeks to contribute to the development of a multidisciplinary framework for conceptualizing social justice in education, exploring also the links with citizenship issues. This would allow us to address some of the tensions and conflicts that are arising as a result of the current conditions of increasing social inequality and injustice among citizens of the world today.

Approaching the concept of social justice

Nowadays, we can consider the existence of three major conceptualizations of social justice (Fraser, 2008, Murillo and Hernandez, 2011): social justice understood as redistribution (Nussbaum, 2006, Rawls 1971, Sen, 2009), recognition (Fraser, 2008) and representation or participation (Young, 1990, 2010; Fraser, 2008). In short, it can be said that the first conceptualization of social justice focuses on a fairer distribution of resources (material and cultural), wealth and capabilities. The second conceptualization is based on the recognition of difference and diversity and cultural respect towards each and every one of the people. And the third conceptualization refers to the representation

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and participation in decisions that affect us in our lives, that are taking place in different contexts and scenarios in which we move, as well as to the procedures for resolving conflicts arise when we are at the stage of struggle for redistribution and recognition.

Some authors as Fraser (2008) and Murillo and Hernández (2011) propose a three-dimensional model of social justice that allows integrating into a global framework both the claims of social equality, recognition of difference and representation and participation in the decision making. From this perspective, what is needed is that this model allows integrating the best of the politics of redistribution, with the best of the politics of recognition, and best of representation and participation.

The redistributive conception of social justice focuses on the equality-inequality dichotomy. This concept focuses on the socio-economic injustices, which are rooted in the economic structure of society. Exploitation, economic marginalization (carrying out undesirable tasks, having to perform low-paying jobs), deprivation (deprivation of an adequate material standard of living) are examples of such situations of injustice. In contrast, the conception of recognition focuses on the identity-difference dichotomy. From this view injustices are presented as cultural injustices that are rooted in cultural patterns of representation, communication and interpretation. Cultural domination, non-recognition, disrespect, are examples of such situations. The concept of representation is based on the principle of participatory parity, and provides an evaluation of democratic procedures, such as the extent to which social arrangements on representation can be considered as socially just, based on the fact that all relevant stakeholders can participate as peers in social life.

In the redistribution model, the solution would be the economic restructuring of income or wealth, the reorganization of the division of labour, the change in ownership structure, the democratization in making investment decisions, etc. In contrast, in the recognition model, the solution to injustice can be found in the cultural or symbolic change. This may include, for example, recognition and positive evaluation of cultural diversity, the positive valuation of other people identities and the positive valuation of cultural products of groups that have been discriminated or excluded. In the model of representation, the solution would be the political change, covering the transformation and improvement of the democratic process and social participation in different settings and scenarios (local, national, transnational, global), giving voice to the different movements, communities and groups, which are facing situations of disadvantage and injustice in order to defend their interests in the issues of redistribution and recognition. This is a concept that resembles Young definition of empowerment, understood as the right of every person to participate effectively in decisions that affect her actions and life, but it is also link to what some authors have stated as a very important element in the construction of the citizen, that is, developing a sense of agency and efficacy in our lives, in order to make decisions and implement change in our own and other people lives (Haste, 200X; Young, 1990, 2010).

For Fraser, the three dimensions of justice are interconnected in the struggle for social justice. That is, in the same way that the ability to raise claims for recognition and redistribution depends on the relations of representation, also the ability to exercise the representation depends on the relationships of status and power relations rooted in

economic structure. Thus, the political dimension is implicit in the concept of justice, so there is no recognition or redistribution without representation.

In her book "Scales of Justice", Fraser (2008) suggests the need to put the debate about justice in two ways. The title of his book evokes two images. The first one is related to the scale, which seeks to balance achieved when an impartial judge is faced with two conflicting positions or demands. The second refers to the map used by the geographer that seeks to represent spatial relationships. These two dimensions -scale and frame-, are the two a pillar on which rests her theory of justice. Both dimensions of the scales of justice pose important challenges to the problem of justice in this era of globalization in which we live. In general, these two images of justice -as a map and as a scale- pose important challenges in the understanding of the different meanings that are linked to social justice. First, if we look at the scale, the challenge leads to the problem of conflicting views when we asked about the "what" of justice: redistribution, recognition or representation? As for the map, the challenge arises from the conflicting frames for the "who", for those who should be the subjects of justice: that is, those citizens that are members of a State, of political communities geographically defined (territorialized citizenship), the citizens that live in this globalized world (global citizenship, cosmopolitan citizenship) or those citizens that are subjects of inequalities and injustices beyond national borders, as is the case for example of what is been called as transnational "risk communities"?.

In our opinion, it is important to take into account some of the proposals and challenges posed by the tri-dimensional approach to social justice if we want to address the issue of social justice in education. However, the real challenge for us in the field of education is to identify which are the specific decisions and practices that really produce progress toward that social justice. We are convinced that this is a very important task that will allow us to know which schools are really working toward social justice.

A framework for analysing education for social justice and its relation to citizenship

An approach to social justice that we believe can be very important to identify the educational praxis, arises from the reflection of Sen (2009) regarding his criticism on political philosophy. As is well known, Sen believes that the best way to promote social justice is not so much through theoretical and philosophical reflection on how it should be organized an ideal society and therefore, socially just, but rather to identify decision-making and practices that really, at any given time, produce progress toward that social justice. We believe that this approach, which is primarily oriented towards decision making in economics, makes sense in the field of Education for Social Justice.

However, we believe that the proposal of Sen to move towards social justice through the equality of capabilities of individuals -once initial differences due to origin or status familiar have been compensated - is based on a very static conception of what really are the capabilities of the persons. As is well known, for decades, in psychology and education, rather than speaking of capabilities as static situations of individuals (both children and adults), we must talk about the processes of shared construction and guided

by others, and how these processes promote the development of different socio-affective and cognitive resources in order to solve the very different situations that we have to face throughout our lives. That is, it is a continuous learning and a permanent reconstruction of these resources, which are largely built from the interaction with others in specific contexts.

Indeed, also in the field of education we can avoid the risk of a sterile debate about the theoretical foundations of social justice in education, without paying sufficient attention to the daily decision-making by schools, behind which can be found the true real progress on social justice, progress-or setbacks-that take place every day in schools.

In this regard, we believe that in the process of identifying the actions and decisions that can be considered as socially just in education, the macro-structural aspects of educational policies have received much more attention (Bolívar 2012), giving much less attention to the lower levels. In fact, we think that at least two levels of analysis are essential, because their basic character. On the one hand, the level of schools, which we can call "micro-structural", and, secondly, the level of the teacher, as an individual agent and promoter of social justice, and which can be called "monadic" due to its most basic nature.

Similarly, other intermediate levels may be clearly defined between the micro-structural level of schools and the monadic level of the teacher, such as the level of the educational school project - or by the educational project made by the teachers-as well as by their own educational project adopted by the school management team, as agents of change and promotion of social justice (Hernández Castilla and Murillo, 2012).

Moving forward, at any level we have described, we can explain how the actions to promote social justice in education take place. First, we believe that these actions always arise in a specific and diverse context, and with specific actors, teachers, students and families. Much has been written about the specificity of the decisions in educational contexts and we believe that this perspective remains indispensable. So in that specific context, the specific actors, the school management team, the teachers as a group, or an individual teacher, must choose between distinct alternatives of action, some of which is always susceptible of promoting greater social justice, generally directed to students or their families.

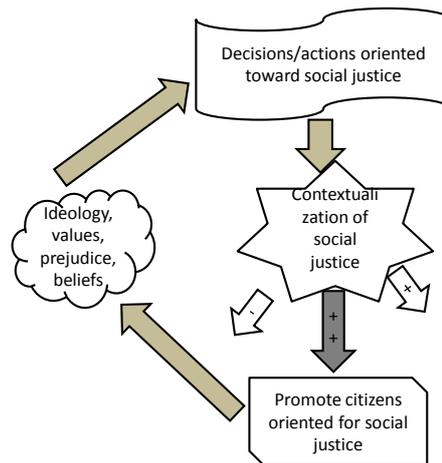
The identification of this alternative action or decision making favourable to social justice, may include: an increasing in the redistribution of resources among those who are at a greater situation of disadvantage or injustice, the recognition of some of the factors - economic, social and cultural- that affect learning and coexistence in school, and finally, an improvement in the procedures of participation and representation of the different members in decision-making.

In all cases, this decision certainly thrives on ideological beliefs, value systems and professional knowledge, as well as on intuitive conceptions, prejudices and misconceptions related to learning and teaching. Ultimately, we could say that one decision or action is "promoting social justice" when such action or decision "encourages and promotes citizens oriented toward social justice." Some of them will be direct

recipients of that action -for example, benefiting from a more educational support-, but others will be indirect recipients, to the extent in which they come to understand and engage in the decisions taken by teachers to achieve that end, or to the extent in which their families do.

In turn, these agents or receivers - directly or indirectly, generate changes in their value systems, which in turn makes possible that this will lead to new actions which promote social justice. (Figure 1) We think, therefore, that in the education field those actions that promote social justice, besides of their own values, tend to generate new actions or decisions in that direction. And this is true in reverse, meaning that the actions that maintain or increase socially unjust situations can have a multiplier effect of inequalities in the distribution of resources and support, or in the lack of recognition of the diversity, or as a major obstacle to the participation and representation of stakeholders in communities and schools.

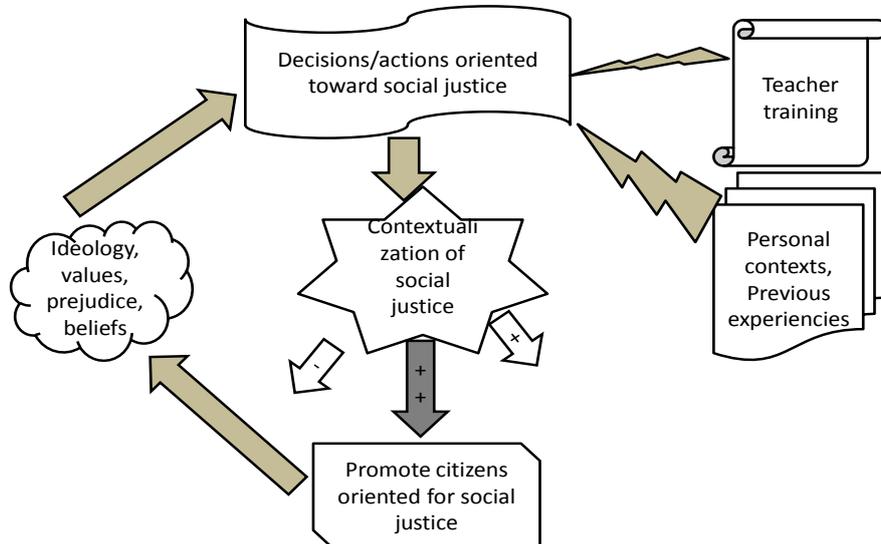
Figure 1.



In our opinion, it should be noted how in the most basic level, that of the novice teachers, this recursive cycle towards improving - or the decline - of social justice in education, starts from the personal experiences and from the social contexts known and belonging, as well as from the teacher training received.

Therefore, we believe that teacher training should take place in those schools more diverse and therefore more likely to promote social justice actions, but today, we find the opposite trend: that is, practical training of teachers is taking place in more homogeneous schools having a low diversity (Figure 2).

Figure 2.



In a similar way, Chubbuck (2012) proposes a framework to explain teacher educators' conceptualization and implementation of socially just teaching. She suggests that there are different qualitative levels in the conceptualization of social justice, moving from a rudimentary professional reflection—mainly by making an individualistic approach as could be usual in novice teachers—to a more integrated professional teaching reflection, that includes structural and personal orientations in relation to learning disabilities.

Lastly, we need to be alert to those strategies that are apparently promoting social justice, but that in fact are rooted in utilitarian conceptions of justice or that are based on a supposed improvement of coexistence among diverse groups for the maintenance of the social order, as is the case with some NGOs that are focused exclusively on activities of charity and social service that cannot be performed by states.

The real strategies that promote social justice, we believe it should be those that facilitate progress toward the construction of a more cosmopolitan citizenship, to a universal justice and the recognition of universal rights, including also the access to information and, finally, that enable the transformation of society and the development of citizens committed to the continuous process of improvement of social justice, as suggested by Westheimer and Kahne (2004).

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