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CiCe  
Institute for Policy Studies in Education  
London Metropolitan University  
166 – 220 Holloway Road  
London N7 8DB  
UK

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## Representations of social justice

Miriam Preckler, Vanesa Sainz, Tatiana García, Almudena Juanes Garcia and Eduardo Ordoñez

Universidad Autonoma de Madrid (Spain)

### **Abstract**

*This paper explores different conceptualisations of social justice that have been developed in the field of education in recent years, and aims to contribute to the design of a new instrument for evaluating and analysing students' and teachers representations of social justice. There has been an increased emphasis over the last decade on the social justice agenda for education issues, yet despite the extensive conceptual work on social justice issues there are few measurement tools for analysing the key elements involved in the different scenarios that can be related with teaching for social justice, and for illustrating changes in teachers' representations of social justice.*

### **Introduction**

The concept social justice is a relatively new one, with just over 150 years old of existence, today we can say that this noun contains several visions of society and justice that are radically different, this is one of the reasons that justify the need to determine a common understanding and implications of this concept, specifically from a strictly scientific point of view.

Over the years, the concept social justice has changed and developed in multidimensional and interdisciplinary ways and also according to different aspects, philosophy, economy, law, politics, education. On one hand different characters and theories have contributed to improve (it should be stressed the importance of utilitarian and contractual flows in the field of philosophy, and the pressure of labour in the industrial revolution...) the meaning of this concept, on the other hand we cannot avoid that this word it has in itself a high degree of ideological aspects.

Nowadays three major conceptions of social justice coexist (Murillo, 2011): Social Justice understand as Distribution (Rawls, 1971, and Nussbaum, 2006, Sen 2010), Recognition (Collins, 1991; Fraser and Honneth, 2003; Fraser, 2008 ) and Participation (Young, 1990; Miller, 1999; Fraser and Honneth, 2003; Fraser, 2008).

The first principle, *Distribution* is centred on the distribution of goods and primary material resources needed (Rawls, 1971) along with the skills and capabilities that we want people to develop or acquire (Sen, 1995). Rawls (1978) as one of the main authors who has developed the concept of social justice, clarifies that the distribution should not be always the same, but in relation to needs. The distribution that produces greater satisfaction will be the optimum in each case.

The distribution in turn *implies* two principles in itself (J. Murillo, 2011):

- Equity: sharing media to favour the poor (not the equal distribution of resources).
- Differentiation: Inequalities can only be justified if they benefit the most disadvantaged people, otherwise they are not lawful.

The second principle is *Recognition*: it refers to the social and cultural respect to every single person up on the earth, and also having social fair relationships within a society.

The third principle refers to *Participation*: with regard to decisions affecting their own lives, that is, ensuring that people are able to have an active and equal participation in society.

These three concepts are not independent, but share many of their approaches. In the Educational field, the term Social Justice pursues an objective that all students learn regardless of their social, cultural and economic background, favouring their inclusion in society and civic consciousness. Nowadays, there are few measurement tools for: analyzing some of the key elements involved in the different scenarios that can be related with the teaching for social justice; identifying differences in issues related to education for social justice; and, illustrating changes in teachers' representations about social justice through the education experience that can help to improve the teachers' practice. According to previous lines, and in order to achieve greater justice in education, different educational activities should be implemented within the school's framework (Murillo, 2011):

1. Stop the inequalities that marginalize and exclude the poorest and most vulnerable segments of the population.
2. Reversing the cultural and socioeconomic determinism that will allow for better quality training, equality, assuming the heterogeneity of students and their specific differences as human beings, in a democratic atmosphere.

Therefore, education plays a key role in the process of rethinking, and reformulating new formulas in order to achieve a fair society.

### **Justification**

Previous educational research on social justice has focused on the need to transform the teaching process (ex. Bigelow, 1994; Ayers, Hunt and Quinn, 1998, Baker et al., 2004; Banks, 2004; Kroll, 2005) , modify teacher education (Cochran-Smith, 2009) change leadership (Marshall and Olivia, 2006; Ryan, 2006; Gaetane, Normore, and Brooks, 2008; Murillo, Krichesky, Castro and Hernández Castilla, 2010), but basically in order to transform the school as a whole (Applebaum, 2004; Stevenson, 2007, Cochran-Smith et al., 2009; Petrou, Angelides and Leigh, 2009).

There are relatively scarce or few empirical studies conducted from the educational and psychology specialist in relation to the understanding and the research of representations by teachers and students on the concept of social justice. The studies that have been

conducted are mainly related to the field of intercultural education (e.g.. Bartolome, 2004a, b; Bartolome and Cabrera, 2003).

This situation shows us, therefore, the lack of research projects in this area, particularly in relation to the research's that try to know the previous ideas-both teachers and students-about the conception of social justice. The general aim of this study would like to suggest how could be the implementation and development of different educational policies and practices.

### **Objectives**

In order to design, create and implement a new tool or instrument for the analysis and assessment of students' representations about their own concept of social justice, the research group GICE () related to the Faculty of Teacher Training and Education at the Universidad Autónoma de Madrid has launched this project. Therefore we will carry out an extensive study with a descriptive ex post facto approach, in which we will study the conceptual representation of social justice in students at the 2 ° and 4 ° ESO educational level.

The instrument that will be set up, consists on a survey study, in which we will develop a questionnaire presenting dilemmas. The dilemmas are presented as realistic, they are an everyday story that you can face in your everyday life, but some situations are especially controversial. This narrative stories are brief, written as a little tale, in which appears a possible real situation but it also present or elicit an ethical conflict. This situation presents a dilemma and the student has to choose between the three different alternatives presented. Participants are requested in the survey that after reading the dilemmas and analyzed the situation, they must choose the alternative that they believe is the right one or the one which is closer to their way of thinking. Working with dilemmas helps us to understand the different representations of the social justice concept in an implicitly, and natural way, according to what the students really think, so the choice of an alternative constitute an intelligible decisions and can be framed within the context and their normally day-life.

The questionnaire has been designed specifically for this study. Before its application, once the questionnaire was made, it was subjected to a double validation: The first validation took place by experts and then the second validation took place as a small experimental validation too. Thus, it will be verify the adequacy of its technical characteristics.

The factors that determine the concept of social justice are:

Figure 1.



- a. distribution:
  - i. Primary goods.
  - ii. Primary resources
  - iii. Capacities /skills
- b. recognition
  - i. prejudice
  - ii. discrimination
  - iii. racism
  - iv. sexism
- c. participation

As associated concepts directly related to these factors or dimensions are:

- a. Environment.
  - b. Access to TIC
  - c. social Policy
  - d. State-Ong
  - e. Multiple perspectives
  - f. democracy
  - g. Identity / diversity
  - h. Imperialism / Empire / Power
  - i. globalization
  - j. migration

A sample question about the Recognition factor:

1. Two ESO students of different nationalities are constantly arguing and tending to fight, both outside the classroom and during the indoor activities. The teacher does not know how to act. What should I do:
  - a. Trying to address the conflict in the group, between the hours of class including all the students as concerned ones on the discussion.
  - b. Let them discuss face to face with a mediator in order to try reach an agreement between both of them.

- c. There is no need to be addressed in class, but through the head teacher or outside school

A sample question about the Distribution factor:

1. A billionaire businessman decides to donate half of his fortune to implement social projects in poor countries. Journalists think that there are three possible reasons for this:
- a. because he wants to contribute to the development of these countries and generate new markets for trade.
  - b. because he doesn't want to feel guilty and relief the mistakes he has done and abuses committed.
  - c. He does it, because he wants to improve their social image without affecting their standard of living.

A sample question about the Participation factor:

2. In a democratic system, the most essential is that:
- a. Elections are held every 4 or 5 years to change or not the government.
  - b. Have a parliament or council where the laws are discussed among all citizens or their representatives and government.
  - c. Compliance with all the rights and freedoms of the citizens of that country

### **Questionnaire Development Process**

A multidisciplinary group formed by experts worked at first on the creation of the different dilemmas according to the three dimensions of the concept of social justice, that we have mention previously. At first it was developed 78 dilemmas, which were subdivided into the three categories mentioned above (redistribution, distribution and recognition). Once the dilemmas were made, a selection of the best 10 items by category was chosen, and a specification of the particular subdivision or concept in question in each dilemma was made. It was carried out a reconstruction of each item, adjusting the text and images according to the cognitive development of the students at their age and the sociocultural context, with the purpose of let the dilemmas be understandable and legible for all of them.

In a second stage, we conducted a second validation process by a larger group of experts who have not been linked to the first phase of the project in order to assess the tool they have previously created.

**Sample 1. To what extent is the each item of the question representative of the dimension related to the concept of Social Justice?**

We ask you to evaluate each of the alternatives related to the questions on a scale of 1 to 9 where 1 would correspond to an unrepresentative view of social JUSTICE and 9, would correspond to a very representative view of social JUSTICE.  
Please mark with a cross (x) the point on the scale that seems most appropriate for each of the alternatives.

1. Gandacia is a country where many immigrants who do not have a minimum knowledge of the language gandes live. Which of the following options do you think is the most appropriate to solve this problem?

a) Do not renew the work permit to those without a minimum knowledge of the language.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
less social justice				More social justice				

b) Everyone to learn the language compulsory

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
less social justice				More social justice				

c) Must be the mayor the councilor who gets more votes for than against, whether one or another candidate

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
less social justice				More social justice				

**Sample 2. To what extent does the item represent that dimension?**

We ask you to evaluate each of the alternatives related to the questions on a scale of 1 to 9 where 1 would correspond to an unrepresentative view of Recognition and 9, would correspond to a very representative view of Recognition.  
Please mark with a cross (x) the point on the scale that seems most appropriate for each of the alternatives.

8. Rashida is a Muslim student of 3<sup>o</sup> ESO. During physical education class she does not remove the veil even though the teacher insists. Which position do you think should be the one at the Direction of the center?

a. Ask her and her parents respect the rules of the class.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Less Recognition				More Recognition				

a. Allow her not to attend to this lesson

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Less Recognition				More Recognition				

c. Deal with the case on a specific commission in order to reconsider the standards coexistence of cultural diversity.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Less Recognition				More Recognition				

According to the result, the questionnaire has been updated, and modified in response to the expert's advices, some options have been eliminated, the ones that were identified as inadequate questions.

Once the instrument has been validated, the final questionnaire refers to two types of questions:

- First set of questions, explore the personal characteristics, family and social aspects of the students.
- Second set of questions referring to the dilemmas according to the different factors or dimensions of the Social Justice concept, each item will have three choices as answers, no one is classified as correct or not.

After that, they implement the questioner as a test, in 4 different schools: 2 schools that are financed and managed by the public administration authorities and 2 schools that have private financing and management. The 2 ° and 4 ° ESO students answer a questionnaire. Finally, we performed a backward translation of the questionnaire in the official languages of the regions where there is co-official language co-existing within the school curriculum, as it is in Basque Country.

### Sample Application

This instrument will be applied to a sample of 2,800 secondary students which will be studying the 2nd and 4th grade, at schools which are financed completely by the public administrations or the ones which get private funds, located in rural and urban areas of 5 regions: Andalusia, Castile-Leon, Extremadura, Madrid and Basque Country.

The selection process and criteria selected in order to choose the centres and the regional governments is justified according to the different characteristics or aspects, as social, economic as well as in educational administration differences. To select students and teachers we will use a proportional stratified cluster sampling. The layers are selected by region and the school management and financing style. Thus, we will select 10 schools and from all of these, the questioner will be applied to all students who study at 2 and 4 of the ESO.

The approximate number students and teachers that make up the sample by community and type of school are shown in Table 1:

**Table 1. Distribution of secondary students that are going to participate in the survey**

	# schools	Public Schools		Non Public Schools	
		2th grade	4th grade	2th grade	4th grade
<b>Andalucía</b>	2	140	140	140	140
<b>Castilla León</b>	1	70	70	210	210
<b>Madrid</b>	3	140	140	70	70
<b>País Vasco</b>	3	140	140	70	70
<b>Extremadura</b>	1	70	70	210	210
<b>Total</b>		700	700	700	700



Once collected the surveys and all information it will be entered into the computer and different descriptive analysis and multivariate analysis will be done (ANOVA, Factor Analysis, Cluster Analysis, Regression Analysis, and so on).

### **Project Benefits**

The project aims to identify students' conceptions of Social Justice of 2<sup>nd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Secondary students. It also aims to contribute, and to understand the school culture and how each of them is working towards to achieve the Social Justice goal. The project will improve and could provide better experiences in order to promote educational social justice policies. Therefore, the proposed project aims to provide new elements that contribute to progress in solving Spanish and International social problems.

The General Assembly of the United Nations sets within its priorities in 2011 to promote an inclusive and sustainable development, as well as promote gender equality and strength peace. The research design aims to help develop new policies, at both macro and micro levels, and aims that its implementation will help to formulate new and better educational policies according to a social justice more socially just.

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