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Social Justice Representations of primary students

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Abstract

This empirical study explores the representations of Spanish primary students´ on Social Justice. Some interviews were applied to a sample of 4th and 6th grade of primary education in a school of the Community of Madrid.

The survey was designed on the basis of a set of Social Justice dilemmas. These dilemmas come from a questionnaire of other research that is being conducted simultaneously in our research group with secondary education students and teachers in Spain. The original questionnaire has thirty questions, while in the interview of the present study, we have selected only six dilemmas (two of Redistribution, three of Recognition and three of Representation / Participation, the three dimensions of Social Justice that we use in our research group).

Our study represents a first approach to the representations of Social Justice for children in Madrid. The aim for a future is to be able to use our interview with the children of other Spanish communities and be able to realize comparisons.

Keywords: Social Justice, primary students, gender, grade, dilemmas, Redistribution, Recognition, Representation/Participation

Introduction

This research studies children´s conceptions about Social Justice, based on the three dimension of Social Justice that our research group is working: Redistribution, Recognition and Representation (Murillo and Hernandez, 2011, Jacott and Maldonado, 2012)

Redistribution of resources (Rawls, 1971; Sen, 2010) Recognition (Fraser y Honneth, 2006) as respect to the difference and Representation (Fraser, 2008) as the participation in social life.

Objectives

We have two objectives:

1)   On the one hand, the construction and validation of an interview to know the conceptualizations of three dimensions of Social Justice in Primary students.

2)   On the other hand, the analysis of developmental differences between these representations in students of 4th and 6th primary school grade, and in boys and girls students.

With these objectives, we propose the following hypothesis: We expect to find differences between the representation of Social Justice (and their constituents dimension) by:

1) Grade: We expect more complex representations in participants of 6th grade.

2) Gender: We also expect a more elaborate concepts in girls than in boys, according to the results obtained of these authors: Metzger and Smetana, 2010; Eisenberg, 2006; Jaffe and Hayde, 2000. They indicated that girls are more prosocial in her behavior, thinking and affective response.

Method

Participants:

Participants were 20 primary Spanish students of 4th grade (9/10 years old) and 6th grade (11/12 years old), distributed as shown in the table below:

Table 1. Sample

	4th	6th
Boys	5	5
Girls	5	5

Design:

The method used was an interview. We design a personal semistructural interview to present 6 dilemmas concerning Social Justice Issues in educative contexts familiar to the children. These dilemmas were selected from a large questionnaire to explore the representations of Social Justice in Primary and Secondary students and teachers.

There were two dilemmas concerning each of the three dimension of Social Justice (Redistribution, Recognition and Representation/Participation).

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 4th (or 6th) grade of primary 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?:

And then, we expect the response of the children. Children's answers were recorded.

Procedure:

1) Participant´s answers to each dilemma were analyzed in two broad categories:

-Responses showing a clear reflection toward Social Justice Issues (These responses were coded with one point)
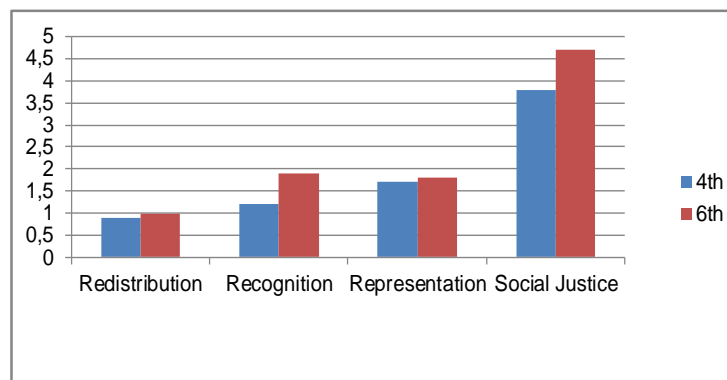
-Responses showing a lack of reflection toward Social Justice Issues (These responses were coded with zero point)
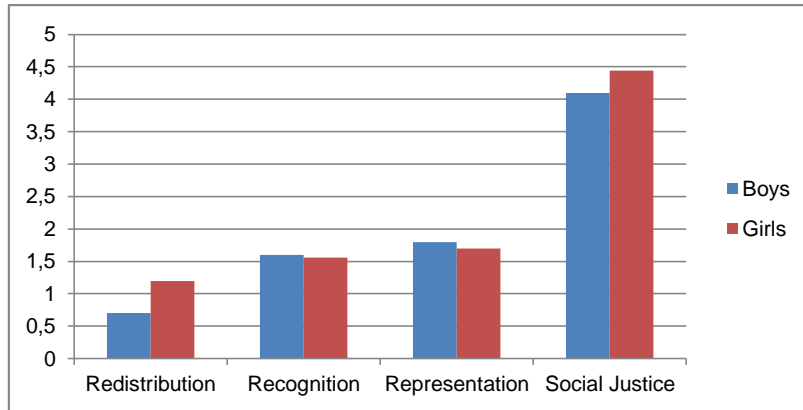
2) We calculated the number of children who show this type of answers by grade and by gender.

Results

The results are shown in the next tables:

Table 2. Means of three dimensions by grade

The results by grade indicated that difference between the participants of 4th and the 6th grade exist. As we predicted, the 6th grade have a more elaborated representation of Social Justice.

However, our hypothesis by gender hasn´t been confirmed. Although the girls have a more elaborated representation of Social Justice, these differences are not statistically significant.

Moreover, in all cases children (girls and boys, from 4th or 6th grade) show a better understanding of Representation dilemmas, than Recognition and Redistribution ones. The Redistribution dilemmas were the most difficult to understand for children.

This result is inverse to the history of development of Social Justice Theories (that initially focus on Redistribution and later on the other dimensions) and also the results shown by teachers.

Conclusion: future lines of research

This is a preliminary study and these results need to be compared with a large sample of primary students.

We are analyzing the responses to each dilemma also in qualitative categories in order to describe some levels of Social Justice thinking in children.

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