

Critical Education

Volume 6 Number 6 March 21, 2015 ISSN 1920-4125

'That would give us power...'

Proposals for Teaching Radical Participation from a Society in Transition

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Citation: Sant, E. (2015). 'That would give us power ...' Proposals for teaching radical participation from a society in transition. *Critical Education*, 6(6). Retrieved from <http://ojs.library.ubc.ca/index.php/criticaled/article/view/184842>

Abstract

In this article, I explore how a group of Spanish students, (aged 11–19), and some of their teachers, understand 'radical participation' teaching and learning within the social studies education. I analyze, from an in-depth and critical approach, open questionnaires, interviews, and focus groups, the ways in which they interpret 'radical participation' and how they propose 'radical participation' be taught. The results suggest that 'radical participation' can be taught by: (a) deconstructing the concepts of power, participation, and politics; (b) empowering the students with the communication and critical thinking skills they require to participate; (c) establishing clearer links between schools and society and engaging students with current social movements.



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Critical Education is published by the Institute for Critical Educational Studies and housed at the University of British Columbia. Articles are indexed by EBSCO Education Research Complete and Directory of Open Access Journals.

The aim of this paper is to discuss how a group of Spanish teachers and students define radical participation and how they propose this particular form of participation be taught within the social studies class. In this paper, I first analyze the political and educational context in which I conducted the research. Second, I review some of the existing proposals with regard to teaching participation. Third, I discuss the ethical and practical implications of conducting research into participation teaching and participatory learning. Following on from this, I discuss the method used and I present the findings. I conclude by comparing teachers' and students' proposals with academic proposals and identify some practical applications of the results of this research.

The Political Context

In May 2011, Spain appeared in the world press regarding the movement known as the *indignados* (the outraged) or 15-M, or the 'Spaniard spring'. This movement was a reaction to the Spanish crisis and to the economic austerity reforms introduced by the government that were an attempt to dismantle the welfare state. The *indignados* considered it necessary to regenerate democracy via increasing citizens' participation in the political process.¹

At the same time, Spain was also conducting national elections. The prospective Spanish vice-president, Soraya Sáez de Santamaria, declared she understood the *indignados*' complaints because it was logical 'that in a country with 45 per cent of youth unemployment people are outraged'.² Sáez de Santamaria's party, Partido Popular, the conservative party, won the elections in autumn 2011. During the period in which this research was conducted (October 2011–May 2012), the stock market lost 20 per cent of its value and the public debt increased considerably.³ The unemployment rate increased from 22.85 per cent of the active population to 25.02 per cent.⁴ The government reduced the expected expenses of the budget by €5,000 million (the education budget decreased from 0.9 per cent of the budget to 0.7 per cent). One of the measures to limit the government costs was the reduction of teachers', doctors', and other civil servants' salaries by approximately 5 per cent.⁵ At the same time, the state rescued a private bank with approximately the same amount it had just 'cut' from the public budget.⁶

Spaniards protested against the situation. Demonstrations and strikes in the health and education sectors took place alongside general workers' strikes and an upsurge in social movements started with the 15-M movement.⁷ At this time, no one in the Spanish government, not even the vice-president, understood that after their electoral victory people would continue being outraged. As an example, during the strike of 29 March 2012, a syndicalist burned a cardboard box in front of Barcelona's stock exchange and was condemned to 23 days in prison.⁸ Similarly, in 2013, the government declared war against

¹ One of the associations that promoted 15-M was the organization 'Democracia Real Ya'. One of the claims of this association is the fight for 'participatory democracy,' (see <http://www.democraciarealya.es/manifiesto-comun/manifiesto-english/>).

² http://politica.elpais.com/politica/2011/05/18/actualidad/1305725529_450107.html

³ <http://www.tradingeconomics.com/spain/government-debt-to-gdp>

⁴ http://graficos.lainformacion.com/mano-de-obra/desempleo/explorador-del-paro-en-espana-segun-la-epa-encuesta-de-poblacion-activa_zDIIAYj95292Pg6t7R1Px7/

⁵ <http://usatoday30.usatoday.com/news/world/story/2012-07-13/spain-wage-cut-protest/56203418/1>

⁶ <http://www.guardian.co.uk/business/2012/may/10/spanish-government-rescues-fourth-largest-bank-bankia>

⁷ http://www.nytimes.com/2012/05/23/world/europe/education-and-health-care-cuts-met-with-strike-in-spain.html?_r=0

⁸ http://ccaa.elpais.com/ccaa/2012/05/17/catalunya/1337246445_098088.html

escraches. An *escrache* is a type of demonstration in which a group of activists go to the homes of those they want to condemn and publicly humiliate them. *Escraches* were conducted by 15-M activists as protests against the expropriation of peoples' homes. Between April and November 2013, the Spanish government decided to punish those who participated in *escraches* with fines of between €100 and €600,000.⁹ The Spanish government's response to this increased direct political participation was denounced by Amnesty International in its 2013 report¹⁰ and described by the NGO, Human Rights Watch, as follows: 'The country's vibrant social movements have set up protest camps in city plazas, mobilized huge demonstrations, organized flash mobs in front of politicians' homes, and blocked hundreds of evictions from foreclosed homes. It looks like Spain's central government wants all that to stop'.¹¹

The Educational Context

Spanish teachers are required to teach students how to participate in society. To educate pupils in the way of active citizenship is one of the main aims of compulsory education within and outside the Spanish borders. Spain had adopted the OECD's (Deseco, 2005) and Council of Europe's (2002) recommendations for educating children and young people for active political participation. Current and previous education laws (LOE, 2006; LOMCE, 2013) describe the Spanish education system as having responsibility for preparing students to exercise their rights of citizenship and active participation in economic, social and cultural life, by having 'a critical and responsible attitude' (LOMCE, 2013, p. 11).¹²

In 28 out of 31 European states (Eurydice, 2012), citizenship education is widely acknowledged as a primary means of encouraging students to play an active role in their school and/or society. For example, the new citizenship education curriculum in England identifies one aim of education as teaching how citizens can actively participate in a state's democratic system of government (DfE, 2013, p. 1). In Latin America, the official curriculum of a number of countries also promotes active political participation. For instance, the Mexican curriculum for secondary education describes student competencies for learning how to participate socially and politically, specifically 'through the mechanism established in the laws' (México, 2006, p. 152). In Colombia, students must learn to participate 'taking into account that their decisions must follow the fundamental rights, the agreements, the rules, the laws and the constitution that govern the community' (Colombia, 2004, p. 12). In the USA, Vinson (2006) analyzed the citizenship education frameworks proposed by two different organizations, the National Council for the Social Studies and the Center for Civic Education. According to Vinson, in the three examples analyzed (*Expectations of Excellence*, *CIVITAS* and *National Standards for Civics and Government*) the final aim is civic action. Although these frameworks and the other examples previously identified 'support some degree of civic participation, they do so only generally, vaguely, not noticing that the ends to which such involvement are or might be aimed are undeniably different, that agreed-upon goals might imply differently produced and interpreted yet equally valid understandings' (Vinson, 2006, p. 66).

⁹ http://politica.elpais.com/politica/2013/11/19/actualidad/1384819985_742890.html

¹⁰ <http://amnesty.org/en/region/spain/report-2013>

¹¹ <http://www.hrw.org/news/2013/12/23/spain-you-protest-you-pay>

¹² By comparing the LOMCE with the Spanish Constitution, it is surprising that instead of participating in 'political, economic, social and cultural life', the LOMCE just refers to the fact that students must learn to participate in

The emphasis on teaching and learning about participation exceeds the limits of the official curriculum. Several projects have been developed worldwide by public and private entities in order to engage children and young people in democratic participation (Percy-Smith & Thomas, 2010). In Spain, one of these projects is the *Audiències públiques als nois i noies de la Barcelona* (AP) ('The public hearing of Barcelona's boys and girls'). The AP is highly relevant in terms of the number of students involved. From October 2011 to May 2012, approximately 1,000 students from Barcelona and 70 of their teachers participated in this project, which is organized by the Division of Education within Barcelona's city council. The objective of the project is to increase participation of young people and to teach democratic participation to students.

These 1,000 students are living in a society that is giving them some ambiguous, if not contradictory messages. Certain types of participation, in particular representative participation, are encouraged by means of education laws, educational projects, and through the hegemonic discourse in which 'un-participative citizens' are blamed for the existence of a 'participation crisis' (Salomon, 2001; Putnam, 2001). Simultaneously, 'alternative participation' (e.g. *indignados*, the Occupy movement) is ignored and criminalized according to the aforementioned NGO's reports. These students and their teachers are in the center of what could be described as a 'fight for hegemony' between hegemonic and subaltern participation (Gramsci, 1985; Chomsky, 2001; Giroux, 2005). These students were living in a society that can be described as being in transition, moving towards new models of participation, and, perhaps, democracy.

The present research focuses on these teachers and students and in particular, on those teachers and students who supported alternative forms of participation. My aim as a researcher was to encourage them to reflect on and actively participate in the construction of an educational discourse regarding political participation: what significance do they give to alternative/radical political participation? How do they propose this alternative participation be taught?

Proposals for Teaching Participation

There are a considerable number of proposals concerning how participation should be taught, particularly in the context of social studies education. Since there is a consensus that the preparation of young people for active participation is one of the purposes of social studies (Ross, 2000), academic research and theory has largely discussed how participation should be taught in social studies contexts. The aims and practices for teaching 'active citizenship' are, nevertheless, more controversial.

Ross (2000) argues that in the social studies context, teaching 'active citizenship' responds to a wide range of meanings. At one extreme, the aim of traditional social studies instruction is to promote the transmission of particular participatory values (Ross, Mathison & Vinson, 2014), especially those related to 'passive electoral participation', where 'citizens have the right to ratify policies that originate elsewhere' (Ross, 2000, p. 55). At the other extreme, the 'social studies as informed social criticism' approach that promotes the countersocialization of students into alternative forms of participation (Ross, 2000). This is radical participation.

In contrast to the wide range of aims, only a limited number of pedagogies to teach participation have been suggested. A class discussion of controversial issues is the approach most often recommended for teaching participation. Existing empirical research (e.g. Davies, Flanagan, Hogarth & Mountford, 2002; Hess, 2008; Ødegård & Berglung, 2008; Quintelier, 2010) and educational theory from a range of different traditions (e.g., Evans & Saxe, 1996;

Giroux, 2005; Dewey, 2012; Ross, Mathison & Vinson, 2014) highlight the relevancy of students discussing political and social issues in class. More controversial is the use of community learning to teach participation. Existing research is not definitive regarding the impact of community learning on students' political participation (e.g., Zaff, Malanchuk & Eccles 2008; Claes & Quintelier, 2009; Quintelier, 2010). The disparity of results may be due to the variety of community learning activities investigated (Wade, 2008). Whereas traditional social studies approaches community learning as volunteering activities or service learning (see Westheimer & Kahne, 2004), radical academics have proposed teaching participation by using strategies developed for the new social movements worldwide, e.g. Jasmine revolution (Ross & Vinson, 2012; 2013).

It also seems to be generally accepted, that beyond the content and the strategies used, the hidden curriculum is clearly related to the ways students learn how to participate. Existing research highlights the impact of an open class climate (e.g. Ehman, 1977; Torney-Purta, Lehmann, Oswald & Schulz, 2001) as well as a school that offers opportunities to participate (school efficacy) (Torney-Purta et al., 2001). Both elements have been currently transformed into quantitative variables to be used in quantitative research, but they might have their theoretical origin in the democratic schools described by Dewey (2012). Following the American philosopher, democratic schools should not only allow students to participate in class and in the school as a whole, but give them 'a personal interest in social relationships and control, and the habits of mind which secure social changes without introducing disorder' (2012, p. 67). For Dewey, 'this does not mean that the teacher is to stand off and look on; the alternative to furnishing ready-made subject matter and listening to the accuracy with which it is reproduced is not quiescence, but participation, sharing, in an activity. In such shared activity, the teacher is a learner, and the learner is, without knowing it, a teacher – and upon the whole, the less consciousness there is, on either side, of either giving or receiving instruction, the better' (2012, p. 110).

The proposals presented above are proposals made by the academic community. Teachers and students have been investigated as 'objects' to identify 'what works' with regard to teaching and learning about participation. However, I have not found any research in which they are directly asked to give their opinion on the topic. This is the primary aim of this paper: to encourage teachers and students to discuss how to define and to teach 'radical participation' and to give them the opportunity to be heard.

In accordance with these ideas, the objectives of the research are to:

- propose a shared, meaningful definition of radical participation in the context studied;
- analyze and contrast the proposals and limitations described by teachers and students about how radical participation could be taught;
- encourage teachers and students to reflect on the inconsistencies of their own discourses with regard to teaching and learning about participation.

Research on Teaching and Learning about Participation

The literature points to a number of controversial issues that should be taken into account when researching teaching and learning about participation.

First, researching into 'participation' implies defining what 'participation' is. The constructs 'participation', 'political participation' and 'civic participation' can have different

meanings and interpretations. For instance, the *International Civic and Citizenship Education Study* (ICCS) (e.g. Schulz, Ainley, Fraillon, Kerr & Losito, 2010) analyzes ‘active political participation’ as based on four elements: ‘help a candidate or party during an election campaign, join a political party, join a trade union, stand as a candidate in local elections’ (Schulz et al., 2010, p. 233). In contrast, the *Citizenship Education Longitudinal Study*, conducted in England, describes ‘political participation’ as consisting of the following four elements: ‘voting in general elections, voting in local elections, volunteering time to help other people, collecting money for a good cause’ (Lopes, Benton & Cleaver, 2009, p. 18). Indeed, what for the CELS study is ‘political participation’ (volunteering and collecting money), for the ICCS is not ‘active political participation’. In this research, ‘participation’ is equal to ‘political participation’ and its meaning is equivalent to the one described by Ekman and Amnå (2012): *political participation includes manifest political participation, latent political participation, and anti-political active forms of non-participation*.

Second, studying ‘participation’ is usually associated with researching ‘political attitudes’ but to what extent these political attitudes are based on critical and informed opinions is not clear. Although teaching ‘participation’ is probably assumed as unanimously relevant, the appropriateness of some teaching strategies in contributing to this aim can be questioned. As an example, the analysis conducted by Kahne and Westheimer (2006) highlights that in spite of the large amount of research on students’ external political efficacy (e.g. McIntosh, Berman & Youniss 2007; Forrest & Wesseley, 2007; Feldman, Pasek, Romer & Jamiesson, 2007; Billing, Root & Jesse, 2009; Claes & Quintelier, 2009; Beaumont, 2011), this political attitude can be neither critical nor contextualized. Following the authors of this study,

emphasizing only efficacious acts because they permit students to experience success in helping others without confronting constraints on their external efficacy can advance a limited understanding of civic and political engagement. Such practices obscure the need for politics and for confronting root/institutional causes of social problems (Kahne & Westheimer, 2006, p. 295).

In contrast with research studies focused on ‘political attitudes’, and following other investigations that rely on a symbolic interactionist approach (Martin & Chiodo, 2007; Santisteban Fernandez & Pages Blanch, 2009), I investigated how the participants actively construct meanings about what radical participation is and how radical participation should be taught.

Finally, due to the intrinsic political nature of ‘participation’, when researching and teaching ‘participation’, a clear specification of the final purpose of the research would be helpful and honest. When this final purpose is not stated, it can be suggested, as Romero (2012) has noted, that the purpose is to promote active citizenship – mainly electoral citizenship – that legitimates liberal democracy hegemony and guarantees individual freedom without mentioning the economic capitalist structures behind the democratic system. Considering Romero’s statement, I consider it honest to specify that I conducted the present research from a critical and participatory research approach assuming the principles of critical pedagogy.

A Participatory Research Study

I conducted the research from a collaborative–participatory approach (e.g. Tikunoff & Ward, 1983; Jaipal & Figg, 2011). This method is based on ‘affirming that peoples’ own knowledge is valuable, these approaches regard people as agents rather than objects: capable

of analyzing their own situations and designing their own solutions' (Cornwall & Jewkes, 1995, p. 1670). Hence, rather than being a director, my role as a researcher was mainly as a catalyst and mediator.

The research design was structured in two main phases, one for each of the first two objectives. In the first phase, the main goal was to propose a shared and meaningful definition of participation in the context studied. I conducted a survey (n=19) and six interviews with teachers as well as a survey with students (n=112). Students were encouraged to write down what they understood the meaning of 'participation' to be and teachers were asked to write down and talk about how would they like their students to participate in society. Data from students' and teachers' answers was analyzed simultaneously by using the qualitative analysis suggested by Miles and Huberman (1994) and it was codified and categorized by using an analytical matrix (Sant, 2014a).

After coding the responses, I identified three contrasting dimensions: (1) the goals of the participation; (2) the mechanisms of participation; and (3) the assessment of the consequences of participation. I overlapped the three contrasting dimensions, and three main trends with regard to defining participation emerged. I decided to name them: (a) participation oriented towards stability; (b) participation oriented towards improving social and individual welfare; and (c) participation oriented towards change and social justice (radical participation). In terms of collecting future data, I summarized each trend and was then able to define participation by using a mind map and by designing three different vignettes where simulated characters were participating in a situation depicting a bank crash.

Following this, where possible, I classified all the teachers and students in relation to the definition and explanation they had provided in the surveys and the interviews. I selected three of the teachers and four students who, supporting the radical trend in defining 'participation', volunteered to continue participating in the research. I used the three mind maps to discuss with the chosen teachers in a focus group possible ways of defining radical participation. Considering pragmatic circumstances (students were from different schools), I interviewed the four students individually using the vignettes and asked them to discuss and to define radical participation. Students' and teachers' comments on the mind maps and vignettes were used to construct the shared and meaningful definition of radical participation that is used in this research.

To accomplish the second objective and to contrast proposals about how radical participation could be taught (second phase), I decided to interview the aforementioned three teachers who supported radical participation and a representative group of their students. In each class, I selected four students who each represented a different understanding of the meaning of 'participation'. The final participants in this second phase were the three teachers and twelve of their students (four students for each trend in defining participation).

Working with these participants, I applied the dialectical inquiry method described by Berniker and McNabb (2006) to the research. This method consists of contrasting different approaches to the same topic (thesis-antithesis) in order to identify what could be defined as the synthesis. Berniker and McNabb (2006) denominated each approach 'model' and they assume 'that such models, analysis, will prove to be in conflict. This does not mean that decisions and processes are necessarily inconsistent or incoherent. Given that these models are tacit, organizational actors will be unaware of inconsistencies' (2006, p. 645).

In this case, I assumed that teachers' and students' views about how radical participation should be taught could be in conflict. I first asked the teachers (by means of interviews) to describe how they would like to teach radical participation. Afterwards, the

students (working in focus groups) were required to identify the best ways of learning about radical participation and encouraged to discuss their teachers' points of views. Finally, in the last focus group with teachers, I used students' views to debate teachers' interpretations and I encouraged them to counterargue.

The resultant method had several similarities with Habermas's ideal speech situation as follows: 'discourses need to guarantee that asymmetric power resources of participants do not influence the discursive interplay: only converging perceptions and viewpoints of the participants lead to a rational consensus. Everyone affected must be able to take part and should have an equal opportunity to speak and to listen to the others' (Deitelhoff & Müller, 2005, p. 169). Considering Mouffe's statement (1999b) that an 'ideal speech situation' could hardly take place in natural situations, and if so, this would not be in a classroom context (Freedman, 2007), I used this research study to establish an artificial dialogue between teachers and students. The assumption was that by giving teachers and students their own space to debate, both voices would be heard. Simultaneously, by contrasting conflicting views, students and teachers can learn from each other and at the same time this awareness can contribute to transforming their own practices.

In this paper, I have decided to present the results of this second phase in the dialectical form in which I collected the data. The resulting format should not be understood as the acceptance of power differences between teachers and students. Instead, I have decided on the thesis–antithesis–synthesis format in an attempt to emulate the 'artificial dialogue' created in this research.

The Case and the Participants

As I have mentioned, all the participants in this research were participants in the educational project entitled *Audiències públiques als nois i noies de la Barcelona (AP)* ('The public hearing of Barcelona's boys and girls'). The project is based on Tonucci's work (1997), which has been in use since 1994. The main aim is to promote civic participation among young people as well as to teach them to participate in society. It has the following stages:

1. Every year the Division of Education within the city council of Barcelona selects a specific topic (for instance, culture, new technologies, youth participation). They fund the design of teaching materials and their distribution to Barcelona's schools.
2. Participating teachers and their students (aged 11–17) work in class – usually social studies, citizenship, or tutor group classes – using these teaching materials. The teaching materials are designed to encourage the students to make proposals regarding the current topic. It is assumed that the teaching materials last for approximately 15 one-hour classes.
3. Representative students from all the schools join together to discuss the proposals suggested by their classmates and they then select the most relevant ones.
4. The students present their suggestions to the city mayor and to the city council.
5. Barcelona City Council is committed to accepting some of the students' recommendations.

The decision to study this case was related to the opportunity provided of having access to teachers who were willing to teach participation and students who were taught how to participate. In the introductory sessions to explain the research project to the teachers, I offered all of them the opportunity to part in this research. Nineteen of the teachers agreed to answer a survey and six of them agreed to participate in the research fully. These six teachers were interviewed, their students were tested (n=112), and their classes were observed (n=6x3). After analyzing data from the surveys and interviews relating to the teachers, I decided to continue working with a smaller group of participants. This second group was composed of three teachers and twelve students. Below I explain briefly the main characteristics of each of these teachers.

The Teachers and Students

Antonia was 57 years old, with 36 years of teaching experience. She worked in a public primary school situated in a working- to middle-class neighborhood of Barcelona. Antonia had taught all her professional life in the same school and she was proud to have contributed to its democratic education. With regard to the course I studied (2011–2012), Antonia was the tutor of a sixth grade class of primary school students (those aged 11–12). In Antonia's class, I interviewed Irina, Mark, Charlotte, and Martin.

The second teacher who supported the radical view of participation was Theresa, who had been teaching social studies in secondary schools all around Barcelona for 36 years. Theresa's high school was situated in a mainly Catholic working-class neighborhood in Barcelona. When I last interviewed Theresa, she had retired. In the 2011–2012 year, Theresa taught social studies to three groups of third grade secondary school pupils (those aged 14–15) in her high school. Theresa's students who participated in this research were Saul, Lena, Aurora, and Adrian.

Finally, Judith was a 53 year-old teacher with 26 years of teaching experience. She had worked in several secondary schools in Barcelona and the suburbs and had had several management positions, such as head of school. During the research, Judith was teaching media and philosophy in a middle-class neighborhood in Barcelona. In contrast with the other schools, her school had a high percentage of students born outside Spain (especially from Latin America and Asia). My research was carried out in one of the media classes that Judith taught, which was composed of fourth grade secondary school students (those aged 15–16), and I talked with Pol, Caroline, Mariella, and Gisela.

Defining Radical Participation: Participation Oriented Towards Change and Social Justice

The first task in relation to defining 'radical participation' was to establish the final goal of this type of participation. Considering participants' answers, 'radical participation' was defined as the sort of participation aimed at *changing* something, moving towards *social justice*. This idea was explicated, for instance, by Judith and Theresa who claimed:

We cannot give up that people must be combative and have clear positions with regard to inequalities ... (Judith. Interview, teacher)

I think our values should be clear, don't you? Sustainability, equality, justice, economical equilibrium, no discrimination ... all these values ... (Theresa. Interview, teacher)

Some of the students in the survey also expressed the view that participation should be helpful with regard to changing the status quo and contributing to the common good:

[Participation] is something really necessary to change things ... Quiet and sited, we are not going to achieve changes ... (Survey, student 58)

[Participation] is important to change the world ... (Survey, student 88)

[Participation] is necessary for the common good ... (Survey, student 90)

Although less mentioned, ‘radical participation’ was also thought to contribute to other goals. In addition, some participants specifically mentioned that ‘radical participation’ was aimed at the empowerment and emancipation of those who participate and to highlight inherent conflicts in society. As an example, Judith explained:

We should try to teach them how to regain their power from those who have it inherently and who use it ... our people first need to know that they have power and then they need to use it ... I don’t think we need to deny the conflict, but to know how to deal with it ... (Judith. Interview, teacher)

According to the participants, those who participate in a radical way can use a wide range of actions (legal and illegal) in which only violent actions are absolutely excluded. For these students and teachers, there is a clear difference between legality and common good:

Edda: What would you think if they perform any illegal action?

Lena: Well ... If they don’t hurt anyone ...

Edda: Do you mean that even if they are performing illegal actions, they are not doing anything bad?

Lena: I don’t think so ... I think it is the opposite ... If they do it in order to change a significant issue... (Lena. Interview, student)

Martin: I think that if you don’t destroy anything ... it is fine...

Edda: What about if the police tell you that you are acting illegally?

Martin: Well ... they are the ones who have the power ... Even they can decide to beat you ... But I don’t think we would do anything bad ... If you don’t destroy anything ... If you just participate ... I think we should be able to do it. I think we should do it!¹³ (Martin. Interview, student)

Edda: Imagine that one of your ex-students, who is 18 or 20, is in jail because he or she has defended a cause you consider fair ... What would you think about him or her?

Antonia: Well ... I would think that he or she has done what he or she was supposed to do ... And unfortunately sometimes there are unfair consequences ... (Antonia. Interview, teacher)

¹³ On 27 May 2011, the police hit some peaceful *indignados* who were sitting in the main square of Barcelona. The student is probably referring to this idea.

The dichotomy legality/illegality is not equivalent to 'goodness/badness', according to the three interviewees. These participants assumed legality to be a set of socially constructed norms that are not necessarily associated with what is ethically correct. Only violent forms of participation are identified to be 'unethical.' Therefore, if the limit is the violence, it could be suggested that these participants used human rights as an ethical code to identify whether or not different forms of participation should be accepted.

Teaching Participation: Knowledge, Skills, and Values

When asked about what content, skills, and attitudes should be taught to learn about radical participation, students and teachers agreed in general terms. Beyond certain initial differences that I will describe in more detail below, a general consensus was established in terms of identifying participation mechanisms, politics, power, controversial issues, critical thinking, communication and social skills, trust, and social justice values as the main items of content that should be taught.

Considering students' views, the obvious topic to be taught was participation mechanisms. Some students vocalized not being aware of the range of participation mechanisms they could use and how they could get information about these mechanisms. Rather than being given a list of possible participation mechanisms, they requested a deep analysis with special emphasis on the implications and possible consequences of each mechanism:

Caroline: The problem is that I don't know what societies I could join ... I don't know any ... And maybe if I did know, I would like to join it ... But since I don't know it ... and I don't know how to get information about that ... (School C. Focus group, students)

Charlotte: We could understand whether it is participation or not and we could decide ... This would be cool ... We would know what is possible ... Not only going to vote and that's all! There are more things that can be done ... (School A. Focus group, students)

Lena: I think they should explain to us ... Like ... These people do this for this reason ... There is a goal behind their action ... And then ... They should teach us the consequences of every action ... Because imagine someone breaks the window of a small shop... What would be the consequences for you and for the shop's owner? (School B. Focus group, students.)

Initially, teachers had proposed that they teach exclusively school participation mechanisms (e.g. school councils). However, when this was counterargued using students' views, they recognized students' arguments and then suggested that teaching school participation mechanisms was necessary, but not enough. In the focus group, the three teachers agreed that perhaps students required some help in order to overcome the distance between the school's participation mechanisms and society's participation mechanisms.

On the one hand, teachers were required to discuss the relevance of teaching politics. Although there was apparent unanimity on the importance of teaching politics, Theresa expressed some doubts considering what she described as students' lack of interest:

Theresa: They need to value democracy ... They need to know what democracy is ... But when we talk about the state, when we talk about institutions and so on ... You try to make it closer to the students ... Like who makes the rules and who follows the rules ...

But I think they don't pay attention at these ages ... (Theresa. Interview, teacher)

Rather than agreeing with Theresa's ideas, pupils emphasized that they were not interested in studying politics from a traditional civics approach (e.g. memorizing institutions and definitions). In contrast, students argued that their interest was in being taught current politics (e.g. political parties and candidates, social movements, ideologies). According to these students, the possibilities of learning how to analyze current politics outside the school were highly limited. What students were describing was not the lack of information regarding current politics, but the lack of information beyond the two main political parties:

Caroline: They should also explain to us about political parties and stuff ... and what they can offer to us...

Edda: What do you mean? To look at the electoral programs and to compare them?

Caroline: Yes ... And to debate in class the different approaches to the ideas ...

Edda: And do you think students would be interested in that?

Caroline: I think so ... Sometimes we have talked about that in class and we have been debating for hours ... Although we have different points of views it is a different way to learn ... (School C. Focus group, students)

Edda: What is the reason, from your point of view, for your lack of knowledge about political parties?

Lena: We are not interested in them ...

Adrian: Effectively ...

Aurora: And also ... Because they are always the same on TV ...

Saul: If you watch TV there are always only the same two [main candidates] on debates ... (School B. Focus group, students)

On the other hand, the participating teachers highlighted the relevance of analyzing power issues when teaching radical participation. According to Theresa, power issues are not only relevant in their own right but they also create a high level of interest among the students:

Theresa: They are really interested in it! Power legitimacy, *de facto* or economic powers ... They are aware of it, you know! They are interested and aware of it ...

Edda: And do you think that this is helpful to teach radical participation?

Theresa: I think so! Definitely!

Edda: Why?

Theresa: To be emancipated, you know ... To be aware of opinion groups, lobbies ... to be critical! (Theresa. Interview, teacher)

From these teachers' points of view, an appropriate 'strategy' to teach matters related to politics and power was the use of controversial issues. Controversial issues enabled students to approach political topics dialectically, contrasting conflicting views on each issue

at the same time as acquiring a certain empathy with those who are in the weaker position in each conflict. As Judith said:

Judith: Well ... To me it is essential to know the reality from a dialectical approach! Not everything is good or everything is bad ... Things happen for several reasons and it is important to identify the positive and negative part of all these procedures ... Well ... Definitely, we are talking about class struggle ... (Judith. Interview, teacher)

Judith's students agreed on the appropriateness of teaching controversial issues. They demanded, nevertheless, a higher connection between the issues discussed and students' lives. Rather than analyzing social conflicts 'from outside', they preferred to analyze 'inside conflicts' where they could discuss their own position within conflicts:

Gisela: We studied the crisis ... we wrote about what we thought about the crisis ... Without any information ... And this is the only thing we have done! And just four or five people did the writing ...

Caroline: We are not well informed ... And he [the teacher] asked us ... Write what you think about the crisis ... Let's see ... First you should explain to us what it is about ... And work a little bit on it ... And then we can give our opinion ... But instead of that ... We were all lost ... We didn't know a lot about the crisis ... Not in detail ...

Edda: What should the teacher teach you then?

Caroline: Analyze in detail what is going to have impact on us and what is not ... Then we would be motivated to try to change it ...

Gisela: And then ... if we were well informed, we would know if we are giving our support to something good or bad, or if we are complaining about something that is actually having an effect on us or not ... And then ... we could be aware of what we are doing ... (School C. Focus group, students)

From Gisela and Caroline's quotes, it could be suggested that students consider it necessary to develop further their knowledge about political issues and about the implications of political, economic, and social issues for their own lives. In other words, they want to feel that they are a party involved in the conflicts.

It seems likely that the hegemonic discourse of representative participation generates suspicion among young Spaniards and it is completely fruitless to teach participation:

Martin: I think that each time ... It is worth ... Because they write something in the papers but then ... And consequently nobody trusts in politics ... Because this is not democracy, this is what they [the politicians] want! (School A. Focus group, students)

Gisela: Here in the school ... We have a classmate ... who is really informed and motivated ... She is really engaged ... But ... When you know what is going to happen ... It is like ... If I do it, nothing is going to change, nothing will change ... Because it is not in my hands ...

Pol: Sometimes it is better to be ignorant ... If you have a blind trust, then you have hope, but if you don't ...

Edda: What should you be taught then in order to learn to participate critically?

Pol: A revolutionary feeling! (School C. Focus group, students)

The quotes suggest that students differ between a type of participation based on hope and an uncritical analysis of society, and a type of participation based on a critical analysis together with a ‘revolutionary feeling’. Although this feeling could hardly be taught, according to the group of students from school B, a similar feeling is increasing together with their distrust in politics:

Edda: Why are you more confident than before?

Saul: Because we are more *indignados* [outraged] ...

Edda: More outraged?

Saul: Yes ... More every day ...

Adrian: We receive all the bad stuff and they don’t do anything to change it...

Saul: Yes!

Edda: Who are “they”?

Adrian: The politicians ... We keep on complaining and they think “uff ...”. They don’t do anything ... They rage! (School B. Focus group, students)

In a contradiction with classic political theory that associates higher levels of participation with higher political trust, these students suggested that people might learn how to participate in a radical fashion by being distrustful and outraged against the status quo. However, according to one of the teachers, some sort of trust is necessary. Following Antonia’s discourse:

Antonia: Yes the trust you have in yourself and in the group you belong to is important ... In education, we must consider trust is really important...

Edda: Trust in yourself and in ...

Antonia: Yes ... and with your group ... You cannot participate if you don’t have trust! (Antonia. Interview, teacher)

If Antonia is right, and a certain amount of self-trust is necessary, probably students would associate this trust with the acquisition of certain skills that would enable them to critically decide.¹⁴ The set of skills these students and teachers described could be summarized into communication, critical thinking, and social skills. In more detail:

Lena: We should have options to talk ... We should know the ways to talk and to give our opinion ... That would give us power ... (School B. Focus group, students)

Martin: We should be taught how to organize ourselves ... Peacefully ... without fights ... For instance I think that the 15-M movement was

¹⁴ In classic political theory, this self-trust could be associated with the political attitude ‘internal political efficacy’ which can be defined as the ‘belief that individuals have resources enough to influence politics’ (Magre & Martínez, 1996, p. 279).

quite fine ... I don't want to vote without thinking ... Because this is important for the society ... (School A. Focus group, students)

Indeed, it could be suggested that students consider the learning of these skills necessary for them to have enough confidence to participate and also for increasing the real impact of their hypothetical participation. Quoting Lena's words, knowing how to be organized in groups and how to communicate would 'give them power'.

Teaching Participation: What Strategies?

Two main activities for teaching participation were proposed by both teachers and students: (1) political discussions and (2) community learning activities. Students described specifically how the political discussions should take place:

Lena: They could do two groups, dividing the people according to their opinions. And then we could debate ...

Aurora: And they also could explain a little bit ...

Lena: And we all give our opinion ... And like this we learn how to talk as well ... Well to see different points of view and to think critically ...

Adrian: Instead of reading from a book how to participate ... (School B. Focus group, students)

Teachers agreed that political discussions were a good activity to use in order to teach radical participation. Nevertheless, they complained about the fact that their students did not have the necessary skills to debate. This argument was clearly counterargued by students who complained that if they did not have the necessary skills to debate, this was a result of not having been previously taught them. Against this argument, teachers manifested their concern about not having enough time to follow the official curricula and to respond to students' requests.

On the other hand, students described different sorts of community learning activities clearly disassociated from more traditional community learning activities:

Mark: We could go to visit the political parties' emplacement ... And we could talk with politicians ... (School A. Focus group, students)

Saul: I will say something more practical ... There is a demonstration ... Then we could go ... (School B. Focus group, students)

Teachers agreed with students' proposals but they identified some difficulties with regard to being engaged in these sorts of activities. From her side, Judith agreed that teachers could engage their students in these kinds of activities but she also manifested her concern in terms of them having an impact on teachers' lives. According to her point of view, teachers' professional careers could be affected as a result of their participation in these activities:

Judith: I was working in a school some years ago ... And I told the head of school ... Look these students want to go on strike ... They want to go to the demonstration ... I will join them ... I took a decision that day ... But you cannot do that every day ... Because your personal and professional situation can be affected ... Even being a radical teacher ... (Judith. Focus group, teacher)

Another difficulty teachers described was judging whether it was right to go out from school with their students. This was a result of considering that students would think the activity a game rather than a learning activity:

Theresa: When we go out from school, the activities don't work ...

Edda: Why do you say that these activities don't work?

Theresa: Because they think it is a free day ... They don't think it is a serious activity ... It is a day without class ... (Theresa. Interview, teacher)

Students agreed with Theresa's point of view that they more enjoyed going out. However, they emphasized the idea that they behave in a different way because they are not used 'to schooling outside school'. In addition, they explained that not being in the traditional power positions established in class didn't mean that their learning was any worse:

Charlotte: When we go out ... When you are on the streets ... It is ... It is like ... You feel free ... You can go, for instance, to a museum ... Where you cannot run, but you still feel free ...

Mark: When you are in a museum ... You are told to look for something ... and you can go there ... and instead of that, in class you must be seated and there you can walk, and you can look for things ... (School A. Focus group, students)

It could be suggested that the choice of out-of-school activities implies a reduction in the teacher–pupil status quo. When students and teachers are outside the school, students seem to feel 'free' and teachers appear to feel 'afraid'. In some way, the school's walls could be compared to a jail's walls, preserving the power relations between one group (teachers) and another (students). If even for these 'radical teachers' the loss of power relations seems to be a problem, it could be argued that as Freedman (2007) explains, it would be impossible to achieve the complete suppression of these power relations.

Discussion

In this small-scale research project, a definition of radical participation is proposed from an educational standpoint. Radical participation is defined as the sort of participation aimed at changing the status quo towards social justice by means of any kind of non-violent action. This definition aligns with the suggestions advocated by radical democratic theorists. In particular, Mouffe (1989, 1999a) defends a sort of participation in which the final goal is social and economic equality, and social justice, and which rather than avoiding conflicts contributes to their emergence.

With regard to teaching radical participation, students and teachers also agree with some of the ideas discovered as a result of educational structural–functionalist research (e.g. Ødegård & Berglund 2008; Quintelier, 2010). This considers class discussions to be highly relevant. However, rather than using these strategies from an decontextualized or unproblematic approach, students and teachers alike suggest the use of controversial issues, which have an impact on students' lives, to inform the conflicts and make for a dialectical and empathetic approach to reality. These controversial issues could be based on topics such as current politics, power, or participation mechanisms. As I have proposed elsewhere, students could, for example, discuss the legitimacy of using *escraches* (Sant, 2014b), analyze

the confrontation of different powers in specific cases (Sant & Perez, 2011), or assess the relevance of different political parties' programs (Ortega & Nomen, 2012).¹⁵

In addition, the participants highlight the relevance of contextualizing and connecting what happens within schools and classrooms with what happens in society. For instance, students maintain that if teachers want to teach them about how to participate, they should try to be engaged and introduce them to the social movements within their own society. These students, who live in a society in transition, cannot be taught participation by sitting at their desks in school classrooms while the rest of the world is moving forwards. This could mean, as Ross and Vinson (2012; 2013) suggested, going to demonstrations or using the strategies developed by these new social movements. However, using these strategies would require the existence of teacher activists (or maybe strong teacher unions) able to afford the consequences of such actions.

Teaching participation within society would also result in the empowerment of students by teaching the skills and the confidence necessary to participate (high internal political efficacy, as described by Kahne & Westheimer, 2006). Rather than teaching them that their participation will have an effect on policies, I suggest teaching them that whether or not their participation is effective in terms of policies, it is effective in terms of their empowerment. In the same vein as what has been proposed by informed social critics (Ross, Mathison & Vinson, 2014), students demand some knowledge (about participation, politics, and power) and skills (communication skills, critical thinking skills) to feel confident enough to participate and they consider school the place where they can acquire this knowledge. Furthermore, they believe that they won't be able to participate if they do not trust in their own abilities to talk, to organize, and to criticize. Students expressed a desire to be empowered by their teachers.

These students and teachers do not agree with teaching aims to promote trust in formal politics. In contrast with classic educational and political research (e.g. Seligson, 1980; Pattie, Seyd & Whiteley 2004), the participants in this research agree that trust in the political status quo is conducive to uncritical participation. In accordance with this, activities whose aim it is to promote political trust, such as attending to politicians' discourses (unilateral), are viewed with skepticism by students. In contrast, these students demand more critical and controversial approaches to politics and offering them the opportunity for discussion with politicians (bilateral) would enrich their learning. Following the example of Nomen and Ortega (2012), teachers could request politicians to visit schools and discuss their proposals and points of view. As stated by these two teachers, whether or not politicians agree to visiting schools and answering students' questions could also imply relevant learning. If certain politicians accede to dialogue with students and others do not, students might identify the difference between two different ways of understanding politics.

The participants in this research describe two different catalysts for participation. Whereas political trust is perceived as a catalyst for traditional participation (representative and passive), 'being outraged' is identified as the first step towards another sort of participation, one closer to radical participation. In order to feel outraged, to achieve what they called a 'revolutionary feeling', they demand to be consciously taught about the implications of current political decisions in their lives.

To conclude, what can radical teachers and academics learn from these teachers and students who live in a society in transition? They can learn that school cannot be separated

¹⁵ One relevant Spanish example of confrontation of powers can be found here: http://elpais.com/elpais/2014/01/13/inenglish/1389607345_906072.html

from society. Society itself (and especially societies in transition) provides resources for teaching participation. Students still have more confidence in their teachers than in the rest of society as the mediators of learning about and investigating what is happening outside the school walls. Radical teachers seem to be willing to assist their students in this learning but they are concerned about the implications of certain actions on their own personal and professional lives. They need support from other teachers, from teachers' unions, from academics, and from other groups involved in this transition. Students seem to want to participate critically in society, but they demand assistance on how to 'gain power'. Teachers who advocate radical participation seem to want and know how to help students to 'acquire this power' but they demand a general commitment to their cause.

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ISSN 1920-4175

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