



Article

Exploring the Communication of Social Movements in Primary Education

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Abstract: There is much controversy today about several factors involved in children's education. The last decade has also seen a significant change in the way classes are imparted, with teachers giving greater visibility to subjects of current importance. One of these subjects is the issue of social movements. The present study aimed to identify possible communication strategies between primary school teachers and children and identify possible pedagogical strategies to explain, treat and discuss social movements in classrooms. To carry out the objectives, we used a Delphi method, and we drew on the experience of experts in several social and educational fields to identify the communication strategies. This interactive technique, comprising different phases and a range of questions, was used with experts in the psychology of education, media studies, primary education, and parents to reach a consensus on how best to approach social conflicts in the classroom and obtain predictions. The implications for primary education are discussed.

Keywords: social movements; primary; children; Delphi method; education; social science



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1. Introduction

Social movements are a reactive way of engaging in social conflicts that directly or indirectly lead to political initiatives and social freedoms (Andrews 2001; Benford and Hunt 1992). Under the same perspective, social movements are seen as informal interactions between a plurality of people, groups and organizations involved in political or cultural conflicts based on shared collective identities (Diani 1992). For its part, social protest is a fundamental participation mechanism for defending the rights and ideals of citizens. On many occasions, protests have been the tools of social movements (Johnston 2016). Indeed, social conflict, understood as a struggle for values, status, power and scarce resources, has been an essential resource for democracy and the recognition of human, social and natural rights (Sell 2019). In this process, opponents in the conflict, which may be the government, a regime, a population or another social movement, seek to neutralize, damage or eliminate the source of conflict (Coser 1998). Two great currents of social order condition how social conflicts are interpreted. On the one hand, consensual currents assert that the organization of social systems tends towards self-compensation between the theories and the forces that articulate structures and their functions. According to this model, social confrontation is anomalous. On the other hand, conflictivist currents affirm that society itself encompasses a series of contradictions and confronted objectives that provoke the confrontation of interest. In the latter sense, the conflict is inherent to social dynamics (Lorenzo Cadarso 2001).

Social conflicts are essential for all democratic societies that promote equality and freedom and seek institutional changes in the democratic system (Archibugi 2020). Social movements do not threaten democracy but enrich it (Alguacil Gómez 2007) and are essential

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for change. A fundamental element of social movements is active participation by the population. In the 1980s, social and political demands were predominant, while in the 1990s social movements were affected by ambivalent messages (Hamann and Türkmen 2020).

Several movements that have led to significant change in the context of social conflicts in Spain are fairly recent (e.g., the feminist or ecologist movements). One that has marked a clear turning point and seen a new way of making demands, however, is the 'Indignados' (or '15-M') movement, which began on 15 May 2011. This social movement demands a less bipartisan democracy, the inclusion of all political parties, and a more authentic division of powers (Monedero 2019) and is an example of a movement as an agent of change in a democracy. Thanks to this mass movement, observed in numerous Spanish cities, significant changes have taken place in how individuals understand politics and Spanish democracy. Though often treated as a political party, the 15-M movement does not have an electoral programme. However, the movement demonstrates how political reforms can be achieved through the mass participation of citizens. Social movements generate new points of view and new models that are different from the democracy known thus far. This movement demands equality, inclusiveness, and transparency. It begins with the notion that certain aspects in society must change and calls for the implementation of 'collective thinking' (as opposed to the 'individualistic thinking' prevalent up to now) and 'active listening'.

Social movements have evolved. Children, adolescents and young adults are all now more substantially involved, a change that began with demonstrations in support of the right to free, high-quality public education (Rockwell 2012). The last two decades have therefore seen an increase in discussions on educational processes and how these processes relate to a future for children that leads to social inequality (Kromydas 2017). Formal teaching methods have also been modified, which could be one reason why children are increasingly becoming involved directly or indirectly in social movements via their families (Sandin 2020). For this reason, this article explores the development of social movements within primary schools.

Children acquire information through the culture in which they live by interacting with people and social situations. This information is preferably selective and focused on informants who are representative of the surrounding culture (Harris et al. 2017). Family and school are therefore areas where children acquire the most information about society. Studies on communication with children and children's development are scarce, however. One analysis of risk communication from parents to children has revealed that children want their parents to be more communicative and to communicate information honestly and positively (Stuttgen et al. 2021). Schools are a suitable setting for communicating social aspects such as natural disasters. In fact, one study reports that students themselves should participate in communication strategies in the context of natural disaster prevention (Midtbust et al. 2018).

1.1. Theoretical Background in Education

Few studies address effective educational strategies focused on social movements. However, a series of investigations show some characteristics that must be taken into account. Specifically, one systematic review (Monroe et al. 2019) identified different effective education strategies on climate change. The results show that situated cognition, that is, studying the situations where it occurs rather than fictitious situations, can be a beneficial educational strategy for students to develop critical thinking about social aspects. According to the systematic review results, students need to relate the scientific knowledge acquired in class with everyday life. Although there are few empirical studies on the subject, either in cooperative learning (Johnson et al. 1994) or cooperative pedagogies (Connac 2020) that focus on primary education, it has been established that students can awaken critical and autonomous thinking about social aspects through cooperative learning among equals; these methodologies are intended to train citizens to be active and responsible for their

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social environment. In fact, Tonucci (2009) argues that participation should not be taught theoretically but should be taught practically.

At the same time, recent studies have analysed social movements through alternative curricular proposals or, in the case of the social sciences, from current social movements in primary school classrooms (children from six to twelve years old). Such proposals provide students with tools for analysing, considering and better understanding their immediate social reality as well as addressing 'relevant social problems' (Pagès et al. 2012) and 'social issues' (Thénard-Duvivier et al. 2008). Other proposals, such as that by Massip-Bonet (2018), aim at a curricular model of primary and secondary education that offers guidance on educational purposes, knowledge and teaching strategies that work around the following six axes: gender, the culture of peace, human rights, citizenship and governance, economic and social sustainability, and the environment and interculturality. These proposals are in line with Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) or Global Goals, the aims of which are to protect the planet, ensure sustainability, and leave no one behind. We are researchers and teachers of different areas of social and behavioural sciences, and we believe that one of these objectives (signed in 2015 by 193 countries and ensuring compliance by 2030) is group empowerment. We also believe that a need exists for more specific studies for work in the classroom.

1.2. The Present Study

This study focuses on the context of primary education. The International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED) establishes that education usually begins between the ages of five and seven and that it is designed to give a solid basic education in reading, writing, and mathematics as well as elementary knowledge in other subjects. The Spanish context comprises six academic courses, which are ordinarily followed between six and twelve. In general, students will join the first year of primary education in the calendar year they turn six. Primary education comprises three cycles of two years each and is organized into areas with a global and inclusive nature (Spanish Ministry of Education and Science 2007).

Primary education classrooms are interactive spaces that reproduce the social reality of the society in which they are located (Papalia and Ruth 2012). However, few studies have analysed pedagogical strategies for dealing with social movements in these classrooms. In this study we draw on the experience of experts in various social and educational fields to identify communication strategies between primary schoolteachers and children. We also aim to identify pedagogical strategies for explaining, treating and discussing social movements in primary school classrooms while taking into account ethical principles. Previous studies with Spanish populations have shown that the Delphi method is suitable for this purpose (Charro 2021; Muñiz-Rodríguez et al. 2017). We hope to reach a consensus after several rounds of questions and establish guidelines for helping primary schoolteachers.

2. Materials and Methods

2.1. Research Design

To achieve our study aims we used the Delphi method. This involves collecting information through repeated consultations to ascertain the opinion of a group of experts. The Delphi method was invented to make predictions about a specific topic and is recommended for obtaining representative opinions from a group of individuals and achieving consensus (Hirschhorn 2019; Sekayi and Kennedy 2017; Sossa et al. 2019). Its predictive ability is based on an intuitive system of judgements from a group of experts in the field (Dayé 2018). Our approach in this study consisted of four phases in which we: (1) formulated the problem and defined the field to be investigated; (2) selected the experts, established the inclusion and exclusion criteria, and invited the experts to participate based on this formulation; (3) prepared a series of questions for the first-phase questionnaire with the study aims in mind and launched it; and (4) conducted the practical development and examined the results. The method aims to obtain the widest possible range of responses.

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To reach consensus, more than one round is usually required and up to four consultations can be made to determine this range (García and Suárez 2013).

We also followed Pickard's suggested guidelines (Pickard 2013), which state that: (a) only experts participate in the question panel; (b) all data are collected in writing; (c) systematic attempts are made to reach consensus; (d) more than one round is conducted; and (e) the anonymity of all experts is respected. Three rounds of questions were needed to reach consensus among all participants. We present the following sections in accordance with these three rounds.

2.2. Participants

To obtain a heterogeneous sample of experts, our inclusion criteria were as follows: (1) journalists with over five years' experience dedicated to social issues, (2) educational psychologists or academic counsellors with over five years' experience working with children and their families, (3) primary school teachers with over five years' experience, and (4) parents/guardians representing parents' associations.

The procedure to recruit the participants followed the following steps: (1) based on the inclusion criteria, the research team selected a group of people who met all the requirements; (2) an email was sent to 60 people with an invitation to participate that included the objectives of the study, an information sheet for participants, a calendar with the dates of participation, and informed consent; (3) the people invited to participate had two weeks to accept or decline the invitation. Finally, 35 people agreed to participate. However, seven people declined to participate once the study began. Participants did not receive any incentive for participating.

The first round comprised 28 participants (80% of whom were women). This sample was distributed as follows: journalists (20%), educational psychologists or academic counsellors (28%), primary schoolteachers (24%), and parents (28%). The age of the participants ranged from 25 to 58 years (M = 35.48; SD = 9.03). All participants resided in Catalonia (Spain).

In the second and third rounds, 10.71% of participants dropped out of the study. The sample then comprised 25 participants (81.81% of whom were women) aged between 25 and 58 years (M = 36.13; SD = 9.37) and distributed as follows: journalists (18.18%), educational psychologists or academic counsellors (31.81%), primary school teachers (27.27%), and parents (22.72%).

2.3. Procedures and Measures

The study followed the guidelines of Organic Law 15/1999 and the Spanish Agency for Data Protection, which regulates the fundamental right to data protection. It was also designed in accordance with the ethical code of the Universitat Rovira i Virgili (2020). We selected professionals based on our established criteria before contacting them by e-mail to explain the aims of the study and the Delphi method. We asked each participant to rate their level of knowledge on the topic as follows: "Indicate your perception of your knowledge of the topic", with 0 indicating a low level of knowledge and 10 indicating a high level. Only those who scored between 8 and 10 were eligible for inclusion. In all rounds, participants had to sign an informed consent form before completing the questionnaires. In all rounds, the batteries of questions used to collect the data were designed for this study. In order to standardize and avoid ambiguities, definitions of the concepts were contained on the second page of the questionnaires.

The first round, which was qualitative, used open questions to collect more information and avoid conditioning the experts, who were not restricted by time or number of words. The questions in the first round were: (1) list strategies for helping primary schoolteachers tackle the issue of social movements; (2) list recommendations for helping primary schoolteachers tackle the issue of social movements; and (3) list ethical implications for primary schoolteachers when speaking about social movements. The questionnaire was sent in a link via e-mail and the participants had four weeks to respond to it.

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Participants from the first round were contacted by email two weeks after the questionnaire had closed to ask them to participate in the second round. Based on their first-round responses, we designed an ad hoc questionnaire with a Likert-type response scale from 1 to 7 (where 1 = completely disagree and 7 = completely agree). These participants then answered a questionnaire with 18 items divided into the following three categories: strategies for helping primary schoolteachers tackle the issue of social movements (7 items); recommendations for helping primary schoolteachers tackle the issue of social movements (6 items); and ethical implications for primary schoolteachers when discussing social movements (5 items).

As in this second round four items from the third category did not reach consensus, a third round was conducted. For this round we used a Likert-type response scale with four response options, where 1 indicated complete disagreement and 4 indicated complete agreement.

2.4. Data Analysis

The questions in the first round were open, so the data were qualitative. For these data, we used constant comparative analysis (Miles et al. 2014) and for the coding procedures, we used open coding. This procedure is suitable for categorizing qualitative data because it reduces researcher subjectivity. Once the first round had been completed, two researchers individually grouped similar responses. The items were then compared, any discrepancies were discussed, and a consensus was reached. A panel of judges was then created (i.e., two research experts in item creation and social issues) to evaluate the suitability of the items. Finally, the changes suggested by these judges were introduced. The results from the first round were used to create the ad hoc questionnaires for the second and third rounds, which aimed to ascertain what the participants thought about the opinions of their fellow participants. The data from the following rounds were treated as shown below.

Since a Likert-type response scale was used for the second and third rounds, these data were quantitative. In the second round, the consensus among the experts was established if at least 70% of the participants answered five or more on the Likert scale. Because in round 3, we used a Likert-type response scale of four response options, the consensus was established if at least 70% of the participants answered options 3 and 4. We also calculated the means and standard deviations in rounds 2 and 3. For data analysis, we used SSPS version 27.0.

3. Results

From the first round, we obtained three categories of items for the second round: (A) strategies for helping primary schoolteachers tackle the issue of social movements (7 items); (B) recommendations for helping primary schoolteachers tackle the issue of social movements (6 items); (C) ethical implications for primary schoolteachers when discussing social movements (5 items).

Table 1 shows the second-round category A items, the number of participants who contributed to the consensus, the percentage consensus, and the means and standard deviations for each item in the general sample. Consensus was achieved for all items. Items 3 and 6 obtained the highest percentage consensus (over 80%).

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Table 1. Category	A. Strategies for	r helping p	rimary sc	hoolteac	hers tack	le the issue	of social 1	nove-
ments.								

	Consensus		Overall Sample	
Items	N	%	Mean *	Standard Deviation
1. Playful, age-adapted activities to promote children's understanding of the issue.	18	75	6.21	0.93
2. Teacher training on how to tackle the issue of social movements.	18	75	6	1.41
3. Teacher collaboration to create support and synergy.	21	87.5	6.25	1.11
4. Pupil-selected projects for dealing with their movement of choice.	17	70.9	5.79	1.47
5. Invitations to those involved in these movements (colloquia, talks, conferences, interviews, debates).	19	79.2	5.92	1.38
Activities such as role plays and motivational projects for generating critical thinking.	21	87.5	6.25	1.23
7. Strategies for helping pupils develop their own social identity.	18	75	6.04	1.43

^{*} Minimum = 1; Maximum = 7.

Table 2 shows the second-round category B items with all their values. All items reached a consensus of over 70%. Item 3 achieved the highest consensus (95.9%), while items 2 and 4 achieved the lowest (70.9%). Table 3 shows the second-round category C items with all their values. Only item 5 achieved consensus (79.2%).

Table 2. Category B. Recommendations for helping primary schoolteachers tackle the issue of social movements.

	Consensus		O	verall Sample
Items	N	%	Mean *	Standard Deviation
1. Provide clear, concise and objective information.	20	83.3	6.29	0.86
2. Be careful not to influence the free-thinking of your pupils with your own opinions.	17	70.9	6.04	1.3
3. Be prepared to ascertain the opinion of all pupils.	23	95.9	6.5	1.06
4. Avoid self-censorship: in class, it should be possible to discuss any social movement.	17	70.9	6.04	1.01
5. Be sensitive to all opinions.	19	79.1	6.38	0.82
6. Be informed about current social movements and their development.	20	83.4	6.25	1.07

^{*} Minimum = 1; Maximum = 7.

Table 3. Category C. Ethical implications for primary schoolteachers when discussing social movements.

	Consensus		Overall Sample	
Items	N	%	Mean *	Standard Deviation
1. Be neutral and objective.	15	62.5	5.71	1.43
2. Always speak from a position of respect for different cultures, ideologies and genders.	15	62.5	5.71	1.43
3. Do not speak from a neutral position since the teaching of values is essential for primary school pupils.	8	33.3	3.63	1.91
4. Inform pupils of all the social movements that exist and do not hide any of them.	15	62.5	5.71	1.16
5. Show that it is possible to agree and disagree with different aspects of different social movements, thus indicating that one need not become pigeonholed in any one movement.	19	79.2	5.96	1.08

^{*} Minimum = 1; Maximum = 7.

The Delphi process seeks a consensus among the participants or a minimum degree of stability among the answers. Since some items did not reach a consensus in the second round, the participants were consulted again. Therefore, we decided to reduce the number of response options to achieve consensus or response stability and consolidate the group's

position. Table 4 shows the results of the third round, where all items except item 4 (67.7%) achieved consensus.

Table 4. Third round. Category C. Ethical implications for primary schoolteachers when discussing social movements.

	Consensus		Overall	Sample
Items	N	%	Mean *	Standard Deviation
1. Be neutral and objective.	24	77.70%	1.81	0.95
2. Always speak from a position of respect for different cultures, ideologies and genders.	24	90.30%	1.39	0.84
3. Do not speak from a neutral position since the teaching of values is essential for primary school pupils.	23	74.20%	2.94	1.1
4. Inform pupils of all the social movements that exist and do not hide any of them.	21	67.70%	1.97	0.91

^{*} Minimum = 1; Maximum = 4.

4. Discussion and Conclusions

The aim of this study was to identify pedagogical strategies to help primary schoolteachers explain and discuss social movements in their classrooms. We used the Delphi method to draw on the experience of experts in several social and educational fields, identify communication strategies between primary schoolteachers and children, and identify pedagogical strategies for explaining, tackling and discussing social movements in primary school classrooms (while bearing in mind ethical principles and the children's stage of development). After several rounds of questions, a consensus was reached on guidelines for primary schoolteachers. The experts concluded that primary school pupils should be educated in social conflicts, social problems, and social situations so that they may better understand these conflicts and the various points of view.

Our data show which advice for primary schoolteachers achieved the broadest consensus. In the category 'Strategies for helping primary schoolteachers tackle the issue of social movements', the strategies with the broadest consensus were 'Teacher collaboration to create support and synergy' and 'Activities such as role plays and motivational projects for generating critical thinking', both of which scored 87.5%. The result for 'Teacher collaboration to create support and synergy' coincides with the conclusions of Monereo and Durán (2012), who proposed interprofessional collaboration as a starting point for networking. To achieve this, the teaching staff must work to agree on decisions, since debating and agreeing on ideas is difficult. Moreover, Duran Duran Gisbert et al. (2020) presented practical proposals for peer observation and collaborative learning for teachers as tools for in-school teacher training. These ideas have also been proposed for the continuous training of teachers in the Department of Education of the Catalan education system.

A consensus of 87.5% was also achieved on the item 'Activities such as role plays and motivational projects for generating critical thinking'. Similarly, in their research on cooperative and collaborative learning methods, Monereo and Durán (2012) formulated various role-playing formats and suggested that role-playing is a good technique for dealing with controversial issues of a socio-affective nature and for consolidating more curricular contents while also encouraging critical thinking. Also, along these lines, Pagès et al. (2012) proposed basing the teaching and learning of social sciences on social problems as a stimulating way to bring the subject closer to students. Today's problems should be understood globally and as an interrelation between different realities. Moreover, if content is presented through contextualized situations and problems, it can connect better with the reality, interests and motivations of students.

The item with the lowest consensus (70.9%) in this category (Strategies for helping primary schoolteachers tackle the issue of social movements) was 'Pupil-selected projects for dealing with their movement of choice'. This appears to be a topic of some debate in current education circles with regard to how teachers should work on the projects, what

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group work should entail, and what the choice of topic should be. This issue must be addressed since non-directivity (i.e., the absence of an educator) can exacerbate social and learning inequalities. Meirieu (2010), for example, states that when students are allowed to work together spontaneously, four unequal functions arise: (a) designers, (b) performers, (c) inactives, and (d) troublemakers.

In the category 'Recommendations for helping primary schoolteachers tackle the issue of social movements', the data show almost unanimous agreement (95.9%) with 'Be prepared to ascertain the opinion of all pupils'. The lowest consensus was achieved for the items 'Be careful not to influence the free-thinking of your pupils with your own opinions' and 'Avoid self-censorship: in class, it should be possible to discuss any social movement', each of which scored 70.9%. Although we consider this a high level of consensus, these items generated more debate and more disagreement than the others in this category, a result that is in disagreement with the views of social science teaching expert Antoni Gavaldà, who believes that the teaching of history and the social sciences should help to further pupils' understanding of political and social inequalities. Teachers should provide tools for reflecting on why certain phenomena have occurred and what the consequences of those phenomena are (Irigoven 2020). Nor is this result in line with the proposal of Pagès et al. (2012), who argue that situations should be created in the classroom that predispose pupils to think and to reconstruct their knowledge based on current facts, situations and problems while also encouraging their curiosity and improving their ability to seek alternative and original solutions. Activities are therefore needed that enable social knowledge to be applied in specific contexts in a dialogical way and based on questions, problems or cases in order to make students more predisposed to participate in public life reflectively and critically and thus contribute to a more democratic society.

In the category 'Ethical implications for primary schoolteachers when discussing social movements', we obtained consensus on only one item, i.e., 'Show that it is possible to agree and disagree with different aspects of different social movements', thus indicating that one need not become pigeonholed in any one movement (79.2%). These results demonstrate that the role of teachers in dealing with current problems or situations (in this case, social movements) is called into question. We should add that this category required three rounds to reach consensus, so we could say a certain controversy exists and suggest that more studies are needed to analyse it. Since in this study we did not reach consensus, we decided to change the response options to make them more restrictive (four options rather than seven). Our participants believed that teachers should develop a neutral role and, as Camps (2020) also points out, that they have a public responsibility not only to train students to assert themselves in society but also to create educational situations that promote critical thinking. Along the same lines, Irigoyen (2021) asserts that schools should teach pupils civic and social skills by offering spaces and mechanisms for socialization and that—as educational institutions that organize skills and facilitate content—they should encourage communication in order to structure relationships among equals, thus combining tolerance, freedom of expression, the handling of criticism, consensus and creativity. Moreover, they should be agents capable of constructing a more active and committed society and creating an environment of social commitment and participatory responsibility. This responsibility must be conceived and articulated as a future dimension for combatting, collectively and from childhood, the current social scepticism.

Finally, in the category 'Ethical implications for primary schoolteachers when discussing social movements', the item 'Always speak from a position of respect for different cultures, ideologies and genders' achieved a consensus of 90.3%. This result is in agreement with Tonucci (2009), who affirmed that participation is not taught but practised. This item requires a balance between freedom and responsibility and involves active participation, communication, dialogue, an acceptance of strengths and limitations, and respect for others. Also, according to Benejam (2015), participation means building a typical project that makes people feel part of a collective because learning to live in a participatory democracy begins with daily practice in the classroom. The only item without consensus was 'Inform

pupils of all the social movements that exist and do not hide any of them', perhaps because social movements have an emotional charge (Hou and Bonanno 2018). Further empirical studies are needed to enable mediation between the biases of citizens in relation to social movements. However, as researchers we believe that education is responsible for dealing with issues that affect society and for training citizens who are capable of asking questions and actively participating in democratic environments.

Limitations

The present study has some limitations. First, we requested recommendations from different experts to identify possible communication strategies between primary school teachers and children. However, we did not ask about the age of the children to whom the recommendation was directed. Studies are needed to identify communication strategies based on the age of children. Second, the participants in the present study had heterogeneous characteristics and were selected based on criteria of profession and work experience. However, we cannot assume that the same results would be reached with different participants; this is a limitation of Delphi studies.

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Informed Consent Statement: Informed consent was obtained from all subjects involved in the study.

Data Availability Statement: The data that supported the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request. The data are not publicly available due to privacy and ethical concerns.

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