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What does Political Participation Mean to Spanish Students?

This article explores how a group of Spanish students (aged 11–19) understand the meaning of 'political participation' in society and discusses the implications of their views for debates and practices in citizenship education. The ways in which these students (n=112) describe and interpret political participation are analysed using an in-depth and interpretative approach employing open questionnaires and interviews. The results suggest that most students value political participation in positive terms and that 'activist' students have a more optimistic view of the effectiveness of participation and especially of new forms of participation such as protests.

1 Introduction

There are several reasons why research into the views of young people is useful. Following the socio-constructivist and symbolic interactionist approaches, it is assumed that students' constructs of citizenship concepts contribute towards their identity as citizens and thus guide their present and future political actions (Dahlgren, 2003; Haste & Hogan, 2006; Dejaeghere & Hooghe, 2009). I believe we need to understand the ways in which students perceive 'political participation' and the links their perceptions might have to their current engagement—and perhaps future engagement—in politics and specifically, in activism politics. Students' perceptions act as a useful source of information, which, if drawn upon, enables us to reflect how we, as society, are educating the citizenry to behave, and can provide insights into whether or not citizens' educators are discussing the teaching of political participation in the same ways students do.

Existing research has highlighted the complexity with which students perceive citizenship and citizenship concepts (Husfeldt & Nikolova, 2003; Kennedy et al., 2008; Farthing, 2010) and it has been suggested that theoretical literature can be helpful as we seek to understand students' citizenship constructs (Kennedy, 2007). Due, in part, to the links between the concept of political participation and the idea of democratic citizenship (Dalton, 2006), there are many different debates regarding the construct of political participation (Ekman & Amnå, 2012). One of these debates discusses whether or not 'activism' should be considered a form of political participation. In this paper, the usefulness of these debates in investigating students' construct of political participation and its links with the construct of civic activism is assessed. The literature review is used here to identify the theoretical disagreements regarding the definition of political participation and these debates are later contrasted, dynamically, with information that has emerged from data. The purpose of this comparison is to identify whether or not students perceive political participation in the same terms academics do.

Spanish society has recently experienced a wide range of types of and motivations for engagement and activism and as such there are opportunities to explore the characteristics of political participation as displayed by young people (van Stekelenburg, 2012; Robles et al., 2012; Farthing, 2010). In comparison with other countries such as the USA, UK, Australia, and the Netherlands (e.g. Torney-Purta et al., 2001; Westheimer & Kahne, 2004; Leenders et al., 2008; Schultz et al., 2010) and notwithstanding the current political debate regarding the characteristics of citizenship education in the Spanish curriculum (see e.g. Gómez & García, 2013), little research has been conducted in Spain concerning students, political participation, and civic activism. Consequently, the knowledge about Spanish students' perception of the meaning of participation is currently undeveloped relative to the theoretical debates presented in the current literature.

This research attempts to fill these gaps by reflecting on academic debates, and further exploring the perceptions of the meaning of political participation among Spanish students, highlighting the perceptions of activist students and discussing the possible implications for citizenship education arising from their definitions of participation. Following this review the research method used in this empirical project is summarized and the use of theoretical discussions in the data analysis is described. The results of these analyses are presented and finally the possible implications for citizenship education based on students' definitions of political participation are discussed.

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2 A review of the literature

Prior to and simultaneously with the development of the empirical project involving Spanish young people a literature review was completed. Searches were principally undertaken between September 2009 and September 2012 and completed by September–October 2013. This review focused upon two topics: the definition of 'political participation', and the research into students' understanding of 'participation'.

The review strategy with regard to the definition of 'political participation' was to focus principally on theoretical studies published in journals since the 1980s until 2013 with keywords provided for titles in both English and Spanish ('political participation', 'civic participation', 'political engagement', 'civic engagement', 'active citizenship', 'political involvement', 'community involvement', 'activism', 'definition', and 'meaning') for use with Google Scholar. Available handbooks and dictionaries on citizenship studies, political science, and political philosophy were also consulted (e.g. Isin & Turner, 2002; Vallès, 2004; Nohlen, 2006; Estlund, 2012). Sixty-five papers and books were retrieved using this procedure. With regard to the second topic, the literature regarding students' understanding of participation and political participation, searches were conducted within empirical studies in English, Spanish, Catalan, and French from the beginning of the 1990s (to include the first IEA Civic Education Study) up to 2013, for students aged 11–18 (with special attention applied to studies incorporating Spanish students). Again, keywords in the appropriate languages were provided for titles and these included ('political', 'civic', 'participation', 'engagement', 'active citizenship', 'involvement', 'activism', 'students', 'teenagers', and 'young'). Google Scholar was employed again and the educational literature database, ERIC, was also used. Following these criteria 279 articles were identified and only those focusing on students' understanding of the concepts searched (ie perceptions, conceptions, views, representations about participation, engagement, active citizenship) were analysed (n=79).

2.1 Literature review: Meanings of 'political participation'

The purpose of the literature review was to identify the different definitions of 'political participation' present among the academic community as a framework for better understanding students' views. This implies the assumption that, although several debates have attemptted to define the concept (e.g. Schwartz, 1984; Conge, 1988; Day, 1992; Haste & Hogan, 2006; Teorell et al., 2007; Reichert, 2010; Ekman & Amnå, 2012), there is still no consensus with regard to what is and what is not political participation.

The definition of 'political participation' is controversial in terms of selecting the concrete actions that are 'political'. Using several categories of analysis (e.g. legality, conventionality, violence), social science academics have long discussed what types of actions might be considered to be political participation (Conge, 1988;

Ichilov, 1990; Vallès, 2004; Nohlen, 2006; Friedrich, 2007; Farthing, 2010; Ekman & Amnå 2012). This debate can be summarized into two paradigms (Dalton et al., 2001; Farthing 2010). The 'old paradigm' understands political participation as the conjunction of legal, conventional, and governmental actions such as voting, joining a political party, or becoming a candidate (e.g. Putnam, 2000; Macedo et al., 2005). In contrast, the 'new paradigm' supports a wider definition of political participation that also includes illegal, unconventional, or non-governmental actions such as boycotting, network campaigning, etc. (e.g. Inglehart, 1997; Norris, 2002; Bennet et al., 2009). Whereas the old paradigm excludes 'civic activism' as a form of political participation, the new paradigm highlights the importance of any sort of activism. According to Ekman and Amnå (2012) the old understanding of political participation consists exclusively of 'formal political participation activities'. In contrast, the new paradigm identifies political participation as equivalent to any sort of participation by including as political participation both manifest political participation activities (ie formal political participation and legal and illegal forms of activism) and latent political participation activities (ie any sort of related involvement and civic engagement).

Existing empirical studies on students' understanding of 'good citizenship' suggest that the debate of old versus new participation is also present in students' views, especially in Spain. Phenomenological research (Martínez et al., 2012)—with data emerging from Chilean students' answers—supports the existence of two different approaches to political participation: those students who define participation as old participation, and those who define it as new participation. This division also seems to be supported by specific research focused on understanding whether Belgian students' perception of participation can be classified into one group or the other (Dejaeghere & Hooghe, 2009). In the USA, Kahne and Westheimer (2004) conducted a mixed methods research study to analyse different kinds of citizens. In relation to the resultant three kinds of citizens, the authors implicitly identified three types of participation related to the old and new debate. Personally responsible citizens mainly participate via formal political activities with the aim of this participation being to accomplish their perceived duties or to help those in need. Participatory citizens engage via formal and informal political activities to help those in need. Social justice-oriented citizens participate using all forms of participation, from formal political activities to activism, with the aim of changing society.

The debate of old versus new participation is probably the most used criterion to classify students' perception of participation (Torney-Purta et al., 2001; Haste & Hogan, 2006; Martin & Chiodo, 2007; Benton et al., 2008; Tupper et al., 2010; Schultz et al., 2010) and the existing results suggest that Spanish students are easily classifiable into the aforementioned groups (González Balletbó ,2007; Schultz et al., 2010). Furthermore, it has been

suggested that Spanish students are more susceptible to perceive activism and other new forms of participation as political participation than other European students (Anduiza, 2001; García & Martín, 2010; Schultz et al., 2010). Although the current consensus of opinion with regard to how students perceive participation would acknowledge that they are probably classifiable into the old versus new dimension, in the current research a decision has been made to take this dimension into consideration without imposing any established category on to the data.

The nature of political participation has also been debated as an important issue within the liberal/ republican discussion on rights and duties, and has been used to increase the understanding of students' answers. Although in the theoretical debate political participation is described generically as a right (liberal model) or as a duty (republican model) (Janoski, 1998; Heater, 1999; Annette, 1999; Frazer, 1999; Barnes et al., 2004), the overlap between these conceptions is considerable. For instance, political participation might be understood as both a right and a duty at the same time (Janoski, 1998). Alternatively, some kinds of political activities can be considered to be rights and others as duties (Schultz et al., 2010) and an intermediate approach can be supported by understanding that political participation is a right and a political virtue (Gutman, 1987; Macedo et al., 2005; Galston, 1991). Applied to educational re-search, this debate, and, sometimes, its overlaps, have been used to investigate students' perceptions.

Research studies have been conducted to identify whether students understand participation as a right, as a duty, or as both. Students' understanding of parti-cipation as a right or a duty has emerged from data (Santisteban & Pagès, 2009; Martínez et al., 2012) and has been used as a constructed dimension from which to analyse that understanding (Cabrera et al. 2005; Schultz et al., 2010; INJUVE 2012). Nevertheless, there is no consensus with regard to the findings of these studies and it could be argued that the discrepancies in their results are due to the different decisions taken by researchers in the process of data collection. As students were required to answer different questions, their answers were different and this has had an impact on the findings researchers have presented. Indeed, rather than intending to classify students into two or three specific boxes, it is argued that the duties/rights debate and its overlaps might be more helpful to understand students' construct of political participation as a complex reality.

Simultaneously with the debates about the concrete actions and the duty/right nature of political parti-cipation, other debates have been held on this topic of political participation, although their impact on edu-cational research has been much more limited. Within these other debates, the representative/participatory discussion can be highlighted for its increasing impact on social science theory (Kateb 1981; Schwartz 1984; Oldfield 1990; Held 1992; Kymlicka, Norman 1994;

Knopff, 1998; Cleaver, 1999; Nohlen, 2006; Friedrich, 2007; Altman, 2013; Dufek & Hotzer, 2013) and research (e.g. Hibbing & Theiss-Morse, 2001; Donovan & Karp, 2006; Bowler et al., 2007). In brief, the academics from the representative camp advocate representative forms of participation, arguing that the value of participation is in its results and that representativeness is the only way to ensure quality politics. In contrast, those from the participatory camp support the theory that participation is valuable in itself—especially for its educational potential—and therefore it should be promoted and extended to direct participation. The overlaps and internal discussion within these two trends are, nevertheless, considerable. There is a wide range of opti-ons between extreme representative participation and extreme direct participation (Mazo, 2005; Altman 2013) and those in the participatory camp do not reach an agreement on whether political participation is a way to achieve consensus (deliberative) or to generate conflict (conflict theorists) (Mouffe, 1999; Janoski & Gran, 2002; Ruitenberg, 2009).

Research with regard to young people's perception of democracy suggests that students use the opposition between direct and representative participation when constructing their definition of political participation. The results of Magioglou (2000), as far as young Greeks (aged 18–26) are concerned, indicate that young people differ between 'real democracy', which is based on repre-sentative participation and 'ideal democracy', which is based on direct participation. However, beyond Magioglou's research, no other investigations have been found associating the participatory/representative de-bate with students' perceptions. This would suggest that the relevance of this debate remains unknown in the determination of students' construct of political participation.

The key issue for the purposes of the current study is that students' perceptions of political participation have been subject to limited investigation through the lens of selected theoretical debates (old/new; right/duty), usually as a part of wider programmes of research on students' perception of 'good citizenship' or 'democracy'. This application has provided us with contradictory re-sults about how students perceive political participation. Due to these existing investigations, we are aware that Spanish young people can be classified either as those who understand political participation as old forms of participation or as those who understand political participation as new forms of participation (González Balletbó 2007; Valls & Borison, 2007). We are also aware that they may understand political participation in terms of rights/duties (Santisteban & Pagès, 2009). However, there are contradictory results regarding the possible links between their understanding of political parti-cipation and their views about rights and duties (Cabrera et al. 2005; Messina et al., 2007; Santisteban & Pagès, 2009; INJUVE, 2012). Finally, the incidence of other academic controversies (whether participation is valu-able by itself or if it is valuable to achieve some external

goals; whether participation is a way to generate con-sensus or a way to generate conflict) in students' discourses remains unknown.

3. Method

3.1 Purposes of this study

Considering the aforementioned research gaps, the objectives of this research are:

  – To explore further the perceptions of the meaning of 'participation' among a group of Spanish students;
  – To analyse whether the students and the citizenship education academics discuss the meaning of 'political participation' in the same terms.

3.2 The theory of social representations

In order to investigate students' perception of political participation, the theory and method of social repre-sentations included in the socio-constructivist and symbolic interactionist approaches was followed. It was assumed, from a naturalistic approach, that humans actively construct their own meanings (Cohen et al. 2011) and that students have a social representation of political concepts such as 'democracy' (Moodie et al., 1995; Magioglou, 2000), 'community' (Moodie et al. 1997), 'public sphere' (Jovchelovitch, 1995), and 'parti-cipation'. 'Social representation' is here defined as a 'system of values, ideas and practices with a twofold function: first to establish an order which will enable individuals to orient themselves in their material and social world and to master it; and secondly to enable communication' (Moscovici 1973, p. xiii). The theory of social representations was used as a framework for in-vestigating students' perceptions.

3.3 Participants.

In this small-scale study a two-stage sampling procedure was carried out. There was no intention of obtaining a simple random sample. The aim of the first stage of the sampling was to obtain a varied and accessible sample of students. In the first stage volunteer sampling was used. Although the weakness of this sampling strategy (in particular the non-representativeness of the sample) (Morrisson, 2006) was appraised, it was considered appropriate due to the socio-constructivist approach of the research and the availability of resources. Students whose teachers volunteered to participate in the research were selected. These teachers (n=6) were volunteers among the 21 Barcelonian teachers with professional experience and commitment to citizenship education who were directly requested via a professional network. One class of students for each of these teachers (each of them from a different school) volunteered and was surveyed (total of students, n=112).

  The first stage sample (n=112) was composed of 43.75% boys and 56.25% girls and the range of ages was between 10 and 19 years (10–11 years, 18.06%; 12–13, 29.67%; 14–15, 32.50%; 16–17, 16.14%; 18–19, 3.63%). 8.9% of these students were special needs students.

They were aged between 16–19 but their schooling age was equivalent to that of a 13–14 year old.

  The aim of the second stage sampling was to select students with different perceptions of political participation to take part in individual and focus group interviews. To identify these key informants the asso-ciation between the conception of good citizenship and the perception of participation was assumed (Dalton et al. 2001) and students with different models of good citizenship were selected. The entire group of students completed a questionnaire &Westheimer, Kahne 2004) and the participants were classified into one of the three models of citizenship described by Westheimer and Kahne (2004): personally responsible citizen; partici-patory citizen; and social justice-oriented citizen. It was naturally not possible simply to impose this framework on the students' data. Rather, Westheimer and Kahne's categories were regarded as useful broad labels that allowed for a variety of perspectives to be included in the research. Twelve students were engaged in this second stage of the sampling: four representative students of each of the three types of citizenship were interviewed individually (n=4x3) and as part of a group. The second sample was composed of 7 girls (58.3%) and 5 boys (41.7%) whose mean age was 13.8 years (11 years old, 2 students, 16.7%; 12 years old, 2 students, 16.7%; 14 years old, 2 students, 16.7%; 15 years old, 4 students, 33.3%; 16 years old, 2 students, 16.7%).

3.4 Data collection and analysis.

Data collection was conducted via questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, and focus groups. In line with previous research on social representations (Wagner et al. 1999), all the students from the first sample (n=112) answered a questionnaire and the 12 students from the second sample were interviewed and took part in a focus group.

  As part of a wider programme of research (Sant, 2013), the questionnaire contained questions to classify students into models of citizenship for sampling purposes (see the participants' section) and one open question. Using the example of existing research on social representations (Lorenzi-Cioldi 1996; Moodie et al. 1997) and with the purpose of collecting spontaneous responses, students were asked to write down the first sentences that came into their minds related first to 'politics' and then to 'participation'. It was assumed that the word 'participation' (and not the term 'political participation') was more useful to research about students' understanding of political participation in all its possible meanings attributed from different theories (see the debate new/old participation in the literature review for a wider explanation). To avoid any confusion as to whether the question was about participation in society or participation in class, the word 'politics' was first used to contextualize the word 'participation' in students' minds. Free association has already been explored and critically justified to obtain subjective meanings by Davies and Fülöp (2010) following the Associative Group

Analysis strategy proposed by Szalay and Brent (1967). Students' responses to the word 'politics' are only used here when they gave meaning to the participation answer (e.g. one student wrote a full sentence split between the space attributed in the questionnaire to answer the question about politics and the space to answer about participation).

After the first data analysis, brief, semi-structured interviews were conducted with the key informants (n=12). In order to ensure the interviews produced the best possible results, vignettes were used due to their capacity 'to "get under the skin" of complex "undiscussables" thought prompts' (Hurworth 2012, p.179). The vignettes presented a situation where a bank crashed in a town and 50% of the population lost their savings; students were asked to read three different ways of acting in this circumstance and decide which one they thought was better. Each of these different ways of acting was based on the models of citizenship described by Westheimer and Kahne (2004).

Three heterogeneous focus groups were later conducted to increase the potential for discussion (Cohen et al. 2011). In each case, 4 students from the same class who had chosen different models of citizenship in the questionnaire (Westheimer, Kahne 2004) (at least one student for each kind of citizenship model) were encouraged to debate the different views of participation and their reasons to support those views.

Following the research method described by Wagner et al. (1999) about Jovchelovitch's study on social representations, data was first systematized and later analysed. Data from the questionnaires was initially systematized and codified by using the qualitative software package TAMS Analyzer. Following Miles and Huberman (1994), 43 codes and subcodes emerged from data and were classified into 6 large dimensions of analyses. Codes and subcodes were contrasted with data from the interviews and 4 more codes emerged (n=47) (the full matrix and the frequencies of each code are shown in table 1).

Once the full data was systematized, qualitative and quantitative analyses were conducted. First, the codes and dimensions that had emerged were contrasted with the theoretical debates identified in the literature review. Some similarities and some differences were found. The differences were identified and the similarities were used to understand and classify emerged codes within each of the emerged dimensions (see these codes in italics in table 1). Second, and following the procedure used by Jovchelovitch (1995) in her research about social representations of the 'public sphere', data was analysed based on descriptive statistics of the codes. Each student was assigned a level of analysis and the existence or non-existence of each code was tested for each student independently of the type of data collection conducted. Absolute and relative frequencies were calculated using the rule that each code would only be applied once to each student of the larger sample. Finally, the data was interpreted using the co-occurrence

of codes and the argumentation developed by students in the groups and individual interviews.

4 Results

In the following section, the results from the data systematization and analyses are presented. It is necessary to highlight that whereas the codes and subcodes (n=47) emerged directly from data, the dimensions (n=6) and code families (n=11) were built upon these codes. Table 1 shows the results of this secondary analysis by presenting the frequency and relative frequency of dimensions and code families. Tables 2-7 present the frequency and relative frequency of codes and subcodes in each dimension.

Table 1: Matrix of analyses and absolute and relative frequency of occurrence of dimensions and code families (n=92).

Dimension	Code family	Frequency of occurrence (ni)	Relative frequency of occurrence (fi)
1. What is the fundamental nature of participation?	Key areas	55	59.78
	Value	56	60.87
	Total Dimension 1	**58**	63.04
2. What is the aim of participation?	Instrumental aims or intended external goals	33	35.87
	Benefits of participation itself or intended internal goals	14	15.22
	Total Dimension 2	**47**	51.09
3. Who benefits from participation?	Total Dimension 3	31	33.70
4. What sort of process is associated with participation?	Participation as people joining together	30	32.61
	The purpose of people joining together	26	28.26
	Total Dimension 4	**32**	34.78
5. What sorts of concrete actions are relevant to participation?	Mechanism	40	43.48
	Characteristic	9	9.78
	Total Dimension 5	**49**	53.26
	Actual/Ideal	10	10.87
	The difference between ideal and	19	20.65
	Total Dimension 6	**19**	20.65

All 6 dimensions emerged from the data with a relative frequency of occurrence higher than 20%. This data has, nevertheless, certain limitations. One hundred and twelve students were investigated but only 92 provided enough data to be analysed. Similarly, although 3 of the dimensions appear in more than half of students' definitions, the presence of the 3 other dimensions is lower. The following results should be interpreted considering these limitations.

Table 2: Matrix of analyses and absolute and relative frequency of occurrence of codes regarding dimension 1 (n=92).

Dimension 1: What is the fundamental nature of participation?				
Code family	Code	Subcode	Frequency of occurrence (n_i)	Relative frequency of occurrence (fi)
Key areas	Importance		21	22.83
	Contribution		10	10.87
	Need		10	10.87
	Good/Bad		9	9.78
	Interest		8	8.70
Value	Positive		46	47.82
	Ambiguous		9	9.78
	Negative		3	3.26

As shown in table 2, most of the students who were studied described their view of the fundamental nature of participation (63%). In the questionnaire these students described participation in terms of 'It is/isn't important' (22.83%), 'It is/isn't necessary' (10.87%), 'It contributes/helps' (10.87%), 'It is good/bad' (9.78%), 'I like/don't like it' (8.70%). Half of the students who answered the questionnaire valued participation positively in relation to one of the key areas previously mentioned but some noted down an ambiguous opinion (9.78%) and some explained their negative opinion of participation (3.26%).

51.1% of the students identified the aims of participation. The most-quoted terms were 'to contribute/achieve something' (16.30%), 'to contribute to change' (7.61%), 'to know others' opinions' (7.61%), 'to help others' (6.52%), and 'to decide' (5.43%). These students' responses were classified into two sub-dimensions: aims concerning external goals or possible beneficial results of participation, such as 'to help others' or 'to change something' (38.04%); and those with aims concerning internal goals or the benefits of the act of participation itself, such as 'to enjoy' or 'to communicate' (18.47%).

Table 3: Matrix of analyses and absolute and relative frequency of occurrence of codes regarding dimension 2 (n=92).

Dimension 2: What is the aim of participation?				
Code family	Code	Subcode	Frequency of occurrence (n_i)	Relative frequency of occurrence (fi)
Instrumental aims or intended external goals	To change		7	7.61
	To help others		6	6.52
	To maintain democracy		2	2.17
	To maintain public spaces		2	2.17
	To maintain stability		2	2.17
	To select representatives		1	1.09
	Goal (not explicit)		15	16.30
Benefits of participation itself or intended internal goals	To decide		5	5.43
	To enjoy		2	2.17
	To communicate	To express oneself	3	3.26
		To know others' opinions	7	7.61

Approximately 34% of the students investigated noted that participation was beneficial for someone. These students described that participation provides a benefit exclusively for the person or group that participates (14.13%), for the whole of society (11.96%), exclusively for the underprivileged (5.43%), and exclusively for the politicians (4.35%).

Table 4: Matrix of analyses and absolute and relative frequency of occurrence of codes regarding dimension 3 (n=92).

Dimension 4: What sort of process is associated with participation?				
Code family	Code	Subcode	Frequency of occurrence (n_i)	Relative frequency of occurrence (f_i)
Participat-ion as people joining together	Same opinions		18	19.57
	Different opinions		12	13.04
The purpose of people joining together	To achieve consensus		16	17.39
	To achieve one's own goal		10	10.87

34.80% of the students associated participation with a process whereby single individuals join together. Whereas some students understand that this constituted group share the same goal in its entirety (19.57%), others mentioned the existence of different goals within the group (13.04%). For some students, the aim of the participation group was to build consensus towards a common goal for everybody (17.39%). For the others, the aim was to achieve their own goal that was not necessary shared by the others (10.87%).

Table 5: Matrix of analyses and absolute and relative frequency of occurrence of codes regarding dimension 5 (n=92).

Dimension 5: What sorts of concrete actions are relevant to participation?				
Code family	Code	Subcode	Frequency of occurrence (n_i)	Relative frequency of occurrence (f_i)
Mechanism	To vote		15	16.30
	To protest	To demonstrate	4	4.35
		To strike	1	1.09
		To protest (not explicit)	7	7.61
	To collabo-rate		7	7.61
	To opine		5	5.43
	To decide		1	1.09
	To help		8	8.70
Characteristic	Legal		2	2.17
	Illegal		6	6.52
	Peaceful		3	3.26

The concrete actions relevant to participation also appeared in 53.30% of the students' responses. Specifically, the most mentioned mechanisms were 'to vote' (16.30%), 'to help' (8.70%), 'to protest' (7.61%), 'to collaborate' (7.61%), and 'to opine' (5.43%). Some students also described 'participation' as a peaceful action (3.26%), as a legal action (2.17%), or as a combination of legal and illegal actions (6.52%).

Table 6: Matrix of analyses and absolute and relative frequency of occurrence of codes regarding dimension 6 (n=92).

Dimension 6: What are the differences between actual and ideal participation?				
Code family	Code	Subcode	Frequency of occurrence (n_i)	Relative frequency of occurrence (f_i)
Actual/Ideal	Reality		3	3.26
	Ideal		6	6.52
The difference between actual and ideal	Number of participants		8	8.70
	Importance		1	1.09
	Effectiveness		11	11.96
	Implication		6	6.52

20.70% of the students studied differed between what could be described as 'ideal participation' and 'real participation'. For these students, the difference between both types of participations was the effectiveness (11.96%), the number of participants (8.70%), and the commitment of each individual (6.52%).

5 Discussion

In the following paragraphs, the results will be discussed using examples of students' responses to the questionnaire, quotations from students' explanations in the interviews, and by contrasting this data with previous debates and research.

5.1 What is students' perception of the fundamental nature of 'participation'?

The 'fundamental nature of participation' dimension had the largest number of associated responses. The students studied usually began their discourse using expressions such as [Participation] 'is good to bring closer different points of view' [Boy, 13 years old] or 'is important because if we don't participate we can't do things'. [Girl, 14 years old] 80.40% of these responses interpreted 'participation' using 'positive' terms such as important, necessary, helpful, and good.

Their responses did not include any connection with the academic debate about rights and duties. Although it could be suggested that the positive assessment of participation implies the understanding of participation as a duty (Messina et al. 2007), these data, rather than supporting this idea, seem to contradict it. In contrast with previous research (Santisteban & Pagès, 2009; Martínez et al., 2012), only 2 of the students who answered the questionnaire explained participation in terms of rights. No students talked about duties, obligations, or responsibilities either in the questionnaire or in the interviews. One of the students who wrote, 'participation

is necessary' in the questionnaire, later claimed in the interview, 'I think we must act in solidarity with the others … But we do not have to solve other people's problems…' [Interview. Girl, 15 years old]

In this example, the girl understood participation as something positive and necessary, but she did not understand participation as a duty or responsibility, at least in relation to the kind of participation described as helping others. This example evidences that, although most of these students described participation in terms of it being important, helpful, good, etc., these terms cannot be interpreted as proof of the connection between students' perception of participation and the idea of duties. Students could understand participation in terms of it being a right and a virtue (Gutman, 1987; Macedo et al., 2005; Galston, 1991) but apart from this their view did not have any connection with the link between participation and rights/duties. Indeed, rather than an explicit connection, what these results show is that most of the students studied do not use the terms rights, duties, or obligations to define participation (96.70%).

Three of the students studied explained that participation was 'not useful' and was a 'waste of time'. In their own words, [Participation] 'is not useful at all, because all the votes go to the corrupt politicians' [Boy, 14 years old] or 'is a waste of time because you will always lose something on the way'. [Girl, 14 years old] According to these students, participation is linked with effectiveness. Although this could suggest the existence of a relationship between students' perception of participation and students' perception of the willingness of the political system to respond to citizens' demands (this attitude in political science is known as external political efficacy) this relationship should be investigated more thoroughly before drawing any conclusions.

5.2 What are the perceived aims of 'participation'?

The second dimension was related to the perceived aims of participation. This included the view of participation as an instrument for achieving a valuable external goal (69.80%) and the view that the 'act of participation' had intrinsic value (30.20%).

Those students who described participation in relation to its external value used the arguments of academics who support the theory of representative participation. Like these representative academics (Cleaver, 1999), students defined participation in terms of its potential outcomes or goals. The potential outcomes mentioned were 'to contribute to stability', 'to select politicians', 'to enforce democracy', 'to change society', 'to help people', or 'to take care of the public space'. As can be observed, there is a wide range of possible goals. While some students understood 'participation' as a way to contribute to stability ('to a stable world', 'to maintain democracy', 'to take care of the public spaces'), others perceived 'participation' as a way to change society ('to change the world'). Hence, it could be argued that, although these students describe participation in terms of its goals, they perceive participation in very different

terms. Indeed, a comparison of Westheimer and Kahne's (2004) typology with these students' responses would suggest that some of these students could be classified as personally responsible citizens, others as participatory citizens, and others as social justice-oriented citizens.

Other students described participation as having intrinsic value. They argued that 'participation' was important for its social potential, [Participation] 'is a really important fact because we are lucky to know what the others' opinions are, what are their projects …' [Girl, 11 years old] 'I like to participate because I can join the society I want'. [Girl, 11 years old] Indeed, these students understand participation as a mechanism of self-expression and socialization with others. Although academics who support participatory and republican approaches to citizenship also highlight the intrinsic value of participation, their arguments are opposed to the students' ones. Republican scholars usually highlight participation in terms of its educational value and the opportunities that it provides to empower individuals (Oldfield, 1990; Annette, 1999), with its final aim being the common good. In contrast, these students perceive participation as an enjoyable act and its final aim seems to be nothing but their own benefit.

5.3 Who are the perceived recipients of 'participation'?
Westheimer and Kahne (2004) have already identified the relevance of the recipients of the benefits of 'participation' as a dimension that can be used to define the different kinds of citizens. In this research, 30% of students also identified these beneficiaries in their definitions of participation, including the participator (or their group), the whole society, the politicians, and the underprivileged.

According to the results, it could be suggested that students perceive that different sorts of participation have different recipients. For those students who described participation as something that would help, the recipients of the benefits of the participation were the underprivileged. For example, 'I agree with the idea that people participate to help to give money to those who need it'. [Boy, 11 years old] 'They should be helped … Because they might be poor … And moreover, I think they might be old'. [Interview. Girl, 15 years old] These students understood participation as a direct action where those who are 'privileged' (in terms of economic and social status) help those who are 'underprivileged'. These students could be classified as personally responsible or participatory citizens (Westheimer & Kahne, 2004), understanding that both sorts of citizens aim to help those in need.

In contrast, for those students who defined participation as 'to vote', the beneficiaries of participation are the politicians and the society as a whole, [Participation] 'is important because it allows the politicians to know what the people want'. [Girl, 13 years old] [Participation] 'is important for the country and for those who govern it'. [Boy, 14 years old] In contrast with previous students, these students highlight their responsibility as citizens

and could be classified as personally responsible citizens (Westheimer &Kahne, 2004).

Similarly, other students also emphasized the relevance of participation for the whole of society. In this case, they highlighted the idea of having civic attitudes (e.g. taking care of public spaces), [Participation] 'is important to maintain the city in good condition' [Boy, 14 years old] or [it] 'is essential to maintain the city'. [Boy, 14 years old]

Finally, some students perceived that the recipients of 'participation' were the participants themselves. For these students, the participants (as individuals or as a group) benefit from participating by achieving a personal or group goal, by being able to express their own ideas, and by joining groups, [Participation] 'is really important to achieve things, if you do not participate you don't achieve what you want' [Girl, 11 years old] or [it] 'is when you like something and you join them'. [Girl, 14 years old]

5.4 What sort of processes do students associate with 'participation'?
Some students explained participation as a process similar to that described by the deliberative (Habermas, 1984; Gutman, 1987) and the conflict theorists (Mouffe & Holdengräber, 1989; Mouffe, 1999; Laclau & Mouffe, 2001). By interpreting co-occurring codes, three different processes emerged from the data, each of them with a similar number of responses: participation as a process of unanimity; participation as a process of deliberation; and participation as a process of conflict.

For some students, participation is a process in which all the individuals in a society share the same goal and participate towards its achievement. These shared goals might, according to these students, be 'things we all share' [Boy, 12 years old] or simply 'do good'. [Girl, 17 years old] Society is understood here as an uncontroversial arena without conflicts of interest and where all individuals share commonly accepted values such as peace or sustainability.

The perception of this uncontroversial arena is, nevertheless, not unanimous. For another group of students, participation was perceived as a process of deliberation, where people holding different opinions discussed them to achieve some sort of consensus, 'It is very important that everybody participates because it is required to know everybody's point of view and choose the best option' [Girl, 14 years old] or [it] 'is necessary to solve conflicts'. [Girl, 15 years old] Rather than being uncontroversial, these students, like the 'deliberative democrats' (e.g. Habermas, 1984; Gutman, 1987), described a controversial arena, in which 'participation' is the mechanism for discussing and solving conflicts.

However, 'participation' was also described as a process to generate conflicts. In accordance with another group of students, participation is a process where those who share similar goals collaborate against those who do not share the same goals.

[Participation] 'is when one does something, such as going to a demonstration, together with other people who share the same opinion' [Boy, 11 years old]

'This [protest] is the only way they listen to us … We have tried in several different ways and they have not listened to us …!'

Who are they?

'The politicians! We keep on protesting and they don't do anything! I hate it!' [Interview. Boy, 15 years old]

Certain links between the approach of these students and conflict theory (e.g. Mouffe, 1999; Laclau & Mouffe, 2001) can be easily suggested. Both these students and the conflict theorists assume the existence of inherent conflicts within society attributed to different points of views and to an unequal distribution of power. For the students, society is composed of those who want to be heard and those – perhaps the politicians or to a wider extent, the status quo elites – who do not want to hear. Hence, for the students, protest participation and what could be called activism becomes the way to ensure the impact of their voices.

5.5 What concrete actions are perceived as participation?

A large proportion of the students (46.73%) explicitly mentioned concrete actions. However, there was an overlap between those students who supported the old forms of participation and those who supported the new forms. Although approximately 34.88% of the students who mentioned a concrete action mentioned electoral actions, which could be understood as a form of old participation, 16.28% mentioned protest actions, which could be classified as a new form of participation. The rest of the students who described concrete actions (48.84%) used terms such as 'to collaborate', 'to opine', and 'to help' that could be vaguely attributed to both old and new forms of participation.

The new participation and old participation division emerged, nevertheless, from the interviews and confirmed the results from previous investigations' (González Balletbó 2007; Schultz et al., 2010). Students mentioned the existence of these two ways of participating and they identified themselves and their classmates as being in one group or the other.

The first group of students identified with old forms of participation (participation as understood by Putnam (2000) and Macedo et al. (2005)). Although disagreeing with conventional politics, they stated their approval of these old mechanisms in contrast to new forms, which were perceived by these students as too demanding and engaged.

'Because this is how I am … Because I think … I never … Well, I almost never strike or similar things … I agree with them! But I support the idea of voting always … Or casting a blank vote … And always being legal!' [Interview. Girl, 15 years old]

'Because this is how I am … What I think … I know what is going on but I don't do anything … Because I have to study and other stuff … And I don't have enough time…' [Interview. Girl, 16 years old]

'Honestly, I am not in the mood of striking, and being beaten and everything else … Definitely, they have my support, but I don't want to get my hands dirty!' [Focus group. Girl, 16 years old]

As can be seen, these girls manifested their support for those who undertook more engaged forms of participation (perhaps these 'engaged' students could be identified as activists) but they stressed that it was not their 'way of being'. For the supporters of old participation, the activists are hopeful and naïve.

'Here in the school we have a schoolmate who is really engaged and motivated … She strikes … and she is really committed …! She is hopeful; she thinks things can change … She thinks that they will be heard because of the strikes … But when you know what is going to happen, when you know that nothing will change … Absolutely nothing will change…' [Focus group. Girl, 16 years old]

As opposed to the less engaged students, the students who identified themselves with new forms of parti-cipation criticized the representative forms of participation for not being committed enough.

'The first [character represented in the vignettes used in the interviews] doesn't care about the problem … OK, she says, "I vote, they will solve it …" In other words, she doesn't care at all!' [Interview. Girl, 15 years old]

'Let the others take care about the problems …' I don't think it's right! One has to fight for the things you don't agree with!' [Interview. Boy, 12 years old]

These students described representative forms of participation as not being effective and they highlighted, in contrast, new forms of participation as effective mechanisms to have their voice heard.

'Nowadays … things are big … There are a lot of people demonstrating and occupying … And a lot of media and TV looking at them, and the politicians feel forced to do something!' [Focus group. Girl, 15 years old]

'It is like a threat … If you do not do anything, we will keep on [protesting] … And I think they will change! Well … I don't know because all of them are … Well, they do not change immediately …' [Interview. Boy, 15 years old]

These students who perceived activism as an outstan-ding form of political participation and who could, per-haps, be described as activists or activism supporters,

explained their willingness to be engaged and to make political elites aware of their complaints. They also perceived that those students who support old forms of participation are not engaged enough.

5.6 What is the reality and how is the ideal level of participation perceived?

As in the research conducted by Magioglou (2000), some of the students studied described participation in terms of 'what it is' and 'what it should be'. For these students, the reality of participation is that it is characterized for involving a small amount of people and not being effective. In contrast, according to these students, participation should ideally engage more people and should have more impact, [Participation] 'is essential to have democracy, it is really bad that so few people vote, they should at least think to cast a blank vote'. [Boy, 16 years old] 'I like people when they demonstrate, but I am afraid that they are not heard'. [Girl, 18 years old]

All the students who mentioned this difference between 'actual' and 'ideal' participation highlighted that 'ideal participation' should be more effective. However, they also pointed out that the achievement of this effectiveness was not in their hands, 'If I do this, nothing will change, nothing at all will change … Because this is not in my hands …' [Focus group. Girl, 16 years old]

For most of these students, the difference between actual and ideal participation was also in the level of people's engagement. Whereas those who could be considered activist students complained that the commitment of others was too little, the students who preferred the old forms of participation justified the low degree of engagement in society. In agreement with those who highlight the importance of having a private life (e.g. Kymlicka & Norman, 1994), these students argued that they could not be more engaged with society and politics because it would impinge on their private life, which they were not willing to entertain.

6 Conclusions

It seems apparent from the results of this study that the students studied perceive political participation in positive terms. Beyond the academic debate between 'duties' and 'rights', which does not seem to affect their perceptions, most of the students assume the importance, need, and relevance of being participative in society. This could be understood as a reason for optimism among those who desire to increase the engagement of young people. This optimism, however, would be limited in some aspects. First of all, the effectiveness of participation is the main criticism levelled by these students. Although it could be suggested that this perception of non-effectiveness could be counteracted by a model of citizenship education aimed at highlighting the effectiveness of participation, Kahne and Westheimer (2006) have already pointed out the controversial nature of this approach. Secondly, although acknowledging the importance of participation, a considerable percentage of the students studied

identified the 'politicians', the 'underprivileged', and the 'participants themselves' as the recipients of the benefits of participation. These associations could perhaps suggest views of participation where engagement is exclusively perceived as an uncritical support for political elites, as an uncritical and paternalist process to 'help the underprivileged', or as a process exclusively oriented to satisfy participants' own wishes. Although these views could lead to an increase in the strength and number of people engaged by offering some arguments in favour of participation, they nonetheless have different imply-cations and consequences. It behoves society as a whole to delimitate the rationality for raising participation, and, in consequence, the sort of participation—and perhaps citizenship—we want to promote.

The results of this small-scale study also suggest that those students who could be identified as activists have different social representations of participation when compared with other students. These potential activists, like those who have been denominated as 'wanting to make their voice heard' (Haste, Hogan 2006), are willing to be fully engaged. Whilst they are optimistic with regard to new forms of participation and pessimistic as far as the old forms are concerned, they do not discount the use of any particular form of participation. Following Kennedy (2007), it would seem better to educate these students in the processes of taking informed and critical decisions rather than to let them make impulsive and non-reflective choices. Applied to citizenship and social sciences education, this would support the inclusion of contents related to the identification, analysis, and assessment of a wide range of participatory actions in the citizenship and social science curriculum. Unfortu-nately it seems likely that the suppression of citizenship education in the new Spanish curriculum will have a negative effect on encouraging students to reflect.

It could also be noted that the non-activist students describe the activists as well-intentioned and overly optimistic. Although evidencing their disagreement with old forms of participation, these non-activist students select these old forms as they find they require less commitment and are thus more adaptable to the demands of their private lives. From a participatory theory point of view, citizenship education should try to encourage these students to become more involved in their communities. In this case, it could be helpful to take into consideration Dahlgren's (2003) proposals to: (1) highlight the identity component of citizenship education; (2) to increase the opportunities for students to participate; and (3) to promote discussion among students about their own citizenship.

On the other hand, taking the representative theory point of view and accepting the validity of students' arguments in terms of the importance of preserving their private lives (Kymlicka, Norman 1994), students' selection of representative and old forms of participation by process of elimination should concern teachers, teachers' educators, and the whole of society. Now may be the time to consider alternative forms of participation

for those young people, who, without having acquired the full range of options by which they may participate, are already disappointed with all types of political participation.

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