
Environment and Humanity in Spanish Textbooks from the 1980s and 1990s of the 20th Century

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Abstract

Research questions and objectives

How did the national and international contexts, intellectual and scientific discourses on the protection of the environment from the 80s and 90s of the 20th century reflect in or impact on primary and secondary education curriculum and textbooks? The main objective of this research is to examine to what extent the new trends and approaches on environmental issues had any effect on the curriculum and textbooks from the 80s and 90s.

The relationship between human beings and their socio-natural environment is of particular interest because it reveals where school knowledge places human beings in relation to their environments. The two key concepts are therefore the environment and the human being. In addition to the relationship between the human beings and their natural and social milieu, the scale on which their representation is applied is also analyzed.

What breadth of surroundings do the textbooks portray? Do they open up beyond the immediate context showing a common broad socio-natural territory? When do the terms "environment" or "milieu" make their appearance in the curriculum and textbooks?

The same applies to people as human beings, as a macro collective of equals. In particular, we pursue to identify the explicit mention of the category of "humanity" in the curriculum and in the textbooks, in order to understand in what contexts and in what sense, meaning and orientation of the concept of "humanity" is developed.

Hence, we investigate how the idea of a human identity, a consciousness of species -humanity- which shares a common interconnected macro-environment, is gradually constructed or approached.

How far did school knowledge move away from or closer to intellectual approaches and scientific discoveries?

This research traces the (re)presentation of "environment" and "humanity" in the curriculum and in the material culture of the school at the end of the 20th century in Spain.

Methodological approach

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The research is being carried out using three kinds of documentary sources: first, discourses on the environment and scientific-philosophical approaches to the human being (1982 Nairobi Conference, Edgar Morin, Norbert Elias). Second, legislation on education (laws and decrees) and the curriculum. Third, social and natural science textbooks for students between 12 and 16 years old. This study contemplates two different educational laws: the 1970 General Education Law that established compulsory schooling until the age of 14, and the 1990 Law on the General Organisation of the Education System, which designed a four-year compulsory secondary education. Hence, we examine textbooks from the last two years of compulsory education and first two years of non-compulsory education from the 1970 education reform, and textbooks from the four years of compulsory secondary education from the 1990 education reform. This methodological option allows an analysis of the progression of knowledge and a comparison between curricula and textbooks intended for the same age groups in two different decades with contrasting contexts and educational policy frameworks.

The textbook sample consists of ten social sciences textbooks and ten natural sciences textbooks from each decade. The selection has been based on the criteria of representativeness, such as the prestige of the publisher, the reputation of the authors and the number of editions. In this way, sources and results are triangulated, addressing the fields of educational policy, existing (contextual) philosophical and scientific discourses, and educational resources that bring knowledge directly into the classroom. This is how we are discovering the degree of association or dissociation between texts and context.

The research is of a qualitative and discursive nature, but an accounting of the appearance of the terms "environment" and "humanity" in the documents examined is carried out, in order to then analyse the meaning given to their use and insertion in the contents. Given the complexity of the key concepts, a number of derived categories or indicators of their presence are developed. "Nature" and "society" as environments coexist with other more concrete and closer spaces, such as "surroundings", and with other wider spaces such as "planet Earth". From "humanity" as a category, on the other hand, derive other categories such as "human being", "humans" and the term "men" from a generic conception.

Another instrument of empirical analysis is the linguistic particle "we". The pronoun "we" is analyzed to identify the scope of the group to which it alludes, how inclusive it is with respect to people and "human beings".

In addition to textual and linguistic analysis of the appearance and use of the meaning given to "environment", "humanity" and "we" groups, textbook illustrations are also analysed. The drawings and photos incorporated to illustrate and support the use of the terms reveal additional information about its conception and meanings.

Description of the data and how the data are analysed if empirical research

The nature of the data is conceptual, textual and linguistic. Thus, the methodological-conceptual apparatus includes theoretical foundation and definitions on the main categories: "environment" and "humanity". There is quantitative data. The number of occurrences of the categories, per page, is counted, so that the reader's exposure to the terms can be calculated. But more important is the qualitative analysis of these appearances and the accompanying illustrations. This qualitative analysis explains the meaning and use of the categories, in order to identify their closeness or distance from the messages conveyed by the complementary sources: discourses, legislation and science.

Preliminary results

Although, depending on the curricular prescriptions per school year, both the immediate national, social and natural surroundings is dealt with in the contents, there is a perceived growth of the space shown as international contexts and territories: other countries and a shared environment, above all from the geographical perspective.

The category "humanity" hardly appears in educational legislation, neither in the curriculum nor in textbooks. It is not a concept that often appears explicitly, and there is no clear elaboration of the relationship between humanity and the rest of living beings or the environment in an interdependent way. The gap between the scientific-philosophical discourses of the time and school knowledge is wide. But there are textbooks of some specific publishers that do incorporate it more frequently and with a broad meaning.

However, the pronoun "we" is a grammatical particle that appears very frequently alluding to different groups of people, including "the human species". It is therefore possible to perceive an allusion to humanity implicitly through the pronoun but not explicitly through the term, about which there seems to be more reservations for its direct visibilisation.

We also identify a greater appearance of the concept of "humanity" in social sciences textbooks than in natural sciences textbooks, and little increase in its treatment in the textbooks of the 1990s, after the educational reform, with respect to the textbooks of the 1980s.

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