



Very twisted rights

Introduction

This teaching proposal is aimed at students in secondary education and vocational training. The activities can be used for the areas of Citizenship and Human Rights, Social Sciences, Ethics, tutorials etc. and by any other teacher interested in the subject.

Throughout the proposal, numerous concepts related to social rights are addressed: the welfare state, democracy, taxation, social movements, neoliberal economics, mortgage laws... As well as being possible to work with the entire proposal by following the order as set out, the activities are also designed to be worked on as independent blocks.

Equally, different methodologies for each activity are proposed (analysis of graphics, games, Internet information searches...), to satisfy different requirements and preferences.

Objectives

The main objective of this proposal is to recognise basic social rights as necessary elements in the fight against poverty and inequality, to understand how a fair tax system can help prevent the dismantling of the rights system, and to reflect on the role of organised citizens in contributing to social change.

- To understand what basic social rights are and how they are managed.
- To reflect and form one's own opinion on the need for basic social rights, their interrelationship and their importance for democracy and justice.
- To understand what the basic pillars are which guarantee and safeguard these rights: which institutions guarantee them, which state model is most appropriate to safeguard them, etc.
- To understand which economic models and interests impinge on social rights, particularly in the current context and the consequences which follow on from the application of neoliberal doctrines, especially those which affect the most vulnerable sectors of society.
- To research into an example of how citizens are organising themselves to reverse the assault social rights are undergoing: the *Plataforma de Afectados por la Hipoteca* (PAH).

summary

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1. The class barometer

Objectives

- **To introduce indirectly the six social rights and to generate debate and questions on the theme.**

Contents

The statements in the barometer are related to the six rights that we are going to work on (decent standard of living, health, education, work, social security, participation in cultural life).

Methodology and guidance

This activity is of an introductory nature and is meant to be dynamic, participative and motivational. To achieve this, we will try to break up the traditional arrangement of the classroom.

The activity consists of marking a point in the class to represent complete disagreement and another to represent complete agreement. Once they have read each statement, each student should choose their position, i.e. to what extent they agree with the statements. We

will ask some of them to explain their point of view and, if their arguments are convincing, the other students will be able to change their position.

This activity can be used either at the beginning or end of the *Global*. A photograph could also be taken or a graphic created to be used again later to observe any changes that have taken place.

2. Seeking a decent life

Objectives and contents

- **To recognise which of our needs are basic, vital and universal.**
- **To work on attitudes such as participation, debate and reasoning.**

Methodology and guidance

The person guiding the activity should play the role of a catalyst and at all times provoke reflection and debate to ensure that the participants defend their ideas. Initially, the work can be done either on an individual basis or in small groups, then pooled to create a single list in which the economic and social rights should appear: work, education, health, housing, food, culture and social cover.



3. The history of rights

Objectives

- To provide a concise historical overview of rights.

Contents

The comic starts with the end of absolutism and the French Revolution, a founding moment for human and civil rights. It gives an outline of the main struggles from the 19th century to the beginnings of the 20th: the dawn of fascism, the Second World War and the Cold War. It was at this time that a broadening of rights (economic, social and cultural: ESCR) took place under the auspices of the United Nations.

However, the achievement of these rights is incomplete (they have not reached every country in the world), limited (do not have the same extent) and reversible (in situations of serious economic crises such as we are experiencing now).

For this reason, we suggest two exercises for the students. The first aims to get them to forecast how they see the development of rights over the next twenty years: if they believe that rights will be curtailed, widened, extended to all areas of the world, etc.

Methodology and guidelines

The class aims to familiarise the students with the idea that human, social and economic rights, etc., as mechanisms to mitigate the inequality engendered by capitalist societies, are success stories which have in large part been due to struggle and social mobilisation.

The second is an attempt to get the students to reflect on how ESCRs (economic, social and cultural rights) are intended to go further than human rights, in as much as they tackle problem areas that are not only related to freedom (political, civil, etc.) but also to equality (economic, social, etc.).

4. Who safeguards our rights?

Objectives

- To distinguish between needs and rights.
- To understand what a right is and what a public right is.
- To learn about the existence of the International Covenant of Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and its contents.
- To understand that there are needs which can be satisfied individually and others in which the intervention of the state or other institutions is required.

Contenidos

- Concepts: rights, social rights, public rights.
- International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.
- The role of the state as guarantor of social rights.

Methodology and guidelines

In this section we will need to ensure that there are no difficulties with vocabulary or understanding in their reading of the suggested texts.

The students will need to recognise which of the basic needs on our list

can be considered universal rights and classify them according to the right to which they correspond.

In Section D it is important that the names of the different institutions (town halls, unions, central government, autonomous governments, etc.) come up and that their obligation to guarantee respect for these rights in all areas of the world is stressed.

All the activities in this block should be shared in the group to generate debate and ensure the correct understanding of the concepts.



5. Let's put some figures to the cuts

Objectives

- **To learn about reality through statistics, understanding the consequences that cutbacks in basic rights have for people.**
- **To relate the cold statistical numbers to situations which affect the individual lives of thousands of people.**
- **To investigate the underlying reasons for the figures expressed in the graphics, to learn about the relationship between them and construct a critical judgement on the different situations these data express.**
- **To develop mathematical skills in close connection with social and citizenship skills.**

Contents

The basic content of this section is the data which express the causes and consequences the lack or loss of basic rights have for people which seriously compromise the possibility of their having a decent life with real equal opportunities.

Each of the graphics shows one of the basic rights which are not guaranteed for a significant percentage of the population and the consequences this has on their lives.

Methodology and guidelines

The students should come up with some basic ideas based on the study and relationship of the different graphics in respect of figures whose aim is to represent the different consequences the cutbacks have on people's lives, whose basic rights are limited or completely taken away and which embody the extent that the problem of the cuts

represents for a significant section of the population.

It is possible to analyse the graphics in the manner in which the guideline questions are posed, either as an individual activity to be later shared as a group, or by using different groups to talk about these questions in order to achieve the objectives indicated. It is also possible to divide the analysis of each graphic between the different groups so that they can then explain their conclusions to the rest of the class. Regardless of the methodology chosen, the questions are guidelines which should allow the implementation of an in-depth analysis to show the consequences which arise from a loss of rights, in order to see the causes.

6. Is the crisis the baddie in the film?

Objectives

- **To reflect on the reasons for the cuts in public social policies.**

Contents

The content we are going to work on is the relationship the social cuts have with the political will to invest in public policies.

Methodology and guidelines

This is a short exercise that links what we have been working on so far, the importance of social policies in the fight against inequality, and the second exercise, where we will work on the tax system and its relationship with these.

Based on this cartoon, whose aim is to illustrate and invite reflection on who and what causes the loss of universal good quality access to these rights, we will break with the institutional message concerning the idea that the crisis obliges us to cut back investment in public policies to anticipate that investment in this is a question of political will.



7. How can our rights be untwisted?

Objectives

- **To encourage debate on the premise that the cuts in public policies are a consequence of a crisis and of a lack of sufficient economic resources.**
- **To reflect on what fair and progressive tax justice is: should those who have more pay more?**
- **To learn about the existence of tax fraud and its repercussions on tax collection.**
- **To understand where public money comes from.**
- **To encourage the search for individual and collective solutions regarding the lack of social rights.**

Contents

The main content of this exercise is a basic analysis of the Spanish tax system, focusing on three themes:

- How tax is collected: tax fraud (tax evasion and avoidance) and the financial contribution of the different social strata.
- What it is invested in: the general state budgets.
- The role of citizens.

This understanding will be used as a basis for encouraging reflection, debate and a search for solutions around the premise that austerity comes out of a lack of economic resources (which as we have been able to see is not true) and about the role of citizens in combatting this situation.

Methodology and guidance

Much of the data, terminology and explanations on how the tax system works have been simplified in this activity; this is to ensure that the students are able to approach the subject of taxation in a simpler way. The entire contents have been extracted from the Oxfam Intermón report: *Tanto tienes, ¿tanto pagas?*, which we recommend you read if you feel it is necessary to go into the theme in more depth. (<http://www.oxfamintermon.org/es/documentos/28/05/14/tanto-tienes-tanto-pagas>)

The activity starts from the setting out of a 'moral dilemma', the aim of which is to work in an experiential way with an analogy, so that we can understand what is meant by a fair and progressive tax system. If the moral dilemma does not arise naturally in the class, it would be a good idea to exaggerate the 'conflict', by

increasing the cost of the present, for example.

The methodology sets out three pre-activities which allow us to create a global idea of the variables (tax fraud, tax justice, investment in public policies) which we will find later in the debate.

In order to visualise and make these concepts simpler, we will be working on the basis of the manipulation of a banknote. There are no questions attached to these exercises, but we can incorporate reflections into them.

Using a paper copy of a banknote, we will first cut 24% of it off, as this represents the amount of tax evasion in Spain. We can do this in two ways: by cutting 24% of the total and seeing how much corresponds to each group, or by cutting it on a group by group basis. This will allow us to show that the greatest part of tax evasion is committed by multi-nationals.

We will then colour in the part of the banknote we have left (the true amount collected) on the basis of how much each group contributes. Here we can introduce reflection on the tax effort and how it is obviously unfair, because those who have the least contribute the most.

We can link this exercise with the reflections that have come out of the debate around the moral dilemma.

Then two graphics are shown, which allow us to learn about investment in public policies in 2010 and 2014. To understand this graphic completely, we recommend visiting this page: <http://dondevanmisimpuestos.es>, where details on each investment can be found.



This exercise can have different levels of complexity. We can tackle it from a general analysis of percentages, or we can go into more depth and learn about the complexity of the budgets. It is important to take into account that public social policies are in part transferred to the autonomous communities, so as well as analysing the government's investment, we can also analyse the cuts made in the contributions from other public administrations.

In the final exercise, the students are invited to reflect, using a number of questions, on the different elements which come into play in the tax system. The first question will allow us to incorporate the concepts of progressive taxation and tax evasion to make sure that fiscal effort does not fall on those who have least, coming to the conclusion that fair collection can be achieved through a progressive tax system that fights against tax evasion.

The second question allows us to establish a link with previous exercises: budgets that invest in social rights will ensure a reduction in inequality and poverty.

Finally, the third question invites us to reflect on our responsibility as citizens in the fight against inequality. How deep we go into this depends on us. We can introduce elements such as: transparency, participative budgets, the right to strike and demonstrate (and their value), the role of social movements (organised citizens), etc.

This final exercise introduces us to the next one, in which we will go into more depth on citizen power.

8. Fighting for our rights

Before starting on this block, it is very important to have prepared the concepts to be worked on, to avoid making the common mistakes and to avoid the risk of not being able to answer questions (sometimes very basic) from the students. It is therefore useful to write them up well beforehand, especially the understanding of basic ideas on mortgages and the successes of the *Plataforma de Afectados por la Hipoteca* (PAH).

Objectives

- Learning about PAH, their objectives, tools and successes, as a result of citizen reactions to the infringement of basic social rights. The key concept is empowerment.
- Raising the awareness of the students about the reality of evictions and the business of mortgage lending, and the deterioration of the right to decent housing.

- Raising the visibility of the use of old and new forms of protest and citizen participation (new technologies as a tool for social change, assembly structures, scratches, civil disobedience, *Iniciativa Legislativa Popular*, etc.).

Contents

- The effect of the property bubble, the high price of housing and the mortgage laws on the right to housing.
- The causes and consequences of losing a house for an average family: mortgage debt.
- The creation of the *Plataforma de Afectados por la Hipoteca* as an example of an organised citizen movement; tools and achievements.



Methodology and guidelines

The activities are organised into three blocks, each one beginning with a brief introduction to explain the contents to the students by using their daily reality on a more emotional level. A series of exercises is then presented to help them unravel some of the complexities around evictions. The first two blocks can be completed in an hour, as a class; the third block can take as long as required, but with a minimum of two hours in class and some homework (especially to be able to access the web page and Facebook of the platforms). All activities are designed to be carried out in small groups.

Block 1

This block presents some data on the housing situation in Spain. The students are then encouraged to learn how the banks make a profit from mortgage loans. Here it is necessary to emphasise the fact that, in this sector, the banks' craving to make a profit has taken priority (the more they lend, the more they make), over the right to decent housing. It could also be useful to start a debate on the understanding (or lack of understanding) of citizens about their rights, about who benefits from this lack of understanding, and who bears the responsibility to ensure that we as citizens are informed about our rights.

We suggest watching this video about an eviction:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5pToHQclmXU#t=150>

Block 2

The aim of this second block is to explain (not an easy task) the debt problem which thousands of families end up with when they cannot pay for their housing and are evicted. To do this, we suggest making a simple calculation as to how high the outstanding debt a family owes

to a bank rises in the time leading up to an eviction, by considering the amount lent, the interest, the capital repaid and the difference between the initial value of the house and that at the time of the eviction. We think that it is important to understand this mechanism so that the students can understand why a family can lose its home and still be in debt to the bank for astronomic amounts of money. It is also important to understand the demands for payment by surrender of the property, one of the most important demands of PAH.

In this sense, it is also necessary to underline the difference between a **mortgage foreclosure** (a mechanism by which an owner can lose a property which, after being publicly auctioned passes into the hands of the creditor bank or others to settle the debt owed to the bank) and an eviction (the legal resolution which leads to the removal of one or various tenants from a property for not having complied with a contract).

Block 3

In this block, we go into the work of PAH in detail. So that the students can carry out the research we propose, we suggest two options for working. In the first, which is more open-ended, each group carries out unguided research and focuses on those themes which catch their attention most; later they can do a short presentation and have a debate in class, guided by the teacher. As an alternative, we suggest controlling the research a little more by assigning a more specific working theme or concept to each group, such as the *Iniciativa Legislativa Popular*, evictions, the PAH rehousing campaign, scratches, etc.

In our opinion, it is essential to check out the PAH web page: <http://afectadosporlahipoteca.com/>, where graphics and information can be found on what the platform does.



In addition, we suggest, as themes for reflection and research:

- How the PAH helps raise the visibility of a reality that many forms of media (and of course, political parties) try to hide. For example: scratches, the march to Brussels to officially complain about the evictions to the European Commission: http://www.eldiario.es/andalucia/Comision-Europea-Stop-Desahucios-Bruselas_0_279622369.html
- How citizens organise themselves to reclaim the right that is being stolen from them (or, to avoid using the passive, that *someone* is stealing from them), by creating spaces for participative and self-managed working, by provi-

ding legal advice to those affected, by influencing legislators and by doing political advocacy work...

We believe that this research should not forget:

- The political pressure for the modification of the mortgage law in Spain and the ILP.
- The STOP Evictions campaign.
- The social work of PAH.

Further work

We suggest as a useful supplementary activity a comparative study between the PAHs and the 'Marea Blanca', the movement which in 2012 and 2013 stopped the privatisation of six hospitals in Madrid. Based on watching a brief report of a seven minute broadcast by a television channel and available on the

web, it would be useful to establish the parallels and differences between the two citizen movements as regards objectives, messages, forms of citizen participation, etc.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VJ0819zXyA8>