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Social Intelligence in Portuguese Students: Differences According to the School Grade

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Abstract

This study aims to present Portuguese students' perceptions about their social intelligence and to analysis and discussion of the differences between groups according to their school grade. Participants are adolescents attending the 8th, 10th and 11th grades of Portuguese public schools. Adolescents were administered the Cognitive Test of Social Intelligence (CTSI; Candeias, 2007), a pictorial self-report instrument, aimed at the diagnosis of adolescents needs capabilities, experience and motivation to deal with interpersonal situations. Resultsof indicate the existence of statistically significant differences between three school grades.Problem Solves and Motivation indexes.

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1. Introduction

The construct of social intelligence has raised repeated research questions over the history of psychology. The design and the study of social intelligence has been part of general debate about intelligence, although its study has been more controversial and less investigated.

Thorndike (1920) used the notion of social intelligence to clarify that intelligence could manifest itself in different facets (Landy, 2005), and characterized social intelligence as the ability to accomplish interpersonal tasks. Thirteen years later, Vernon (1933) understood the social intelligence as the ability to get along with people, the awareness of social issues, the susceptibility to stimuli from other group members, and the insight to the states of temporary mood and personality traits of unfamiliar people. In the early 60's, Guilford (1967) defended that social intelligence referred to the behavioral content, involving the interactions between individuals and the attitudes, needs, desires, mood states, perceptions and thoughts about the others and ourselves (Rosas, Boetto, & Jordan, 1999). The 90's has seen a greater interest in understanding the social intelligence (e.g., Cantor & Kihlstrom, 1989; Ford & Tisak, 1983; Gardner, 1983, 1998; Sternberg, 1984; Sternberg & Barnes, 1988; Sternberg & Wagner, 1986). Specifically, Gardner (1998) discusses multiple intelligences and specifies two intelligences –interpersonal and intrapersonal. The interpersonal intelligence is the ability to read other people's moods, motives and others' mental

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states. The intrapersonal intelligence is the ability to access one's own feelings and to draw on them to guide behavior. Since then, numerous research efforts have explored the social intelligence construct (e.g., Cantor & Kihlstrom, 1987; Ford & Tisak, 1983; Goleman, 2006; Kosmitzki & John, 1993; Marlowe, 1986; Silvera, Martinussen, & Dahl, 1991; Walker & Foley, 1973).

Nevertheless, definitions of the construct and associated measurement approaches have varied to a notable degree across these perspectives. For example, recently, Goleman (2006) identifies two broad categories of social intelligence: social awareness and social facility. Social awareness deals with four abilities: (i) Primal empathy, which includes feeling for others, and sensing non-verbal emotional signals, (ii) Attunement, that is, listening with full receptivity, attuning to a person, (iii) Empathic accuracy, which means understanding another person's thoughts, feelings, and intentions and, (iv) Social cognition, that is, knowing how the social world works. In contrast, social facility includes (i) Synchrony, which means interacting smoothly at a nonverbal level, (ii) Self-presentation, that is, presenting ourselves effectively, (iii) Influence, which represents shaping the outcome of social interactions, and (iv) Concern, that is, caring about others' needs and acting accordingly.

Weis and Süß (2007), using a multitrait-multimethod-design and a confirmatory factor analysis supported the multidimensional structure of social intelligence for the domains of social understanding, social memory, and social knowledge. Others studies, based also these multitrait-multimethod designs, have provided clear evidence for the multidimensionality of social intelligence (Jones & Day, 1997; Lee, Day, Meara, & Maxwell, 2002; Lee, Wong, Day, Maxwell, & Thorpe, 2000; Wong, Day, Maxwell, & Meara, 1995).

The concept of social intelligence adopted in this paper is based on a cognitive and metacognitive approach of intelligence, from the influences of the Triarchic Theory of Intelligence formulated by Sternberg (1983), and the Theory of Multiple Intelligences developed by Gardner (1993). In this perspective, social intelligence is a multidimensional construct that refers interpersonal problem-solving processes and skills such as comprehension, elaboration of an action plan, execution and monitoring (Candeias, 2007). It comprises the analysis of procedural (e.g., cognitive process and performance), structural (e.g., type of contents elected for the resolution of the situation) and attitudinal (e.g., interest and self-confidence in problem-solving) levels of analysis of interpersonal cognition.

In summary, social intelligence has been thought of as the ability to accomplish interpersonal tasks (Kaukiainen et al., 1999) and to act adequately and shrewdly in relationships (Bjorkqvist, 2007; Frederiksen, Carlson, & Ward, 1984). Intelligence in interpersonal relationships has been characterized as a key ability (Hopkins & Bilimória, 2008), with some scholar arguing that the social facets of intelligence may be as important or even more important than the cognitive aspects (Sternberg & Grigorenko, 2006).

Despite the lack of consensus on concepts of social intelligence, empirical research has shown that social intelligence is a relevant component for socially competent behavior (Süß, Weis, & Seidel, 2005), seeming to adapt social and cultural changes around education, employment or performance (Candeias, 2008). Research has also demonstrated that girls (Carvalho, 2011) and women (Hopkins & Bilimória, 2008) register higher levels of social intelligence.

This study aims to present Portuguese students' perceptions about their social intelligence and to analyze and discuss differences between groups according to their school grade.

2. Method

2.1. Participants

Participants were 1171 adolescents, 590 girls (50.4%) and 581 boys (49.6%), aged between 11 and 25 years old ($\mu = 14.84 \pm 1.89$), attending the 8th- (48.2%; N=565), 10th- (27.4%; N=321), and 11th- (24.3%; N=285) grades at elementary and secondary schools, in the northern, center and southern Portugal.

2.1.1. Instrument

Social intelligence in adolescence was assessed with the Cognitive Test of Social Intelligence (CTSI, Candeias, 2007), a self-report instrument for adolescents from 12 to 17 years old. The CTSI draws on three interpersonal illustrative stimuli of real life situations in which people use social view. The first stimulus has an old lady and several youths at a bus stop, with the old lady facing in the wrong direction and out of place. The second stimulus presents a

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