Social Values and Authority in Education: Collaboration between School and Families

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A coordinated approach involving both school and families is essential for education to be successful. Mutual support and the satisfaction to teachers and parents alike are particularly important in the area of education in values. We carry out a pilot study, from which we obtained enough information to design and apply family education programmes in the future. In this paper, we explain the design and implementation of the programme: 1) a brief state of the question and a review of some recent bibliography; 2) the stages in which this pilot project was put into practice; 3) some conclusions will be drawn as a guide for future work in this area. The school with which we made our action-research agreement was San Viator (Vitoria, Spain), an independent school with some public funding. The headmaster, the coordinator, and the school counsellor were the professionals who collaborated directly with our project. The educational goal was to provide guidance for parents with children in years 3 and 4 (aged 8 to 10), and the school itself invited these parents to take part in the programme. Out of 75 families at the school, 40 expressed interest, 26 (fathers and mothers) took part in the diagnosis, and 12 mothers participated in the programme.

Keywords: Authority, social values, Family school partnership, Family education programmes, Parental competence.

A coordinated approach involving both school and families is essential for education to be successful. Such collaboration gives satisfaction to teachers and parents alike. Mutual support and the satisfaction that this produces are particularly important in the area of education in values (Hillaker, Brophy-Herb, Villarruel, & Haas, 2008). Today, communities are asking schools and families to take the initiative in education in order to train citizens who are well integrated into society, that is, citizens who accept social values (Daly, 2007).

None the less, a certain degree of discomfort is perceptible among educators regarding this issue. Teachers sometimes feel that parents are not bringing their children up properly, that they have lost control, that they do not know how to show their affection in a balanced way, lurching from overprotection or permissiveness to making unreasonable demands, and that they have lost authority over their children. All of these aspects belong to the parents' area of competence. However, parents themselves feel alone, and sense that they lack the resources they need to educate their children in values in today's adverse social contexts. They need support from schools and from the community.

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A team of researchers sensitive to this educational need planned an action-research methodology to study the implementation of such a project. We assumed that the application of programmes to strengthen parents' competences in values education is an effective means to tackle the problem outlined above. We believed that such programmes are of higher quality if they are carried out in collaboration with the school and in accord with its social education curriculum. We felt that the programme could be more effective if: a) the school itself asked the families to take part on a voluntary basis in programmes for parents; b) the programme was adapted to parents' and children's real needs. These ideas formed the starting point for our project. The next step was to carry out a pilot study, from which we obtained enough information to design and apply family education programmes in the future and to do research into these educational interventions.

In what follows, we shall explain the design and implementation of the programme. First, we shall present a brief state of the question and review some recent bibliography on this subject. We shall then go on to describe the stages in which this pilot project was put into practice: designing the intervention, diagnosing educational needs, writing, applying and evaluating the programme. Finally, some conclusions will be drawn which will serve as a guide for future work in this area.

First of all, however, it is important to provide some background information which is essential to understand the pilot study. The team which designed and carried out the intervention was made up of five people: four researchers who teach in the department of education at the University, and one family guidance counsellor. Through the counsellor we made contact with various schools that were particularly interested in family education and education in values. The school with which we finally made our action-research agreement was San Viator (Vitoria, Spain), an independent school with some public funding, which provides education from the age of 3 to the age of 18. It has around one thousand pupils, mostly from middle-class families with parents who have completed secondary, technical or university education, mainly aged 30 to 45. The headmaster, the coordinator of years 3 and 4 (aged 8 to 10), and the school counsellor, were the professionals who collaborated directly with our project. The educational goal was to provide guidance for parents with children in years 3 and

4, and the school itself invited these parents to take part in the programme. The reasons for this choice were as follows:

-When children are aged 8-10, education in social values takes on particular importance both in the family and at school; social values are positive values for interpersonal relations and social adjustment.

-Parent-child relations are straightforward and educational measures can be carried out with relative tranquillity; education at this stage can help to prevent the typical conflicts that arise in puberty and adolescence.

-Less published research is available concerning family education in social values for children of this age.

Out of 75 families at the school, 40 expressed interest, 26 (fathers and mothers) took part in the diagnosis, and 12 mothers participated in the programme.

Family Education and School

This initial research was carried out in a context that is far from straightforward. Of the bibliography reviewed, we shall emphasize references that are representative on the grounds of contents and relevance to the current situation, in order to situate our own research project.

a) Family and education in social values. Various different sectors in society –the public administration, educators, therapists– are aware that the family is the sphere in which children develop their social skills, acquire values, and receive the encouragement needed to carry on learning outside the family context (Illies, 2008). Many studies examine the issue of authority (Meidl, 2009), and how relations within the family affect children's social adaptation to different cultural contexts (Calzada, Fernández, & Cortes, 2010; Leung, Wong, Wong, & McBride-Chang, 2010). We found more studies on socialization and transmission of values than on education in the form of family education projects (Rodríguez, 2007). Studies on the family's possible role in antisocial behaviour and health problems (Cullen & Ownbey, 2010) are particularly frequent, although there is now an increasing volume of research on how the family can promote social behaviour, the learning of values and the development of fortitude in different situations (Hardy, 2010). A large proportion of the studies on socialization and acquisition of values within the family focuses on adolescents (Padilla &

Walker, 2007; Roest & Semon, 2009). Slightly fewer papers are available concerning early childhood, which emphasize the need for preventive measures. One key issue for these authors is the parent-child relationship in the area of affection, demands, discipline and control. The results show that it is important in family life to redress the balance between affection and discipline, and to return to a more authoritative parenting model, although the conclusions of the different studies vary according to social and geographical context (Baumrind, Larzelere, & Owens, 2010; García & Gracia, 2010).

In view of this situation, we believe that our study is of particular interest. In concrete, we argue for the need to encourage family education focusing on social values in general, rather than confined to situations of special educational needs. Preventive measures and education are useful before adolescence, in the 8-10 age group. During this phase, parent-child relations are usually more harmonious, while the children have reached a developmental stage at which they can learn social skills and values. Children of this age are more sensitive to educational measures taken by their parents. On the other hand, there is less published research on family education centring on social values at this age, even though some interesting studies are available (Pérez, 2010). Our own research is a contribution to this field.

b) Collaborative relationship between families and schools. Research shows that cooperation between schools and families leads to an improvement in children's performance. Studies focusing on this issue raise various questions, such as how such cooperation should be achieved, what methodology is most effective, and how certain difficulties in communication and participation can be overcome, particularly concerning families at risk, cultural diversity, and so on. The main objective of this two-way cooperation is to ensure good academic performance: to advise parents if they need to help their children to study, or to take a greater interest in certain subjects (Frenzel, Goetz, Pekrun, & Watt, 2010; Simpkins, Vest, Dawes, & Neuman, 2010), to help parents choose sports and cultural activities for their children, and to enable the teachers to tap into the potential of family support as an aid to their pupils' learning (Symeou, 2006). Another aim of educational cooperation between families and schools is to take action in order to prevent disruptive behaviour –bullying, taking drugs and alcohol,

psychological disorders affecting school performance and peer relations– or to support disabled or sick children. To a lesser extent we find studies on how to achieve cooperation between the two parties in order to educate children in social values, although both research and practice in this area are growing. Moreover, some researchers are interested in establishing whether education in values in the family has a positive effect on school performance (Morillas & García, 2009).

Our own study addresses the question as to how schools can support activities intended to diagnose parents' needs, thereby helping them to acquire competences that will enable them to educate their children. It looks at how schools can promote cooperation in areas of education that go beyond academic performance, affecting children's all-round development, in which both family and school have an essential role to play (Martínez, Rodríguez, & Gimeno, 2010).

c) Educational intervention in the family and family education programmes. This area has grown considerably over time. Social measures focusing on families are not restricted to the use of legal measures in situations of risk, but are also understood as a means of preventing and solving problems (Kumpfer, Whiteside, Greene & Allen, 2010). Professionals implement various measures designed to equip parents to fulfil their functions, particularly those of socializing and educating their children. These programmes are designed to: enhance the family's well-being by reconciling different functions and reducing stress (Sanders, 2008; Hartung, & Hahlweg, 2010), involving parents more (Cowan, Cowan, & Knox, 2010), increasing the sense of parental competence (Dekovic et al., 2010) or developing reflexive parenthood (See Special issue, Journal of Child and Family Studies, volume 19, issue 2, 2010). Regarding programmes which reflect the family-school relationship, we find practices aimed at parents which will help their children to adapt better to school: in the case of children with disorders (Akshoomoff, Stahmer, Corsello, & Mahrer, 2010), to improve school performance (Prins & Willson, 2008). Another research group deals with methodological aspects of: designing and setting up programmes (Small, Cooney, & O'Connor, 2009); assessment of needs and evaluation (Fraser & Galinsky, 2010).

Within this framework, for our own action-research study we adopted the key elements of the design and application of parental education

programmes which have been established to be good practices.

Design and development of the intervention

The bibliography concerning educational research and intervention in the family makes it clear that a properly grounded proposal must include the following elements: definition of the problem, design and application of the programme, and evaluation of the programme with a view to taking further decisions.

Specification of the problem

The research team identified the problem of how to improve education in social values, and noted, on the basis of a review of the literature, that it is important to make sure the interests of both educational agents (family and school) coincide. The research team selected a means of intervention which consisted of the application of a programme for parents intended to develop and promote parental competence in educating in social values, as described in the introduction. After making an agreement with a school that expressed interest in this type of family education programme, we decided to define the educational needs of the parents of children aged 8-10 more precisely, in order to design a programme that would fit with this reality. Initially, this meant seeking out diagnostic tools that would be appropriate for this research, and devising a scale which would provide us with information about how parents were educating their children in the area of values. A later section will be devoted to this aspect of the study. These tools were administered with the help of the school, which suggested to the families that they could take part and organized when and how the diagnosis could be made. The researchers analysed the results and met the coordinator of the primary school, the counsellor and six teachers who worked with children aged 8-10 to discuss the data that they had obtained and to compare and complement these results with the teachers' views. After this analysis we shall discuss the implementation of the programme. Figure 1 (see Appendix 1) shows how the process was organized over time.

Assessment of needs

The initial diagnosis of parents' needs was made using a Family Education Scale which was devised and administered in a double version for parents and children.

In a general sense, the Scale assesses how competent parents are at educating their children. It is made up of 3 sub-scales:
a)   General parental competence: designed to evaluate how well they know their children, their identity as parents, and family life (no. of items: 17).
b)   Parental authority: designed to evaluate parental control, availability and affection (no. of items: 14).
c)   Education in values: intended to evaluate social values specific to each age group (no. of items: 24).

This scale is intended to assess possible deficiencies in the family's educational role, as well as the strengths that make the family effective at educating its children.

This initial assessment of the situation regarding family education was complemented by an evaluation of parental satisfaction using the Family Satisfaction Scale by Adjectives [ESFA] (Barraca & López-Yarto, 2003), which uses a global score to rate the satisfaction experienced by members of the family. We also applied the Family Adaptability and Cohesion Evaluation, Scales III [FACES III] (Olson, Portner, & Lavee, 1985), which assesses the two main dimensions of Olson's model: cohesion and adaptation as dimensions of the workings of the family.

With regard to children, in addition to the children's version of the Family Education Scale, we assessed their adaptation to school and family using the multifactor self-assessment test of child adaptation [TAMAI] (Hernández, 1996). In addition to providing self-assessment concerning situations of personal, social, school and family adaptation, this measures parents' attitudes to education.

We completed the study by applying a parenting competence scale, the children's version of the Perceived Parental Competence Scale [ECPP-H] (Bayot & Hernández, 2008), which evaluates children's perceptions of their parents in the way they perform their roles.

To devise an appropriate family education programme, taking into account the parents' needs and the information provided by their children, we proposed a session in which we could exchange our impressions with the teachers, which would help us to complete the diagnostic study and adapt the programme to the parents' real needs as much as possible.

In what follows, we shall describe some of the main results from the initial assessment of how the parents approached the upbringing of their families.

Education in justice was the aspect about which parents felt most certain. However, the factors which received lower scores were those related to control and discipline, availability and affection, and the factor related to teaching fortitude.

In particular, we found significant differences in favour of the mothers in areas such as:
- I am involved in the school's educational programme;
- I am committed to my child's education;
- I attend the sessions organized for me by the school;
- I encourage my child to perform small acts of generosity;
- I teach my child to forgive others, and I think it is important to set rules for his/her education;
- I help him/her to rectify and make good;
- I explain what I expect him/her to do and I say what I expect of him/her.
- The issues on which parents, both fathers and mothers, had most difficulty were:
- I deal out rewards and punishments in an arbitrary way;
- I let him/her do what he/she wants;
- I think that if my child does not behave well it is because he/she needs more attention;
- I find it hard to understand my child's temperament;
- I am frightened of doing the wrong thing in bringing up my child;
- I know how to correct him/her without offending him/her;
- I find it hard to understand children of his/her age.

When we compared the parents' results with those obtained from the children's survey, we observed that the parents' greatest shortcomings lay in the areas related to control.

We felt that these results showed that it would be beneficial to give parents some help in the area of control, understood in the broadest sense: setting rules, control, affection and availability of parents in their children's education.

Specification of the programme

The programme was designed by the research team, who collaborated closely with the people working in the school who were in direct contact with the children and their family situation. The programme was reviewed by all those involved. We followed some guidelines which previous studies had identified as good practices in parenting education (Martínez, 2009) and we also bore in mind the data obtained during the first stage of the educational needs analysis. To design the programme, we carried out the following tasks:
- -Definition of objectives: goals and objectives for the different sessions, as well as specific contents;
- -Organization of the tasks to be carried out by the people who were going to give the sessions, and for the participants;
- - Planning and providing the resources needed for each session;
- - Planning and adapting the timing and sequence of activities;
- - Planning the evaluation.

Regarding the task of outlining the contents of the programme, we must underline the importance of coordination between the different speakers: it was necessary to check that the material had been written in accord with the guidelines that we had agreed; to make sure that the general and specific objectives were being met as planned; and to adjust the calendar to fit into the timescale of the programme and avoid clashes with school activities that had not been previously envisaged.

The programme consisted of 9 sessions lasting 90 minutes each, with the families of children in the school, organized within a 5-month timeframe. Each speaker wrote a complete grid for his/her session and other observation schedules, as well as providing explanations of contents, reflections, individual work, specific questionnaires for some sessions, and evaluation forms. The grids were structured like the example in table 1.

Objectives			
Actions	Resources	Methodology	Time

Table 1 Session grids

For the sessions themselves, various procedures were used. We gave priority to active participation on the part of the parents. Sessions began with an explanation given by the speaker, who provided the following information: aims, sequence of activities, evaluation to be carried out. As well as receiving brief explanations of the different themes, participants took part in activities designed to promote reflection, to formulate questions, resolve problems, or work in groups with other participants. For each session, participants were given printed material that had been written specifically for the programme. Each participant had a code number, so we were able to gain access to written material, questionnaires and reflections while maintaining anonymity. Figure 2 shows the aims of each session.

Working sessions	Goals				Objectives								C9	C10	C11	C12	C13	C14	C15	C16	C17	C18	C19
	B1	B2	B3	B4	C1	C2	C3	C4	C5	C6	C7	C8											
18/01/2010	X				X	X	X	X															
09/02/2010			X						X	X	X												
16/02/2010		X			X	X	X	X	X				X										
09/03/2010		X			X	X	X	X	X				X										
16/03/2010			X								X		X	X									
13/04/2010			X												X	X	X			X	X		
11/05/2010			X												X	X	X	X	X				
09/05/2010				X					X			X										X	X
18/05/2010				X					X			X										X	X

Figure 2. Goals and objectives of each working session on the programme

Goals:
B1. Know what values I can teach my children at this age.B2. Understand how children of this age learn values.B3. Understand how I can and must exert authority in my family.B4. Reflect and design a plan to make the most of family life, including education in values.

Objectives:
C1. Create an environment in which the programme can be applied through mutual understanding between coordinator and participants.
C2. Obtain information about how the participants understand their parenting competence in teaching their children values in order to adapt the contents to the programme.
C3. Understand what the participants expect from the programme and immediately assess how useful the session is for them.
C4. Encourage people to stay on the programme.
C5. Encourage parents to learn to value and accept their own potential and shortcomings in the way they teach their children values, and to be aware of the importance of setting a good example as a way of educating their children.
C6. Be aware that one learns empathy, self-esteem and acceptance of oneself and others by imitating one's parents' behaviour.
C7. Promote parent-child interaction based on trust and mutual respect.
C8. Provide information for parents about the abilities, attitudes and habits of children aged 8-10, and the values that they should work on.
C9. Encourage parents to be assertive in family education.
C10. Know that children learn to communicate with others by following the model they see in their parents.
C11. Give parents practical knowledge of how to assert their authority and impose discipline.
C12. Outline some principles for distinguishing educational control from other types of control, so that parents have a point of reference.
C13. Establish the main areas and limits in educating one's children, showing where the child can learn about freedom and how he/she can be made aware of the consequences of his/her actions.
C14. Learn different ways of reinforcing behaviours.
C15. Propose a follow-up plan for imposing discipline.
C.16. Integrate knowledge gained from previous sessions with the present session.
C.17. Present a concrete question related to the present session to be resolved in the next session.
C.18. Help parents to set realistic objectives and make sensible plans for the future.
C.19. Provide information for parents about the sensitive periods in the lives of children in this age group.

Evaluation of programme

The researchers started out from an initial evaluation of what the participants expected concerning the usefulness and benefits of the programme, and their motives for taking part. This information was obtained from a qualitative questionnaire with open-ended questions.

From this point onwards, once the programme had been reviewed and adapted more closely to the participants' needs, the dynamics of the different sessions was as follows:

- Session was given;

-Participants assessed the key ideas of the subject of the session, in order to remember them and reflect on them before the next session;

-Assessment of participants' own abilities (parenting competences) in a concrete family education context;

-Evaluation of session; how and why was it useful to you, suggestions for next session;

-Participants' evaluation of basic ideas of previous session, in order to review key notions, provide continuity and clear up any problems that might arise.

The results obtained by these means enabled us to improve some aspects of the programme as we went along. We shall discuss the most representative findings. The participants' expectations were high, according to the initial evaluation, and they were satisfied in the end, according to their final evaluation. The activities designed to promote reflection confirmed that the aims of the sessions had been met: the mothers who took part learnt the main ideas, clearly detected aspects of their children's education that could be improved, and proposed realistic ways of improving. The issue of authority was the one that arose most, and the one that the mothers said they had learnt most about. One of the requests that was repeated most often was that the presenter should provide practical examples. The evaluation of the later sessions showed: greater participation and higher satisfaction on the part of the mothers, who felt greater security in their role as educators and in the teaching and personal application of values, had greater knowledge of their children's potential, made increased use of educational tools, and were able to bring about greater coordination with fathers in the upbringing of their children.

Conclusions

The results obtained in this research project, both in the diagnostic phase and in the execution of the programme, provide further support for the findings of the most representative studies in this area: 1) parents who are convinced of the need to teach their children social values and cooperate with schools in this area do not know how to combine affection and control without becoming authoritarian figures, and are uncertain about how to make their children happy without overprotecting them; 2) social trends encouraging individualistic or hedonistic lifestyles have a negative impact on parenting competences, because they make parents feel insecure. Teachers can give parents useful information about what their children are like, and can provide them with valuable aid, while respecting the style of each particular family.

On the other hand, we found that even in the case of families committed to teaching their children values, like those in the programme, it is hard to solve certain problems like lack of time, which is particularly acute in the case of fathers. This lack of time is one of the main reasons for which only 12 mothers of the 40 families that expressed interest participated in the programme. We observed that the mothers were more interested in this type of programme. However, the sessions in the programme proved useful to stimulate dialogue between mothers and fathers about how to bring up their children. Reflection on certain issues made them feel more secure in their aims –to insist on teaching their children values in an environment which makes this extremely difficult-and more confident about the methods they should use –showing affection but making demands on their children, setting rules and giving rewards and punishments. Sharing experiences with other participants created a climate of support. Schools could work more in the area of educational cooperation with families through this type of programme, which provides a time and place for dialogue about the education of pupils/children.

Finally, we must emphasize that interventions like the present pilot study place the researchers in a situation in which they must design methods for diagnosing, assessing and educating that are adapted to the real possibilities of the people for whom they are intended. At the same time, the results that have emerged from the present study provide support for continued efforts to research and act in family education focusing on social values, and particularly for projects which strengthen the relationship between families and schools.

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Appendix 1

Steps	Scheduling	Actions	Stakeholders		
			D1	D2	D3
Specification of the problem	Phase 1: Sept-Nov /2008	Broad definition of problem Contact schools Agreement with school	3	3	
	Phase 2: Jan-Sept /2009	Concrete definition of problem Selection and development of diagnostic tools	2		
		Application of diagnostic tools	3	1	
		Analysis of results	3		
		Comparison with teachers' diagnosis	3	10	
Specification of the programme	Oct-Dec /2009	Design and development of materials	4		
		Organization of application		3	
		Planning of calendar and resources		3	
Application and evaluation of programme	Phase 1: Jan-May /2010	Application: working sessions	4		12
	Phase 2: Jan-Oct /2010	Initial, ongoing and final evaluation	5		12
Final evaluation and making conclusions known	Oct-Dec /2010	Making conclusions known	4		

Figure 1. Steps of design and development of the intervention *KEY* People involved: D1. Number of researchers. D2. Number of people involved in the school. D3. Number of families that attended the sessions.

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