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Revista de cercetare și intervenție socială

IMPLEMENTATION AND EVALUATION OF THE "LEARNING TOGETHER, GROWING IN FAMILY PROGRAMME": THE IMPACT ON THE FAMILIES

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Published by:

Expert Projects Publishing House

On behalf of:

"Alexandru Ioan Cuza" University,

Department of Sociology and Social Work

and

Holt Romania Foundation

Implementation and Evaluation of the "Learning Together, Growing In Family Programme": The Impact On The Families

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Abstract

The article looks at the characteristics of the programme and its application and evaluation. We have chosen a mixed methodological focus that is characterised by a research process that collects analyses and links quantitative and qualitative data, as well as its integration and joint discussion, to achieve a greater understanding of the phenomenon under study. The application has been undertaken with 1,834 people of whom 1,270 have undertaken the programme (609 parents and 661 children), and 564 (296 parents and 268 children) formed part of the control group. The results show that after the programme the strict (authoritarian) style, permissive style, criticism and rejection have decreased and parental affection and communication have increased. There has been an increase in leisure activities undertaken in the family, both in everyday and special activities, satisfaction with family life has improved and there has been greater community integration along with learning processes of an emotional, behavioural and cognitive nature. We describe proposals for change to improve the efficiency of the programme by means of going deeper into the subject matter of the programme and the creation of reference bodies to establish networking with the small entities, attending to the largest number of families possible within the characteristics of the programme.

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Keywords: educational programme; family support; vulnerable families; family education; positive parenting; group training.

The family and child poverty support programmes[6]

The most recent studies about poverty and child poverty show that the children who live in this situation are much more likely to experience learning difficulties, suffering health problems, showing low school performance rates, having premature pregnancies and having less occupational expectations (UNICEF, 2007). The situation of child poverty is therefore situated as one of the main causes of social exclusion. Until now some of the family intervention or support processes were excessively structured from the perspective of deficit, based on the deficiencies or limitations of those involved, and the perspective of potentialities that consider the possibilities within them of some factors of protection or simply of some personal resources that can and should be strengthened, was not always taken into consideration. Professional work does not only consist of reducing the limitations and weak points, but also in increasing the capabilities and strong points that are also found in the majority of people, even in those who are in more negative situations (Amorós & Palacios, 2004).

These needs and approaches have been highlighted, among others, by international bodies such as the Council of Europe that promotes the Recommendation (2006), regarding the Policy to support positive parenting. Specifically, the member states are called on to support parents in their educational tasks through: a) suitable family policies that provide the legislative, administrative and financial measures to create the best possible conditions for positive education, b) the provision of support services for parents, such as local advice services, helplines and educational programmes, and c) provide specialised services for the parents in situations of risk with the aim of anticipating the unnecessary movement of children from the family home due to situations of ill treatment.

The international tendencies and research undertaken by different teams of Spanish universities have enabled the production of programmes called third generation (Martín-Quintana, Máiquez, Rodrigo, Byrne, Rodríguez & Rodríguez, 2009; Rodrigo, Máiquez, Martín & Byrne, 2008), where the main aim is to promote the quality of family functioning as a system, through comprehensive long-lasting, multi-domain, multi-context interventions and with socio-educa-

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[6] "Aprender juntos, crecer en familia" (2011) (Learning together, growing in family programme) has been produced by Amorós, P; Rodrigo, M. José: Balsells, A; Byrne, S; Fuentes, N; Martin, J. Carlos; Mateos, A; Pastor, C; Guerra, M, (2011) belonging to 4 Spanish universities (Barcelona, La Laguna, Lleida and Las Palmas de Gran Canaria) and with the promotion and funding of the Social Integration Area of the "la Caixa" Foundation

tional group interventions with the whole family (parents and children) (Amorós et al. 2011).

Today, parental education programmes (Amorós, Kñallinsky, Martin & Fuentes-Peláez, 2011) are oriented towards promoting family communication that improves both the quality of the family system and parental skills; what predominates is the need to create an atmosphere that favours educating children where organisation is imposed over chaos (Martin-Quintana et al., 2009), and in which the factors of protection that identify the capabilities are the best points of reference for a family intervention (Amorós, Balsells, Fuentes- Peláez, Molina, Mateo & Pastor, 2011; Amorós, Palacios, Fuentes, León & Mesas, 2002; Balsells, 2007; Balsells, Amorós, Fuentes-Peláez, & Mateos, 2011).

This perspective teamwork is considered fundamental, since it offers participants the opportunity to: share experiences, satisfactions and doubts; feel part of a group with the same interests, desires, needs and expectations; analyse their own attitudes and compare them with other people in the same situation and understand the different perspectives of all those involved (Amorós et al., 2005; Balsells, Fuentes-Peláez, Mateo, Mateos, & Violant, 2010; Hidalgo, Menéndez, Sánchez, Lorence & Jiménez, 2009).

Alongside this, the objectives and activities must respond to a global vision of a process of development of family coexistence from a threefold perspective: the emotional dimension, which aims to help manage the emotions; the behavioural dimension through the development of skills that help face up to situations adequately, and the cognitive dimension, which facilitates greater comprehension of the process of family coexistence (Amorós et al., 2005; Amorós et al., 2011). All these elements make up a series of more motivational and attractive programmes for families and help in the maintenance of them throughout all the sessions.

Additionally, to be able to develop these programmes efficiently, the figure of the professional who invigorates the sessions is vital. The animator is not a transmitter of information, but a coordinator and motivator of the teaching-learning process (Cojocaru, Cojocaru, & Ciuchi, 2011). In this process they act as guide, as companion undertaking all the activities being aware of the objectives, balancing the participation of the members of the group with verbal and non-verbal strategies, knowing how to adapt the needs of the group and providing brief and concise conclusions that help systemise the learning process of the different participants.

"Aprender juntos, crecer en familia"
(Learning together, growing in family programme)

We should point out the reference point of the "Learning together, growing in family" programme. The first reference is the "la Caixa" Foundation, a non-profit body that belongs to the financial entity CaixaBank. The "la Caixa" Foundation is to be an international benchmark committed to human rights, peace, justice and dignity of people. Its mission is to contribute to the progress of people and society with special emphasis on the most vulnerable groups.

Among the different programmes promoted by the Welfare Projects we can highlight the Caixa Proinfancia Programme that helps in the promotion and full development of childhood and families in situations of poverty and vulnerability. Between 2007 and 2012 Caixa Proinfancia attended 204,022 children and 119,399 families by means of 541,905 supports and a total budget of 247,022,360 euros. This whole process has been made possible thanks to the establishment of a network of more than 400 non-profit entities and 10 public administrations. This programme was the object of an assessment by Riera et al. (2011) and from this emerged the proposal to produce an educational and support programme to respond to the needs of families and their children in a vulnerable situation called: *learning together, growing in family*.

The contents of the programmes from the perspective of positive parenting

The programme responds to the main guidelines that should inspire the undertaking of the educational task from a perspective of positive parenting, such as the affective connection, educational practices, communication, the relationship with the school and new technologies, shared play and leisure and conflict management.

The need for affection is one of human being's basic needs, along with physical, cognitive and social needs. The patterns of affective connection contain three basic components, a behavioural component, a cognitive component and an emotional component that make up the basic ingredients of the inner model of attachment of the child (Collins & Read, 1994; Lafuente & Cantero, 2010; López, 1998, 2008; Marvin & Britner, 2008). We observe that the relationship established with the parents has quite a direct link in the thoughts and sentiments developed with respect to the relationships of friendships and their quality (Dwyer, Fredstrom, Rubin, Booth-LaForce, Rose-Krasnor & Burgess, 2010). Diverse research shows that this influence can be exercised through multiple factors, among which are also found the attachment link between father and son, the relationship as a couple between the parents, their mental health and the levels of communication established with the children (Lucas-Thompson & Clarke-Stewart, 2007).

The educational practices established in the family dynamic are a fundamental part of parental resilience and the capacity to undertake positive parenting. From both points of view, the educational practices have the objective of establishing limits and rules for the children to guide their behaviour, as well as to gradually generate the acquisition and familiarisation of a series of pro-social values such as autonomy, respect and tolerance (Amorós, Balsells, Fuentes-Peláez, Molina, Mateo & Pastor, 2011). Apud (2001) defends the idea that there are three basic spaces where participation must be developed and experienced: the family, the school and the community. Nevertheless, child participation should not be confused with a delegation of paternal functions. This participation of children in the decisions that affect them and in the running of family life must be accompanied by an establishment of clear rules and limits that are coherent, agreed and consistent; parents must exercise their parental role from a standpoint of respect, tolerance, comprehension, support and listen to their children (Balsells, Del Arco & Miñambres, 2009).

Communication plays a decisive role when receiving and giving support. For this reason, accessibility, availability and active listening are conditions that favour encounter and communication which in turn favours cohesion and the family atmosphere. Some authors talk about the relevance of family communication as one of the variables that with greater frequency is usually related to the psychosocial adjustment of children (Musitu, Buelba, Lili & Cava, 2001; Rodrigo, Máiquez, García, Mendoza, Rubio, Martínez & Martín, 2004). Moreover, a negative family atmosphere caused by problems of communication and lack of affection between the members of the family can influence the psychosocial development of the children negatively and have a bearing on forming a negative image of both the adults that form their family core and the teachers in the school as figures of formal authority (Moreno, Estévez, Murgui & Musitu, 2009). This is solidly confirmed as a specific need in cases in which the situation of vulnerability has led to desertion and a provisional separation from the family as a means of protection (Fuentes-Peláez, Amorós, Mateos, Balsells, & Violant, 2013; Mateos, Balsells, Molina, & Fuentes-Peláez, 2012; Cojocaru & Cojocaru, 2011). To sum up, parents have a very important parental task, among others, of producing all types of opportunities for their children to be able to use all their capacities, to whom they must also provide the acquisition of all the resources that contribute to their development and education in order to overcome with guarantees the different life transitions that await them (Rodrigo Máiquez & Martín, 2010b; Rodrigo, Máiquez, Martín & Byrne, 2008).

We know that there is a complex framework of factors that affect integration and school results of children which range from the individual variables of the subject itself, to other factors that are connected with the family, the school institution or the social setting. However, recent studies (Marí-Klose, Marí-Klose, Granados, Gómez Granell, & Martínez, 2009; Sarasa & Sales, 2009) state that the

role played by parents in the education of their children has an essential influence on the school results. In the ecological model of positive parenting proposed by Rodrigo, Máiquez & Martín (2009) they state that the lack of relations between the family and the school is a factor of risk, and on the contrary, a good school atmosphere and opportunities for participation are factors of protection to develop positive parenting. The role of the family and the school is understood as being in favour of collaboration guided by the interest of the child. Educational co-responsibility, as Fuentes-Peláez (2010) states, undoubtedly requires that all the agents collaborate in the educational task based on two-way communication between school and parents-tutors to detect and comment on the progress and learning processes that the children acquire, and agree on a coherent educational line between the work of the school and family support.

Finally, it is essential to deal with *new technologies*, since they have advanced considerably and with them their use, especially in the use of the mobile phone and Internet. Today's children grow up with them and have incorporated them into their universe as a further activity for their studies, relationships and leisure.

In current society, *the occupation of free time* is an important question. In a globalised society where family conciliation is a subject of interest it is absolutely essential to think about strategies in which families can share leisure spaces in a satisfactory and healthy way. In this sense working on the question of constructive and shared leisure with families is fundamental since it is an important space for the development of healthy habits. As well as sharing play with peers, the child also enjoys sharing moments of play with parents (Chapela, 2002; Figuera, Picart, Segarra & Sullastres, 2006). Doing activities together with the members of the family brings many benefits since it enables greater knowledge and recognition of the members of the family.

Both in the models of emotional control and confronting stress, of special importance is family resilience, understood "as a dynamic process that enables the family as an open system to react positively to the threats and challenges of the setting, becoming strengthened from these situations" (Walsh, 1998; 2004). For other authors family resilience represents the capacity of a family to recover from adverse circumstances and overcome them strengthened and with greater resources to face other difficulties of life (Fuentes-Peláez, Amorós, Balsells & Pastor, 2010; Grotberg, 1998).

To sum up, it involves the family identifying its strong points and its resilient capabilities that help them overcome problems and difficulties, helped by what is previously learnt about strategies for confronting stress and emotional control.

Objectives of the programme

The objectives respond to a global vision of a process of development of family coexistence from a threefold dimension: (1) emotional dimension that aims to help manage the emotions; (2) behavioural dimension by means of the development of skills that enable one to confront situations competently; (3) cognitive dimension that provides greater comprehension of the process of family coexistence. The *general objective* of the programme is to promote development and family coexistence in the transition from 6 to 12 years old by means of promoting positive family relations between parents and children in accordance with the exercising of positive parenting. The *specific objectives* correspond to the development of each of the 6 modules that make up the principles of positive parenting.

Materials, resources and strategies

The programme has a series of materials and resources to assist in its application and evaluation: (1) manual for proactive animators; (2) audiovisual resources in DVD format; (3) workbook for parents; (4) workbook for children; (5) guide for implementation and evaluation.

The contents of the programme are structured in objectives, with their activities and strategies. The techniques and strategies as a whole are selected for the application of the contents in a group setting. The selection of the didactic strategies and techniques have been undertaken obeying, on the one hand, the efficiency shown in earlier programmes (Amorós, Jiménez, Molina, Pastor, Cirera, Martín, Fuentes-Peláez, et al., 2005), and, on the other hand, its adaptation to the contents chosen in the programme. All the techniques selected enable us to work systematically and in a structured way in contents referring to knowledge, emotions, experiences, skills, attitudes, etc., and involve giving the participants the opportunity to analyse, reflect and share those aspects with others (Amorós, Fuentes-Peláez, Mateos, Molina, Pastor, Pujol, Violant et al., 2009). Additionally, the techniques that are analysed here separately will be used in an integrated way throughout a specific training session; in each of the sessions they can use several distinct techniques. The techniques employed are the following: Oral explanation. Written exercises. Simultaneous dialogues. Guided debate. Group work. Brainstorming. Animated and cartoon stories (case or situation studies). Video-Forum role play and Guided fantasy.

Methodology

We have chosen a mixed methodological focus which is characterised by a research process that collects analyses and links quantitative and qualitative data, as well as its joint integration and discussion, in order to achieve a greater understanding of the phenomenon under study. We have chosen a concurrent triangulation design (Plano & Creswell, 2008) which enables us to obtain data independently with the aim of being able to reach a greater degree of reliability in that data and greater in-depth analysis.

The programme is designed for its group application since it endeavours to offer the participants the opportunity to: (1) Share experiences, satisfactions and doubts; (2) Feel part of a group, with similar needs and expectations; (3) Analyse their own attitudes and compare them with those of other people; (4) Achieve a broader vision towards aspects of family coexistence; (5) Understand the different perspectives of all those involved; (6) Reflect on their reactions before new situations.

The number of participants may range from 8 to 16 people. There will be three types of groups: the parents' group, the children's group and the families group (the two former groups together). The design has a programme group (PG) and a control group (CG). The Programme Group (PG) is made up of those families in a situation of vulnerability, users of the collaborating bodies in the Proinfancia project that have children aged between 6 and 12, both inclusive. The Control Group (CG) is taken at random from among the families in a vulnerable situation who come to the same bodies and belong to the same social settings as those of the programme group. They must be families who use these services but who receive very occasional support and without being in psycho-educational programmes or treatments of any type.

This programme follows an ecological model of exercising positive parenting according to which the task of being parents is not done in a vacuum, but within an ecological space whose quality depends on three types of factors: the psycho-social context where the family live, the capacities of the parents to exercise positive parenting and the evolutional/educational needs of the children. Thus, in the design of the instruments it has been planned to evaluate the quality of the family context, informed above all by the entity itself and the animators, under the supposition that these conditions in which parenting is exercised may influence the result of the programme. The programme design is a mixed design which combines the quantitative and qualitative methodology on considering that both are complementary and help capture more accurately the process of change that occurs with the programme.

Table 1. Characteristics of the evaluation design (PG=Programme group and CG= Control group)

Period	Contents Which dimensions and parameters do we evaluate?	How? Instruments and strategies for collecting information	When? When do we evaluate?	Who? Who we ask?
Initial	Professional competences	1. A. Identifying animator file, valuation of training course and professional competences	During the training course	Animators
	Family and social context	2. A Identifying family file. 3. A Group file	Prior to the course	Entity/Animators (PG/CG)
	Family competences	4. A. Scale of family educational guidelines.	Contact prior to the course	Parents/Children (PG/CG)
		5. A. Scale of perception of family role		Parents (PG/CG)
		6. A. Scale of leisure guidelines and family satisfaction	Session 0	Parents (PG/CG)
Process	Of process	1. B. Valuation of the implementation process	End module 3 (session 6)	Entity/Animators
		2. B. Valuation of family change by other service		Entity/Animators
		3. B. Discussion groups		Animators/Family (PG)
Final	Satisfaction with programme	1. C. Scale of satisfaction with the programme (1 and 2)	End module 6 (Session 12)	Families (PG)
	Professional competences	2. C. Professional competences file		Animators
		3. C. Valuation of change in the families		Entity/Animators (PG)
		4. C. Valuation of family change by other service		Entity/Animators (PG)
Follow-up	Family competences	4. D. Scale of family educational guidelines (1, 2, 3 and 4)	End of reinforcement module	Parents (PG/CG)
		5. D. Scale of perception of family role		Families (PG/CG)
		6. D. Scale of leisure guidelines and family satisfaction		Parents (PG/CG)
	Professional Development	7. D. Changes in professional development file	End of programme	Entity/Animators

Characteristics of the population

The total number of participants was 1,834 of which 1,270 have done the programme and 564 formed part of the control group. The total number of participants were made up of 847 families, of which 65.3% (553) did the programme (programme group) and the other 34.7% (294) formed part of the collaborating group which acted as the control group. Therefore, 553 families took part in the "Learning together, growing in family" Programme, and taking into account that in 9.2% of the cases both parents took part, making a total of 609 parents, and 661 children.

The collaborating group was made up of 294 families (296 parents and 268 children). The degree of follow-up of the programme fluctuated in a bracket of 70% to 85% which represents quite a low degree of abandonment and probably due to circumstances outside the programme.

The families of the programme group *took part in 54 groups animated by 138 professionals distributed in 9 and undertaken in 12 cities* or metropolitan areas. They were groups of a similar composition because in a high percentage of cases they have brought together families at risk and free of risk, following a mixed model that was highly recommended in order to avoid stigmatisation of the families at risk and to promote their integration into the community.

Below, in the following table are shown both the most important socio-demographic characteristics, as well as the comparison of the average scores or frequencies between both groups.

As can be seen in the *Table 2*, there are no major differences in any of the socio-demographic variables evaluated between both groups. The programme group is characterised by being mainly made up of mothers with an average age of 36.8, and 2.55 children (well distributed by age and sex), with a two-parent family situation in 59.9% of the cases. 77.3% live in capitals of province, mainly with basic studies (both father (57.1%) and mother (59%)) and unemployed (both father (54.8%) and mother (66.2%)). Therefore, they are comparable groups from the perspective of their socio-demographic characteristics and their status of risk.
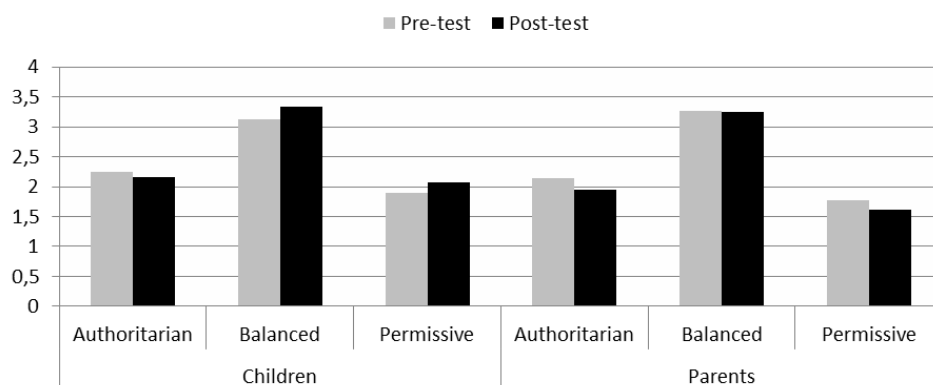
Table 2. Comparison of the socio-demographic variables of the families according to the group they belong to (programme group or collaborating group (control))

	Programme Group (N=553) M (DT) o %	Collaborating Group (N=294) M (DT) o %	χ² / F	p
Level of risk			2.228	.136
No risk	30.7	25.9		
Risk	69.3	74.1		
Sex			0.694	.405
Mother	86.2	88.2		
Father	13.8	11.8		
Age (mother)	36.80 (6.67)	37.73 (7.46)	2.368	.124
Age (father)	40.92 (7.95)	39.29 (7.57)	3.508	.062
No. of children	2.55 (1.31)	2.88 (3.17)	3.527	.061
Age (child)	8.92 (2.43)	9.01 (2.25)	0.187	.666
Sex (child)			0.083	.773
Female	42.4	41		
Male	57.6	59		
Zone			1.568	.210
Capital of province	77.3	81.9		
Rest of province	22.7	18.1		
Family state			4.136	.388
Married	48.3	50.6		
Unmarried couple	2.7	5.2		
Single-sex couple	1.6	1.1		
Single parent family	38.6	37.4		
Reconstituted	8.8	5.7		
Family type			0.141	.707
Single parent	40.1	38.5		
Two-parent	59.9	61.5		
Level of studies (mother)			4.321	.229
No qualifications	17.0	14.5		
Basic qualifications	59.0	58.4		
Secondary or FE	20.9	20.5		
University	3.1	6.6		
Level of studies (father)			4.172	.243
No qualifications	21.5	16.5		
Basic qualifications	57.1	54.1		
Secondary or FE	17.2	25.7		
University	4.3	3.7		
Work situation (mother)			11.754	.055
Employed	31.6	44.7		
Unemployed	66.2	52.2		
Retired/Pensioner	1.3	1.9		
Disability	0.8	1.2		
Work situation (father)			8.706	.121
Employed	40.1	55.3		
Unemployed	54.8	42.7		
Retired/Pensioner	3.1	0		
Disability	1.4	1.9		

Results of the impact on the families

In this article we present a part of the evaluation undertaken: that referring to the impact of the programme on the families (parents; children). This is a substantial aspect that the evaluation design has aimed to capture from diverse angles: from the quantitative data of the pre-post analysis of the questionnaires, the qualitative appreciations of the families themselves about the crystallisation of the learning processes and finally, from the points of view of the professionals who did not take part directly in the sessions and of the actual group animators.
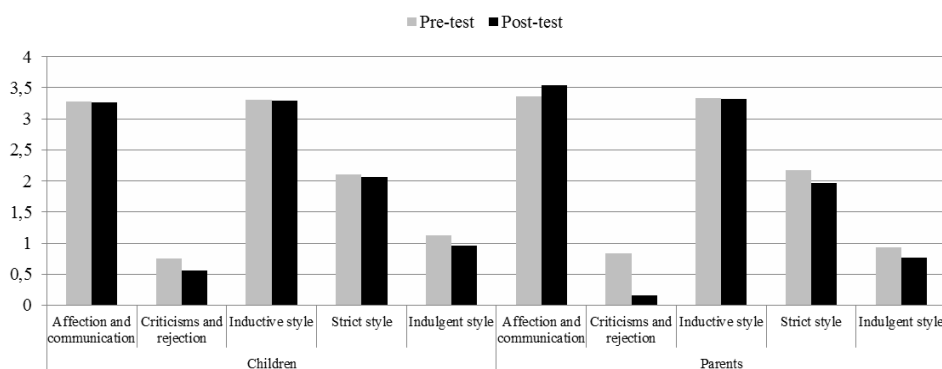
The results indicate statistically significant changes after the programme in the quality of the family educational scenario. Regarding the parental educational guidelines with children aged under 9, we see that from the children's point of view there is a significant increase of balanced or democratic style ($F (1,136) = 4.504$, $p \leq .05$) and of permissive style ($F (1,136) = 3.909$, $p \leq .05$). From the parents' point of view we see a significant decrease in authoritarian style ($F (1,124) = 3.862$, $p \leq .05$) and permissive style ($F (1,124) = 4.025$, $p \leq .05$). For *the children both the level of balanced and permissive style has increased, and for the parents the use of authoritarian and permissive style has decreased.* Here there appears a divergence between the perceptions of the children and those of the parents in the group of children aged under 9, probably due to difficulties in capturing the items of the questionnaire according to their age or whether they really perceived them in this way.

The coincidence is greater in children aged over 9 since in both cases *there is a decrease in the style that uses criticism and rejection and in the indulgent style.* In the families with children aged over 9 there is also agreement in describing a family atmosphere where affection and communication prevail, with the use of inductive practices to explain, followed by practices with strict or authoritarian models, indulgent and with less presence of criticism and rejection. This coincidence indicates that in the educational setting the educational messages are

suitably transmitted, the children being able to capture accurately the different educational styles of the parents and the changes that they have experienced during the programme. The programme managed to improve some educational guidelines in both age groups in a statistically significant way.

From the children's point of view we see a significant decrease in criticisms and rejection (F $(1,137)$=5.552, $p \leq .05$) and of the indulgent style (F $(1,137)$ = 6.424, $p \leq .01$). From the parents' point of view we see a significant increase of affection and communication (F $(1,157)$ = 4.387, $p \leq .05$), as well as a significant decrease in criticism and rejection (F $(1,157)$ = 628.442, $p \leq .001$), strict style (F $(1,157)$ =12.464, $p \leq .001$) and indulgent style (F $(1,157)$ = 8.970, $p \leq .01$).
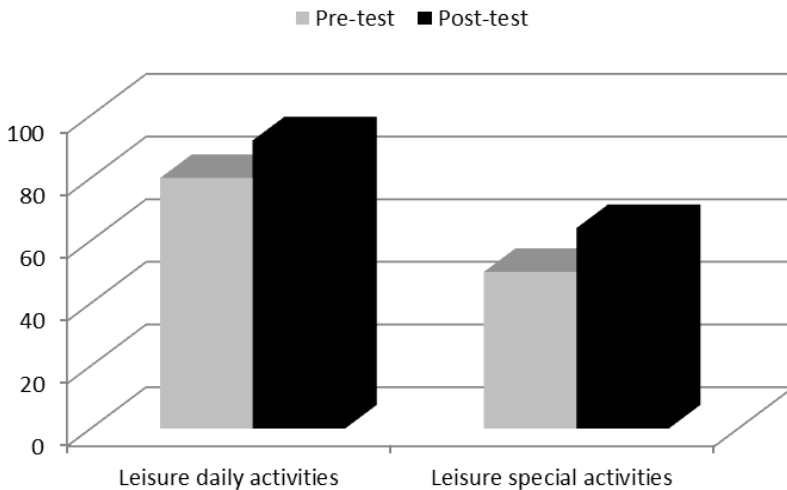

In the qualitative analysis of the discussion groups of parents the changes experienced have been focused on the following sections:

- They learn to reflect on their *educational practice*; the participants adopt a reflexive attitude about their educational practices in such a way as to question whether their way of educating is the most suited to the needs of their children. On being a programme that generates reflection about their experiences and ways of doing things, the parents gradually take up this attitude: *"We believe that with all the parents and families, the programme makes them reflect. Perhaps we are lacking in how to help and ensure that this personal reflection is shared."*
- The families have *strengthened relations and informal support.* There are programme groups that have established relations of friendship due to the programme and make them extendable at other times of their social life. In this order of benefits, we see an increase of accompaniment and orientation by both the professionals and the group: "*And the parents value having this person there to be able to guide, but above all they value more the support of the group, the most group-orientated part of them as adults, not so much the*

family question, which they also (…) appreciate the network of support they have generated."

- They become *aware of their parental functions* and the responsibilities that this involves, facilitating an attitude of predisposition and acceptance of the support relationship, orientation and support of their parenting: *"We use afternoon snack to recall activities, subjects regarding services, external activities, etc. We realised that they use this information because later we find them in certain activities."*
- They have introduced changes in the family dynamics about the questions dealt with in the programme: "We sent them off with tasks to do at home, such as family meetings, which were very successful because after there were families who had established them as a regular practice in their home."
- The programme can generate in the family the *awareness of their situation*, and in some cases is valued as a painful process so they see themselves that the solution is difficult. This is one of the risks of prevention, which arouses feelings that cannot be dealt with in the programme group and consequently requires a complementary intervention: *"This formation is making many mothers whose husbands do not help them realise that they are lacking somebody, and are more aware that it is not working. This is rather painful since they are much more aware of how unfortunate they are, and also later they must struggle at home since the husbands put up obstacles and tell them that what they are doing is stupid, that it is of no use whatsoever."*

The families have also shown statistically significant changes in the *increase in leisure activities done as a family, both in daily events* (F (1,284) = 6.066, p ≤ .05) *and special ones* (F (1,284) = 5.567, p ≤ .01).

The experts say that both ordinary and current leisure and extraordinary leisure is useful since the latter requires more effort of coordination and planning than the first, as well as greater economic effort in order to do it. In our case, with the profile of families with economic difficulties that has been mentioned above, it is very reasonable that a massive use of this type of special leisure has not been thought about, but with effort that has been made, a significant increase has been able to be detected.

On the other hand, from the analysis of the discussion groups we can deduce that the participants show learning processes related to the emotional (attitude and predisposition in the task of being parents), behavioural (abilities and skills relating to parental competences) and cognitive dimensions (knowledge about the family and the evolutional development of childhood).

Some of the attitudinal and emotional learning processes obtained during the development of the programme refer to the more emotional plane of parenting:

- *Emotional involvement, affection and the expression of the emotions*: "We have had the chance to let it all out and have realised that there are ways of speaking to children, of giving them a hug, a word of affection"… "We have to treat everyone the same, and although they are different ages we must treat them all the same. Sometimes we believe the oldest one does not need as much affection as the younger one".

- *Attitude of reflection about the educational practice*: "On how not to overprotect our children or even know how to protect them. Here we have been able to learn the middle ground"… "This has been very useful for me and it has helped me realise things that I was not aware of before, for example, when your child asks you something show them that you have time for them. Flexibility and availability for them".

In the behavioural plane, they point out learning processes related to communicative skills and the strategies for establishing rules and limits:

- *Learning processes related to communication strategies*: "One thing I have learnt is that through dialogue we can reach an understanding by all the members of the family"…"Sometimes, the day-to-day stress you feel means you do not listen to your children or you do not dedicate the time to them you should. With this you learn to value the importance of knowing how to listen to them".

- *Strategies related to the capacity to establish rules and limits*: "The fact is it has helped us to make the children realise that it is not us who want these rules, but that there are minimum rules of coexistence: do not shout, insult… they have helped them be more responsible, to comply with the rules, etc." … "We have learnt to treat sons and daughters equally and that both do housework. Without differences".

- *The cognitive learning has been mainly focused on the evolutionary development of the children*, just as the following quotes show: *"It is also important to know the different ages in order to know what one can do with a specific age and what one can do with another"* … "I have learnt from communication that you reap what you sow and according to the age range you use some or other resources".

From the psycho-educational and community focus of this programme we seek to promote the wellbeing of children and the family, strengthening the factors of protection and minimising the factors of risk that are found in the family setting in order to undertake real prevention.

In this sense, the following improvements or changes have been identified in their parental practice:

- *Reflection on educational practices*, capacitating of the families with the final aim of achieving autonomy (component of empowerment): "What was good for me was the role play we had to do with me as a child and I realised what my daughter's needs were and it made me think about how important it is to do things and play together with my daughter since she is a child and we both need to do this".

- Recognition of the influence on the children of the actions of the parents, *cognitions focused on the needs of the children:* "What she says is right, this organisation has provided us with much more and we devote more time on attending to our children. Because the times we live in are so hard, we are going crazy because of the crisis, we need this and we don't have it, the child wants to go to the cinema and you don't have money for them… This is a great opportunity and we make the most of it and the children also accept it and are happy".

- *Incorporation of more optimum educational guidelines:* "With these rules we have improved a lot because before they arrived and sat at the table, at dinner time, like royalty, now they collaborate a lot"... "Strengthen what they do well, not only telling them when they do things badly, but when they do things well, which is almost more important than when they have done it badly (strengthening the positive)".

- *Acceptance, recognition and satisfaction of the role of parents:* "I am also very satisfied and happy because we have ensured that our son, the younger one, is more respectful, he does his chores, we sit down and talk about what he does. I have noticed a change in his behaviour and also in mine"… "I have learnt to enjoy the task of being a parent more because you just cannot spend the whole day shouting and screaming, etc.".

- Changes related to *communication, empathy and trust* (reciprocity in parent-child relations): "We make more time for them. Before I came home from work tired and didn't take any notice of her. Now I arrive and spend

some time with her, and she tells me what she has done all day. She didn't do that before"… "For me, the most important thing has been communication. Thanks to the programme the relationship with our children is a more open relationship".

- The exercising of *co-parenting*. Affection in the couple and mutual support: "I would highlight the improvement in communication between my wife and I, since with 5 children, it can sometimes be very complicated for the two of us to agree but what we try is that neither one of us undermines what the other one says"… "We have improved communication between the couple and have learnt to respect what the other says so that there is not a goody and a baddy. It is important to remain firm in the decision that the other member of the couple has taken".

- Changes in *shared leisure*, the undertaking of joint activities with the family: "I have seen, thanks to the programme, that a change has taken place in my family, we have achieved a greater integrity among the members of my family and we do more things together"… "It is the first time we have done things together with our children"… "We have learnt that we can share with them, although not for much time, we can play with them, watch a film, etc. and the children also seem to be at ease".

We should underline that *satisfaction with family life* (F (1,284) = 6.498, p ≤ .01), *for both parents and children, has increased significantly with the programme*, which means that there has been an increase in the perception of the quality of life of the families, at least in this ingredient of quality that is life satisfaction.

Relating to what the children learn it has been observed that it is related to behaviour, participation in housework and aspects related to coexistence (family communication, establishment of rules, educational attention of the parents):

- *Behaving properly:* "Myself better behaving at home and outdoors" … "My parents say I am kinder and that I don't protest as much" … "I respect my parents' rules" … "Yes, much better. The relationship at home has improved because now we behave better and we have improved our attitude towards them";

- Active participation in the domestic sphere: "Participating at home" … "Helping my parents" … "We also learnt to help our grandparents and take care of them and be nice to them" … "I have learnt to help my parents when they come home tired from work";

- *Changes in family communication* (parents-children): "I get on better with my parents, because before they screamed at me and didn't ask me anything; we did an activity that consisted of asking each other before screaming"… "Since we have done the programme we can now participate in the family opinions";

- *Establishment and compliance with rules and limits:* "Sometimes my parents punish me but we speak and reach an agreement"… "I think about things twice and know how to forgive"… "We have to help, and do housework";
- *Educational support and attention* by the parents: "They now pay a bit more attention to me"… "My mum behaves better… she doesn't shout at me anymore, and she listens more" … "My dad is more on my side"… "We go for a walk in the park with the family"… "I play more with my parents".
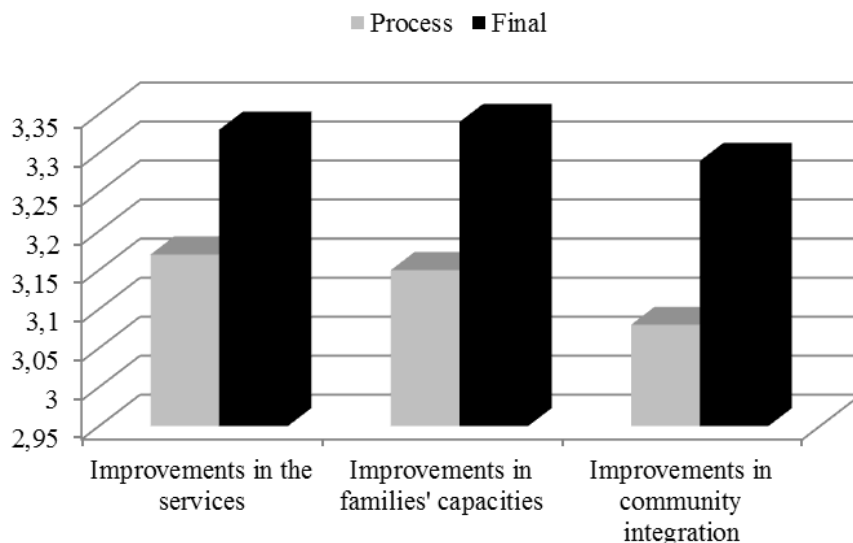
Process of crystallisation

In the last session in the 3-4 months on having completed the final stage of the programme, and therefore coinciding with the moment in which the post-test of the quantitative evaluation was done, the results of which we have just described, they could make an in-depth analysis through qualitative methodology of what *learning processes have crystallised* in the daily life of the families. As can be appreciated, they coincide with those improvements observed in the questionnaires which constitute a guarantee in itself. In this sense we underline that the families have been able to maintain an *attitude of reflection about their practices* at home which they did not have before; it also reflects a *presence of rules, limits* to control the behaviour of the children by means of procedures more based on practices that respect and take into account the children's point of view. We also observe a *greater participation and involvement in home life* and in particular everything that has a bearing on the children's lives. It was as if they were consolidating a more active "look" at the children and a greater effort in attending to and trying to satisfy their needs. Moreover, the communicative strategies and those for resolving problems that were learnt have had their effect and the *family atmosphere is seen as calmer* since the family has greater skill in "how" to relate to each other and talk between parents and children. Finally, the families highlight the changes in *shared leisure*, the undertaking of activities together in family. Without doubt, this is a competence which has crystallised more than any other.

We complete the *valuation of change of the families resorting to other important observers:* the professionals of the service not subscribed to the programme and the animators themselves who have led the groups. This process of triangulation is highly recommendable to ensure that the valuations of improvement made by the protagonists themselves are validated by other external observers. The professionals not subscribed to the programme were consulted twice, during the process stage and during the final stage, with the aim of checking how they valuated each family that took part in the programme.

The results obtained comparing both moments show that these professionals *have indeed collected statistically significant improvements in the services the families receive* ($F(1,241) = 10.1$, $p < .002$). The families mainly use the resources

of the service and are more involved and participative, with *improvements of the families in their capabilities* (F(1,241) = 13.7, p< .0001), of looking for informal support and collaboration, in their capacity to identify their own problems and in the communication between the members of the family, as well as a *greater community integration* (F(1,241) = 13.7, p< .0001), extending their network of support.

The changes in community integration correspond to a very important facet of evaluation that had not been dealt with through the previous questionnaires but says a lot about the effort made integrating into the community with these families in such a short space of time.

Regarding the estimated improvement of the families after the programme by the animators themselves, they are placed higher than the "quite a lot" category, touching the "very much" category, which indicates a very high level of perception of change in all the aspects considered. The highest marks of family improvements have been appreciated in the sense of responsibility of the wellbeing of their children, in problem-solving, in the capacities for reflection on their ideas and practices, improvements in communication and demonstration of affection, as well as improvements in knowledge of the resources of the setting. The improvements in the use of community resources or in relations with teachers have been comparatively less but always within a very high general level.

Conclusions

The results of the implementation and evaluation of the programme show that the experience has been extremely satisfactory for all those concerned. The families (both parents and children) have appreciated that their participation and involvement has helped them improve in wellbeing and family coexistence.

After the programme the parents have decreased their strict style (authoritarian), permissive style, criticisms and rejection, and have increased affection and communication. We are therefore faced with results that show that, even though starting from acceptable, low or very low levels, important changes have been achieved that point to a clear improvement in the educational styles in the family in the opinion of both the parents and the children themselves.

The majority are families that have different life and social circumstances that cause psychosocial situations of risk such as adolescent parents, families with dependents or with children with special needs, single-parent families, families with situations of violence in the couple, child negligence, among others.

The participants mention some changes in their task of parenting that are connected with resilient parenting. One of the most important objectives of the "Learning together, growing in family" programme is to strengthen those characteristics that enable families who experience these situations of stress and/or poverty, and provide a better education and care of their children. The final aim of the programme lies in providing the parents with a support that helps them do their tasks and educational responsibilities better, optimising the family relations and links.

In this sense, the following improvements or changes in their parental work have been identified: (1) reflection on educational practices, capacitation of the families with the final aim of achieving autonomy (component of empowerment); (2) recognition of the influence on the children of the actions of the parents, cognitions focused on the needs of the children; (3) incorporation of optimum educational guidelines; (4) acceptance, recognition and satisfaction of role of parents; (5) changes in communication, empathy and trust (reciprocity in parent-child relations); (6) exercising of co-parenting. Affection in the couple and mutual support; (7) changes in shared leisure, the realisation of joint activities in family.

The joint participation in leisure activities is one of the improvements of the families to which growing attention has been paid by the researchers. Sharing leisure time which is gratifying is the best way to promote family communication and the spontaneous demonstrations of affection, as well as providing examples of rules and values which in other more formal contexts would cause rejection. For this reason we should highlight the benefit to the participating families that the increase in their participation in these moments of shared leisure has involved.

Regarding the children the results show important changes of statistical significance after the programme in the quality of the family educational setting. Regarding parental educational guidelines with children aged under 9, it has been observed that from the children's point of view their perception shows a significant increase of balanced or democratic style and of permissive style. Children aged over 9 point to the decrease in the style that uses criticism and rejection and in the indulgent style.

Regarding the learning processes that are shown they are related to: behaving properly, active participation in the domestic setting; improvement of family coexistence: changes in family communication (parents-children); and acceptance of the establishment of and compliance with rules and limits along with greater support and educational attention by the parents: We should underline that the satisfaction with family life has grown with the programme which means that there has been an increase in the perception of the quality of life of the families, at least in this ingredient of quality which is life satisfaction.

4 months after the completion of the programme, in what is called the process of crystallisation, we have seen that some of the keys that have led them to these improvements in family life were the level of commitment that they had to acquire; the formal support, which has enabled them to conserve some form of relationship with the entity and its professionals, the mutual support between other families during the group sessions, the possibility of continuing to see each other and to be able to talk about matters in common; being aware of the limitations and of the problems, as well as an attitude of optimism, ambition and effort. All of this is considered key to maintaining changes in the exercising of the parental role and in the perception of the role, and the strategies that they learnt on the course are perceived as a support to maintain the changes. The family meeting and for planning and organising shared family leisure activities are two elements that help them continue with the changes and continue with the attitude of improvement and reflection about their educational practice.

In the same way as they have identified these facilitating factors, they also highlight the limitations for the crystallisation of the changes: the stress of the situation of poverty and economic difficulty; inertia and habits (educational styles) of doing things in one way; the different criteria of the parents in establishing limits and the lack of consistency to maintain the decisions.

We can also conclude that in the opinion of the animators the level of change of the families has been very high. This means that there has been quite a lot of agreement between the change perceived by the families themselves (reported in the questionnaires and the final session of the programme), that perceived by the professionals not directly subscribed to the programme as well as that perceived by the very animators of the groups which validate the results extraordinarily.

One of the basic aspects of the programme has been the active participation of both parents and children. This has enabled all of them to experience each part of the contents and feelings and be able to apply them to their daily lives. In this way, there have been two generations working simultaneously which contributes to what is learnt in the sessions can have a bearing on other members of the family.

For the continuity and consolidation of the programme and from the evaluation data small changes have been introduced for their implementation in the 2012-2013 course. These changes refer to: 1.) Process of evaluation where the different instruments of evaluation have been adapted and the time period extended for the realisation of the process and attracting and selection of the families. 2.) Revision of the activities of the programme, changing and adapting 5 activities aimed at parents, 7 aimed at children and one activity from the family section. 3.) Training process of trainers that currently has the participation of some animators who having been given the initial training process, developed the programme, so that the university lecturers and the animators with training and experience do the training process jointly.

The application and evaluation of the "Learning together, growing in family" programme is being developed in the same 12 cities in Spain, and has experienced a 25% increase in the number of participants and entities.

Among the new innovative proposals is the creation of specialised entities in group training that are reference points in each neighbourhood so that they can offer the services to entities that do not have the sufficient number of families. In this way the programme is more efficient and increases the possibilities of attention to a greater number of families.

Finally we would like to highlight the good results that the collaborative plan followed by the "la Caixa" Foundation have produced on joining perfectly the efforts of the participating universities, entities and professionals. It is in these privileged spaces where scientific reflection and good practices are combined, and where efficient policies of support to the family and innovation in the services that attend to them concur, in which the levels of excellence and effort that the service to the families requires, and especially to the most vulnerable in our society, is best achieved.

Acknowledgements

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