

## PUBLISHING

### HOW TO EDUCATE? ARE WE DOING IT WELL?

#### CONTRIBUTING TO THE ON GOING DEBATE IN THE LITERATURE ABOUT THE OPTIMUM PARENTAL EDUCATIONAL STYLE

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At the current time, those changes affecting the family unit (lifestyle, working needs, not always right educational attitudes...) cause many times confusion to families facing the possibility to find and answer to those daily situations. Some times being a parent represent to live high levels of satisfaction; but there are also significant levels of stress and suffering, experiences that generate dissatisfaction and frustration. The task is certainly complicated: improvisation is not an option and specific skills to face those challenges are required. Parents must respond to the emerging new educational challenges in order to reach an effective, positive and appropriate socialization for the optimal development of children and adolescents in a safe environment.

Research on education, parental educational practices or “educational styles”, topic of pedagogical and psychological literature during the last decades of the last century, has provided a wealth of knowledge and specific theories, but is still under investigation. From *Pedagogía Social, Revista Interuniversitaria* we want to participate in this debate and stimulate it through our pages if possible. For the moment, lets expose some aspects...

#### **Educational parent styles: form the typological or qualifier approach to the dimensional**

Most part the researches on relationship between parental educational styles and child and adolescent behaviour are based on Diana

Baumrind proposal (1967 and 1971), whose work represented a fundamental point of reference in the field of support and parental control, autonomy and personality development of children. The author also reviewed the positive influence of a neglectful or democratic style on gender, age, ethnicity, socioeconomic status and family structure (to see a the neglectful model history, check Baumrind, 2013). Baumrind's results were the reformulation of those by Maccoby and Martin (1983) showing how an authoritative parental style better transmitted norms and social values, getting more mature, autonomous and responsible children. In general, we start form the Baumrind traditional tripartite model, whereas three parental educational styles (“authoritative discipline”, “anti-authoritarian discipline” and “permissive discipline”) or the quadripartite later revised by Maccoby and Martin (1983) - authoritarian-reverse, authoritarian-repressive, permissive-indulgent and permissive-neglectful style-in the Anglo-Saxon literature, reinforced the authoritative parents prototype as the most beneficial in their children development. Thus, this theoretical suitability between the educational style and optimal psychosocial child and adolescent adjustment has been corroborated by various authors (Dornbusch, Ritter, Liederman, Roberts and Fraleigh, 1987; Dornbusch, Ritter, Mont-Reynaud, and Chen, 1987; Lamborn, Mounts, Steinberg and Dornbusch, 1991; Steinberg, Elmen and Mounts, 1989; Steinberg, Lamborn, Darling, Mounts and Dornbusch, 1994).

However, there is an important exception to the idea that authoritative style is always optimal for the children familiar socialization. There is empirical evidence that suggests that the combination of affection and imposition is not always associated with the best results in the children psychosocial well-being. Different studies developed in different cultural contexts suggested that the **authoritarian style** is the right one: American studies with ethnic minorities of African Americans (Deater-Deckard, Bates, Dodge & Pettit, 1996), Chinese (Chao, 1994, 2001) or multi-ethnic (Steinberg, Dornbusch & Brown, 2002). Those studies have pointed out the lack of cross-cultural validity of affection and control, as they are understood differently in some oriental cultures regarding those with the American culture. The Eastern traditional culture has been identified by very static gender roles where fathers have a closest relationship with sons and mothers with daughters. In addition, there are important differences in educational interaction: strict and emotionally distant fathers and less straight and more affectionate mothers. The strong control and the obedience -meaning care, concern and love- promoted by the parents, with the purpose of keeping the harmony and family unit, explain their authoritarian style. In regards of such situation, we were lead to the inclusion of a new typology: "chiao-shun or training style" (Chao, 1995), that emphasises the self-discipline, the obedience and the hard work of the child from early ages. The authoritarian practices of parental imposition and firmness, would only have effective results in collectivist and vertical cultures in which the parent-child relation is hierarchical and linked with the positive affection and the respect by the authority (Martínez & García, 2008).

On the other hand, another set of studies indicated that adolescents from **indulgent families** also get equal to or greater scores in different criteria than those of authoritative families. In this way, the high acceptance/involvement of parents together with a low severity/imposition defined as indulgent parental style is key to identify sons and daughters with best general profiles for psychosocial adjustment. So is noted in studies carried out in Spain (Calafat, García, Juan, Becoña & Fernández, 2014; Fuentes, García, Gracia & Alarcón, 2015; Garaigordobil & Aliri, 2012; García & Gracia, 2009, 2010; García, Pelegrina & Lendínez, 2002; Gracia, Lila y García, 2008; Martínez, Fuentes, García & Madrid, 2013; Musitu & García, 2004; Pérez Alonso-Geta, 2012); as well as in South American countries such as México (Villalobos, Cruz & Sánchez, 2004) or Brasil (Martínez, García & Yubero, 2007; Martínez & García, 2008); and also in works

developed in Germany (Wolfradt, Hempel, & Miles, 2003), Portugal (Rodrigues, Veiga, Fuentes & García, 2013) or Italy (Marchetti, 1997; Di-Maggio & Zappulla, 2014). All of them point out that sons and daughters of indulgent parents are not only as suitable as those from authoritative parents, but that even improve in the emotional and family self-concept, in hostility/aggression, emotional instability and negative vision of the world.

There is no doubt that these results reinforce the importance of acceptance/involvement for family socialization which is shared by the authoritative and indulgent styles, enabling the modelling of children behaviour, the establishment of a clear and well structured regime of rules as well as an intimate, open and spontaneous communication (Alegre, Benson & Pérez-Escoda, 2013; García & Gracia, 2010; Martínez, et al., 2013; Pérez, 2012).

Both the variety of obtained results in the various investigations as well as the different samples and methodologies used make it difficult to combine criteria or generalizable conclusions and reveal the absolute need to deepen in the construct validity.

Similarly, although the first approaches to the study of parental style and Diana Baumrind's results, using a qualifier or typological approach - comparing those whose parents are differentiated by the educational style, and that have been defined according to dimensions such as affection or control - have laid the foundations to combine and integrate the mode in which parents behave with their sons and daughters. Moreover, these works were completed and enriched by contributions from other researchers using a dimensional approach - relating some of the variables or most relevant dimensions of parental style to variables concerning their sons and daughters' adjustment or competence - (García, Cerezo, De la Torre, Carpio & Casanova, 2011; Oliva, Parra, Sánchez-Queija & López, 2007; Rivas, 2008). From that perspective, two fundamental assumptions are highlighted (Ceballos & Rodrigo, 1998): on the one hand, relations between parents and children are bi-directional; on the other hand, educational practices are only effective if they are adapted to the children age and promote their development. No doubt, both approaches are complementary.

Many of the issues considered from the 90s led to a change of perspective. While the models and the variables proposed during the second half of the 20th century were inductively obtained, in this decade deductive models based on complex theories of motivation and human development will be built; those will be focused on developing intrinsic instead of extrinsic motivations based on behavioral and psychological control.

## Some important dimensions in the parental relationships and the psychosocial adjustment of their child

**Affection** is one of the dimensions or variables that more attention has received from family socialization's researchers. That label (Oliva Delgado, 2006) is refers to aspects such as the emotional closeness, support, harmony or cohesion. There are many data supporting the importance of child and adolescent's social adjustment. Available data indicate that parents drives to: a higher self-esteem and psychological well-being (Cerezo, Casanova, De la Torre & Carpio, 2011; Darling & Steinberg, 1993; Steinberg & Silverberg, 1986; Oliva, Parra & Sánchez-Queija, 2002), a better scholar or academic adjustment (Im-Bolter, Zadeh & Ling, 2013; Mounts & Steinberg, 1995; Steinberg, Lamborn, Dornbusch & Darling, 1992), lower toxic substances consumption (Bahr & Hoffman, 2010; Becoña, Martínez, Calafat, Juan, Fernández & Secades, 2013; Calafat, et al., 2014; Parra & Oliva, 2006) and a lower behavioural problems (Aunola, Stattin & Nurmi, 2000; Pelegrina, García & Casanova, 2002). There are many studies manifesting the importance of some positive family relations (emotional cohesion and its adaptability) on emotional problems: as depressive adolescents (Milevsky, Schlechter, Netter & Kreehn, 2007; Oliva, Jiménez, Parra & Sánchez-Queija, 2008) or the influence over the capacity to face and overcome vital adverse and stressful events with more adapted behaviour producing more adapted and resilient individuals (Fuentes, et al., 2015; Milevsky, et al., 2007; Oliva et al., 2008; Suldo & Huebner, 2004). Therefore, it is noted the importance of fathers and mothers affective involvement in their child and adolescent socialization for a suitable psychological and emotional adjustment.

Regarding **control**, things appear to be less clear and we can't say that there is a linear relationship between control and adjustment. Researchers have not reached an agreement over the aspects that should be included under the label "control" (Oliva et al., 2007; García, De la Torre, Carpio, Cerezo & Casanova, 2014), such as the establishment of limits and the application of penalties for non-compliance, child's monitoring or direct supervision, responsibilities requirement, the knowledge that parents have of their child's activities, etc. Most of them do not separate the different dimensions of control, making it complicated know which of them related to their children psychosocial adjustment. Concerning these issues, currently a new line of performance under the considerations of "Self-determination Theory, in order to clarifying the "parental control" term

has been developed. The human being needs to satisfy three psychological needs for an optimal development and a good social adjustment: the need of competition, autonomy and affective relationship or connection. The social environment in which the subject interacts must promote the development of these three basic vital needs and the family environment plays a key role in this development. So that, there are family interaction that promotes the individual autonomy and family interaction contexts that exercise the control. From this point of view, parental control is a socializing strategy always with negative consequences in the development child and adolescent given that it thwarts the individual need for autonomy. On the contrary, family contexts promoting the autonomy would enhance this basic human need. From this perspective, parents exercising control would be rejecting the child's perspective and would be pushing them to behave in the way they want them to act. However, in a family atmosphere of autonomy support, parents empathize with the child perspective, supporting them so that they show their own opinions, goals and values. That option provide an adequate degree of choice and also reasoning when personal choice is limited by maternal and parental decisions (Soenens & Vansteenkiste, 2010).

**Promotion or autonomy promotion** has been widely studied (Hodges, Finnegan & Perry, 1999; Oliva, 2006). It refers to parental practices intended to the development of greater capacity in children to think, form their own opinions and make decisions for themselves; and above all, by questioning, exchanging views and being tolerant to ideas and dissenting elections. With regard to the consequences arising for the teenager, data indicate that parents promoting autonomy have more individualized children and with more adjustment and social competence.

Contributions on the aspect of the parental-child communication are also important, as it is **self-disclosure**, which refers to adolescents trend to spontaneously inform parents about their activities in the street, their friends, or relationships; in other words, of what they do when their parents are not present (Kerr & Stattin, 2000; Oliva et al., 2007). The disclosure of information in adolescence (Oliva et al., 2008) can meet at this stage a similar role to behavioural control in childhood, so it would be a key element in the democratic style from puberty.

Finally, we point out another line of investigation: **consistency and inconsistency in the educational style of parents** (parental agreement). In many cases, research is focused on the effect of the mother educational style (Beckwith & Cohen,

1989; Kim & Mahoney, 2004; Thompson, Raynor, Cornah, Stevenson, Sonuga-Barke, 2002), perhaps by the fact that usually that is still, despite some modifications, responsible for supervising activities of daily life and habits. In this case, it assumes that the father style is similar or irrelevant (García Linares et to the., 2014). On the other hand, certain studies the average score is considered and the attitudes of each parent are diluted in a single score. The works that have considered both parents (García Linares, et al., 2014; Mestre, Samper & Frías, 2004; Mc-Nally, Eisenberg & Harris, 1991) were differently valued by son or daughter about their relationship with the father and the mother. The general hypothesis is that regardless the predominant style, it has to be consistent given that inconsistency is harmful for the child development (Winster, Madigan & Aquilino, 2005). With regard to the consequences that low coherence can have on teenager adjustment Fletcher, Steinberg and Sellers (1999, see also Olive, Parra & Arranz, 2008;) (Simons & Conger, 2007) state that those adolescents that had an only democratic parent showed a greater competition that those with none, although father and mother were consistent in their styles. The benefits of having, at least, a democratic parent seem to overcome the negative effects that could arise from the lack of agreement.

In short, all the previously stated indicate that the educational style is a **multidimensional concept**, and that, beyond affection and control, there are other variables that should be taken into account. These brief pages reinforce the importance of parental socialization and the need for greater efforts by parents in aspects sometimes neglected: communication with children, friendly relations, interest in their problems, reasoned explanation of their actions, autonomy promotion, etc.

### **Practical implications: Promotion of the parental education**

The positive exercise of parenthood means that the primary concern of the parents must be the well-being and healthy development of the child and that they must educate their sons and daughters so that they can develop themselves the best possible at home, at school, with friends and the community. Understand by positive parenting the good treatment received by different people based in the capacity for loving, welcoming, caring for, calm; in synthesis, to protect and produce good reactions favouring the brain, cognitive, emotional and interpersonal development (Council of Europe, 2006; Sanders, Markie-Dadds

& Turner, 2003). Programs for parental education constitute one of those supports needed by the family in order to develop parenting skills or capabilities that allow to face the vital task of being father and mother.

Those programs have evolved along during the time and changing its objectives, content and methodology according to the conceptual approach and parent needs of each generation. In recent decades, there is a multiplicity of experiences in different contexts. Thus, we can highlight parental education programs internationally (Dinkemeyer, McKay & Dinkemeyer, 1998; Gordon, 2006; Kumpfer et al., 1989; Popkin 2002, 2008; Sanders, 1999, 2008), most of them are a technical model, driving parents purchase procedures and specific techniques for modification of the sons and daughters behaviour. The "Triple P" Positive Parenting Program (Sanders et al., 2003), designed at the University of Queensland Australia and implemented in more than twenty countries in the world, has shown that it generates positive changes in parenting skills, problems, behavioural and parental well-being, varying results depending on the intensity of the intervention and according to the delivery mode (individual, group and self-administered) showing best results in personalized interventions.

At the same time, the *national field* can point out program development of parental competencies based in empirical evidences through intervention group, in a context of primary or secondary intervention and that essentially adopt, an experiential methodology that favours a shared knowledge between the participating fathers and mothers. These programs can be applied in the multiple contexts or centres dispensed. As to say families and schools (Díaz-Sibaja et al., 2009; Equipo de Preescolar Na Casa, 1998; García Bacete & Forest, 2006; Maíquez et al., 2000; Torío et.al., 2013), social services (Hidalgo, et al., 2007; Rodrigo et al., 2000, 2008, 2010), in both contexts -schools and social services- (Maganto and Bartau, 2004; Martínez, 2009; Oliva, Hidalgo, Martín, Parra, Ríos & Vallejo, 2007) or eventually at social services and Proyecto Hombre or other community centre of drug addiction prevention (Orte et al., 2006; Larriba et al., 2004).

Parental group education enables spaces and exchanges meetings between mixed groups of mothers and fathers, highlighting the potential and resources that they have to face different daily situations and constitutes a effective psychoeducational resource to changes parental skills: emotional skills development, family skills development, social skills, organizational or management skills; as well as to acquire theoretical

relevant knowledge. In synthesis, it seems necessary that those parents organize the family scenario and develop positive educational upbringing styles.

It is crucial to find an appropriate way of relating with and educating their children, an educational style spacing the running times, which forces to reformulate the existing models or to extend the typology, without excluding that both options are necessary; as well as it is to consider and incorporate strategies addressing the complexity of

the different family situations that coexist in today's society.

All of this, and given its relevance to the families, and thus for society itself, must encourage us to continue working and delving into this complex subject with more determination if possible.

Susana Torío López

Facultad de Formación del Profesorado y Educación.  
Universidad de Oviedo  
Associate Editor de *PSRI*

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