

FAMILY EDUCATION



Family education influences in a very significant way. For instance there are children that before their mother came to the centre, would escape from class, fall asleep in the classroom... and now, I don't now, if it is because they have here her reference or because his mother is also interested in education, it is like "look mum..." (...) "look mum I have done this! ", "have you seen that I have behaved well?" "ask Conchi how good I was" (...) then this has really changed.¹

Education professional supporting Family Education

¹ Flecha, A. (2012). Family Education Improves Student's Academic Performance: Contributions from European Research. *Multidisciplinary Journal of Educational Research*, 2(3), 301-321. doi:10.17583/remie.2012.438. <http://www.hipatiapress.info/hpjournals/index.php/remie/article/view/remie.2012.16>, p. 315.

Family Education

Background

Family Education is one of the **Successful Educational Actions (SEAs)** identified in the research project **INCLUD-ED. Strategies for inclusion and social cohesion in Europe from education** (European Commission, 6th Framework Program, 2006-2011). INCLUD-ED analysed educational strategies that contribute to overcome inequalities and promote social cohesion, and those generating social exclusion, particularly focusing on vulnerable and marginalised groups. The SEAs supporting education of pupils at risk, have **universal components which have been showed to be transferable** in very diverse contexts, leading to educational success. Family education is used to improve education of children and youth in different contexts around the world.

Thanks to the SEAs presented in two international conferences in the European Parliament in Brussels, thousands of children in all over Europe have improved their achievement, increasing their opportunities to continue their school career successfully. The social and political impact of this project has been the reason why the European Commission has included it in the list of the top-10 research projects with the highest impact in Europe; INCLUD-ED is the only one from the socio-economic sciences and humanities selected to be in the list.

Family education is based on previous theories and research that have already demonstrated that the promotion of cultural and educational interactions between students and social agents, and more particularly with family members, enhance students' achievement. Certain family education and community engagement programmes that promote educational and cultural interactions have led students whose families have only a few books at home or low academic degrees to obtain excellent results in their academic achievement.

In line with the outstanding scientific approaches of learning sciences, Family Education involve and promote learning interactions with a dialogic approach of learning,² this is, promoting learning processes through dialogues that are *egalitarian*, recognize and build upon each person's *cultural intelligence*. They seek *transformation*, enhance the *instrumental dimension* of dialogue, are based on the value of *solidarity*, act as sources of *creation of meaning*, and rely on and promote *equal value of different origins*.

Family Education can be used as an independent practice but are also implemented in **Schools as Learning Communities**, along with other SEAs such as Dialogic Literary Gatherings and Interactive Groups. Learning Communities is a project based on a whole school intervention to overcome early school leaving and improve school performance and social cohesion through the implementation of successful educational actions. As a result of the improvements achieved in these schools, the European Commission and the Council of Europe have recommended considering *schools as learning communities* to reduce early school leaving and improve learning outcomes.³

How does Family Education work?

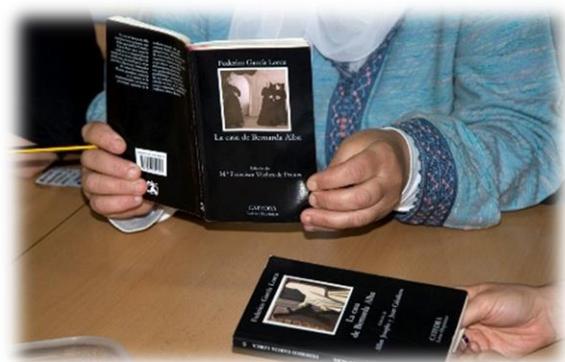
Family Education consists of family and other community members engaging in different learning activities in the school. The learning activities can be very diverse; the only condition to be met is that these activities are **defined** (the contents, the organisation as well as the schedule) **by the participants themselves in order to guarantee that the program directly respond to their needs and interests**, and follow a **dialogic orientation**. There is a great variety to offer among Family education programs.

² Aubert, A., Flecha, A., García, C., Flecha, R., & Racionero, S. (2008). *Aprendizaje dialógico en la sociedad de la información*. Barcelona: Hipatia; Flecha, R. (2000). *Sharing Words: Theory and Practice of Dialogic Learning*. Lanham, M.D: Rowman & Littlefield.

³ Communication from the EC (January 2011). *Tackling early school leaving: A key contribution to the Europe 2020 Agenda*.

Two examples Family Education implemented in schools:

Literacy and language classes for migrant families. This family education activity in schools includes literacy classes in the language of the host country for migrant families. These classes help mothers, fathers and other relatives to improve their language skills. This allows them, on the one hand, to improve their ability to communicate beyond their community and to have access to diverse social spaces such as health services and work and, on the other hand, to participate in their children's learning in the classroom and in the home context. These courses are coordinated by volunteers, always following the participants' own requests.



Federico García Lorca.

Dialogic Literary Gatherings (DLG). DLG are an educational and cultural activity in which people who do not have an academic background, even people who had never read a book, read and discuss books by authors of universal classic literature. These authors may include Tolstoy, Shakespeare, Homer, Kafka, Sophocles, Cervantes, Zola, and Orwell to mention some. DLG break away from the idea that families with a low SES or minority background cannot be interested in classic literature, as here we can find for instance Arab mothers in a Spanish school reading *La casa de Bernarda Alba* by

Family and community members participating in such activities **foster their own learning and that of their children**. This is possible because in this learning activity instrumental learning is central and respond to the needs and demands of the participants. The educational level of the families in the schools where it is implemented increases. As a result the family and educational contexts and the interactions among them are transformed, and the students' learning also improves.

In these schools, the children's curriculum does not differ from other schools, as these activities are not focused on children but on adults. However, Family Education reinforces many of the curricular contents children are taught in school. Family Education, as well as other SEAs are designed to break the "Mathew effect" of giving less to those with more difficulties, since it brings excellence for everyone, especially high level contents for those more disadvantaged.

Family and community members decide when to participate in Family Education, the type of activities that are implemented and the schedules. Volunteers in charge of these activities take the responsibility of the proper development of the Family Education activities in coordination with the school head or other participative management bodies such as mixed committees composed of teachers, families and other community members. The assessment of the activity, including the adjustment to the participants' need of support is based on dialogic processes of assessment and agreements related to learning between the volunteers and the participants.

Implementing Family Education does not entail additional costs for schools, neither for students, and schools do not receive additional funding to implement them. However, Family education **mobilises resources that are already available in the educational community –primarily community**

members and the families themselves– to enhance all students’ learning. As Family Education is developed with the already available resources, it is a sustainable educational action.

Need/challenge addressed

- Attendance and retention in education
- Reduction of behavioural problems
- Motivation for learning
- Learning achievement
- Multicultural coexistence
- Enhance educational level of families
- Empowerment of family members and other community members as educational agents
- Students-families-school relationship
- Coordination home-school about children’s education

Level of intervention

Family Education is open to any adult who wants to improve their educational background. It is especially aimed at family members with low educational background or migrant families that do not know the host country language. Family Education can be implemented in schools from a wide range of levels, including early childhood education and care, elementary, middle and high schools. The schools implementing Family Education may be public, private, religious, non-religious, placed in poor neighbourhoods, “middle-class” schools, as well as upper class neighbourhoods.

Intensity of the intervention

The intensity of the intervention is in each case decided by the participants, according to their educational needs and their possibilities to participate (taking into account work, family and other responsibilities).

Results

Some of the main achievements⁴ of Family Education are: 1) Increase in school performance (performance rates), 2) Involvement of all the community in learning processes and school, 3) Reducing absenteeism and early school leaving.

The Mediterrani School (Tarragona – Catalonia, Spain) is located in the Campclar neighbourhood at the outskirts of the city of Tarragona. The installation of petrochemical companies and the arrival of immigrants around 1960s caused a population increase and consequently the need for new schools. Specifically, the Mediterrani School started on February 1982. Lately, in the neighbourhood with two schools, the Mediterrani School got the reputation of a school whose pupils do not want to study. This school has about 60% of Roma students and 35% of students of Muslim religion, and a high proportion of students in severe situations of poverty.

⁴ The quantitative data presented as follows belong to a school implementing several SEAs, therefore the individual effect of Family Education cannot be isolated. The greater the number of SEAs implemented, the greater the improvement schools achieve.

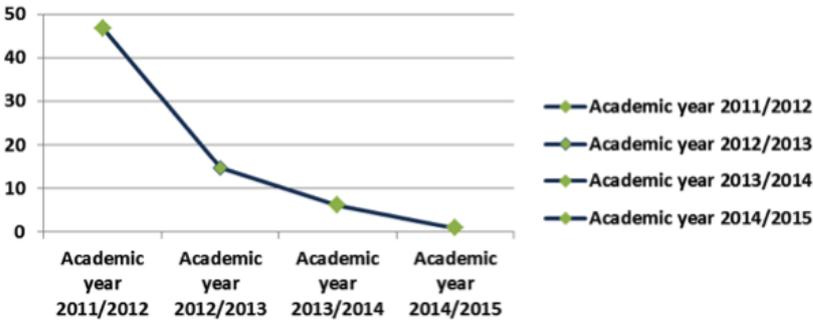
In this school, children used to have low literacy levels. Since Family Education started to be implemented, literacy classes have been organised by volunteers for mothers and fathers of pupils. The impact on learning improvement can be clearly observed in classes with youngest children. The percentage of students who achieve **reading and writing skills** in pre-primary education (5 years old) increased by 58,95 percentage points from year 2011-2012 to year 2014-2015.

Academic year 2011-2012	Academic year 2014-2015
21,05%	80%

Percentage of 5-year-old students achieving reading and writing skills in pre-primary education (in 2011-2012 and 2014-2015). Source: school data.

The school, traditionally had also very high rates of absenteeism. It was an increasing reality until the school year 2012-2013 when the school became a Learning Community and started implementing SEAs, including Family Education, what in consequence changed this trend. The following chart shows the **decrease in absenteeism** from 46,52% in 2011-2012 to 0,94% in 2014-2015.

Percentage of pupil enrolments that are regular absentees			
	Morning	Afternoon	Mean
Academic year 2011/2012	40%	53,45%	46,72%
Implementation of SEAs (Family Education and Others)			
Academic year 2012/2013	10%	19,35%	14,67%
Academic year 2013/2014	5,37%	6,79%	6,08%
Academic year 2014/2015	1,26%	0,63%	0,94%



Student absenteeism (between 2011-2012 and 2014-2015). Source: school data.

The Mediterrani School is seeing an **increase in family participation**. In 2012-2013, 22 family members were engaged in 6 different Family Education activities held in the school, and in 2014-2015, 19 Muslim mothers were participating in a course of oral Spanish and 25 mothers in a Spanish writing course. This **active participation of family members** and their interest in education **overcomes stereotypes** related to migrants' interest and success in education. Besides improving their personal skills, Family Education is helping participants to **achieve official certifications**. This was the case of two Roma mothers who participated in the course to obtain the certificate of instrumental learning: both of them obtained the certificate.

The experiences observed in other schools show similar benefits. A responsible of the educational administration reflected on the impact that Family Education has both on family members and students:

*The benefits were not just for the parents, of course, they were for the children because the parents' self-esteem grew, their ability to relate to their children grew, to manage relationships, the actual skills of reading to your children...they were given the confidence and the skills to be able to do that.*⁵

Teachers reflect on the benefits it has for students:

(...) when they see their mothers, because some of them [the mothers] come to our class to learn to read or write, they come and stay during the classes. This motivates them [the students].

*In staff meetings we have sometimes discussed the fact that specific families which are following classes... Well, until now, their children never did their homework, and now they do it.*⁶

Because of the positive results, the number of schools implementing Family Education have greatly increased since the 90s. At the moment, **more than 200 schools implement Family Education in Europe and more than 300 in Latin America.**

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⁵ Flecha, A. (2012). Family Education Improves Student's Academic Performance: Contributions from European Research. *Multidisciplinary Journal of Educational Research, 2*(3), 301-321. doi:10.17583/remie.2012.438. <http://www.hipatiapress.info/hpjournals/index.php/remie/article/view/remie.2012.16>, p. 314.

⁶ Flecha, A. (2012). Family Education Improves Student's Academic Performance: Contributions from European Research. *Multidisciplinary Journal of Educational Research, 2*(3), 301-321. doi:10.17583/remie.2012.438. <http://www.hipatiapress.info/hpjournals/index.php/remie/article/view/remie.2012.16>, p. 313.

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Further information

INCLUD-ED presentation video: <http://creaub.info/included/2012/03/18/mediaresource/>

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