



# Dreams of Higher Education in the Mediterrani School Through Family Education

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Through Learning Communities, schools and their communities may play a key role in overcoming inequalities suffered by vulnerable populations. Learning Communities implement Successful Educational Actions (SEAs), one of which is Family Education. This action focuses on promoting basic education among community members, in addition to other adult educational and cultural activities. In this context, SALEACOM. Overcoming inequalities in schools and Learning Communities: Innovative education for a new century (2015–2017) is a Marie Curie RISE project that develops interdisciplinary solutions for and with learners most heavily affected by inequalities, including access to higher education and its quality. In this article, we focus on one experience from the Mediterrani School (Spain), where we work through SALEACOM. This school was known as a ghetto school until 2012, when they decided to transform the school into a Learning Community and to apply SEAs. This article analyses the impact of the Family Education programme in relation to families and children's expectations of higher education and how these expectations affected children's results. Family Education started in the Mediterrani School in the academic year 2012–2013, when the school and families conducted adult training courses. Three years later, family education had a massive response from the community, when 63 community members, 41% of the Roma enrolled in training courses. Since then, all courses are established according to the community's decisions through their active participation. Following a communicative methodology, we conducted semi-structured interviews with a communicative orientation among some of the participants in these adult courses. The communicative analysis showed that Family Education allowed the participants, and the members of community expected continued education throughout life and access to the university. The Adult Education promoted in the Mediterrani School can have a transformative effect on educational outcomes, opening possibilities for personal and social change.

**Keywords:** learning communities, vulnerable populations, Roma, adult education, family involvement, family education, diversity, higher education

## INTRODUCTION

The concern about education and the lack of accessibility for the entire population is a global problem. Preliminary research (Giroux and Flecha, 1992; Ogbu, 1997; Orfield and Lee, 2005; Ferguson et al., 2007) has shown a link between poverty and educational opportunities. Specifically, McLoyd (1998) showed that living in extreme poverty persistently has particularly negative effects. In this sense, poverty alleviation is one of the five priority themes of the Europe 2020 strategy adopted by the European Council (European Commission, 2010a) that commits EU actors and Member States to work for smart, sustainable and integrated growth (Valls and Padros, 2011). Education and permanent education became a key strategy in European policies guaranteeing immigrants' social and economic integration (De Paola and Brunello, 2016). Immigrant and Roma students are two groups that have historically experienced the greatest educational inequalities resulting from segregation and low expectations (Arabadjieva, 2016; Miguel-Luken and Solana-Solana, 2017).

The right to education is a fundamental human right, reflected in a free compulsory primary and secondary education and the possibility of accessing other levels of studies without discrimination. "The development of high quality education systems is a key factor to help guarantee full social inclusion for everyone, as well as the development of a competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy, and greater social cohesion in Europe" (INCLUD-ED, 2007, p.4). When dropout rates are reduced, educational success and social impact in terms of the completion of upper secondary education and participation in tertiary education (European Commission, 2009) are related both to social inclusion and access to various social areas such as employment, housing, health and political participation, access to resources, the use of public institutions and the availability of personal networks (Rusk, 2003; Briggs, 2005).

In this context, the integrated project (7th priority of the 6th Framework Program) INCLUD-ED, Strategies for inclusion and social cohesion in Europe based on Education (2006–2011) provides the keys to successful educational actions (SEAs) (INCLUD-ED Consortium, 2009), through which trajectories of social transformation are generated. Some SEAs studied through the INCLUD-ED Project are interactive groups, extending learning time (after-school activities), dialogic literary gatherings (de Botton et al., 2014), and family education (Flecha, 2015). As explained by Flecha and Soler (2013), these actions are transferable to different countries and to many environments because they contain universal components (Racionero-Plaza and Puig, 2017). Learning Communities, based on SEAs, are inclusive educational experiences that confront new social needs while raising an equal educational response by working toward social cohesion. Schools and their community environments through Learning Communities may have a key role in overcoming inequalities suffered by vulnerable populations. In this article we focus on the SEA: Family Education, which focuses on the family and the community but is part of UNESCO's definition (2016, p. 6) of adult education:

"Adult learning and education is a core component of lifelong learning. It comprises all forms of education and learning that aim to ensure that all adults participate in their societies and the world of work. It denotes the entire body of learning processes, formal, non-formal and informal, whereby those regarded as adults by the society in which they live, develop and enrich their capabilities for living and working, both in their own interests and those of their communities, organizations and societies."

The case study presented in this article shows how Family Education contributes to the transformation of the expectations of higher education and children's expectations of reaching higher education in an urban primary school in Catalonia (Spain). The article presents the results of the SALEACOM project (2015–2017)<sup>1</sup>, a Marie Skłodowska-Curie Research and Innovation Staff Exchange (RISE) call. These crucial challenges are addressed by identifying SEAs that overcome the educational exclusion of the most vulnerable students ("About Us – SALEACOM Project", 2018).

As an introduction, on the one hand, this article presents what the previous literature described regarding Family Education as a successful action and, on the other, the kind of community participation that has been proven scientifically to be successful for the community and its children.

In addition to the introduction, the article is structured in four sections that provide data and evidence of a direct relationship between Family Education, expectations of higher education and the improvement of children's academic results. First, we detail the theoretical approach used for Family education and its impact on the education and expectations of students; second, we explain the methodology used to develop the research and how it has been carried out as well as the chosen sample and the techniques used; third, we present the main results regarding how Family Education contributes to academic improvement and expectations toward higher education; finally, the conclusion offers a brief summary on the article's main contributions.

## Breaking the Cycle of Inequality Through Family Education

The promotion of Family Education, especially in highly vulnerable contexts, shows results that can offer alternatives to school failure in children from these contexts, thereby breaking the cycle of inequality that exists alongside low socioeconomic levels. Extensive research finds that socioeconomic level is a significant predictor of academic success for young people of racial or ethnic minorities (Furstenberg et al., 1999; Malecki and Demaray, 2006), especially in those families that have a low educational level and low expectations (Oreopoulos et al., 2006). Different studies point to the importance of high parenthood expectations in relation to children's academic success (Castro et al., 2015). Parents' completed levels of education may, for example, affect children's academic achievement (Black

<sup>1</sup>This project aims to develop interdisciplinary solutions for and with learners most heavily affected by inequalities, including access to higher education and its quality. The SALEACOM Project, begun in January 2015 and slated for completion in December 2017 (36 months), creates a global research network with a shared goal: overcome inequalities affecting children and youth systematically underserved.

et al., 2005). According to Fall and Roberts (2012), research consistently shows that students of poor or single-parent families whose parents do not have a high school diploma are at a higher risk of school dropout compared to students of families without risk factors. One of these potential support factors is social support (Malecki and Demaray, 2006).

Different results are derived from the different availabilities of cultural, social and economic resources in the family that can limit educational opportunities and, as a consequence, children's first working experiences entering the labor market. Thus, family background's effect on education and labor market entry is repeatedly demonstrated (Dustmann, 2004; Krause and Schüller, 2014; Jose et al., 2017). Research indicates that those with a higher educational level have more opportunities in the labor market; conversely, those with lower educational levels tend to have temporary jobs that are precarious (De Vries and Wolbers, 2005; Santa Cruz et al., 2011). In this context, European organizations such as the European Commission (2010b) and European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (2014) have noted that the lack of academic training, precariousness and inactivity are key factors that increase the vulnerability to poverty. Considering this reality, UNESCO et al. (2015, p. 69) notes that "it is equally necessary and urgent to promote the financing of literacy programmes for young people and adults, as well as opportunities for learning, education and adult training, in a perspective of lifelong learning." Practices demonstrate the association between Family Education and children's performance; for example, the School Development Program (James Comer, Yale University), Accelerated Schools (Henry Levin, Stanford University), Success for All programmes (Robert Slavin, John Hopkins University) and Learning Communities (Ramón Flecha, Universitat de Barcelona—CREA).

## Family Education in Learning Communities

In particular, Learning Communities from SEAs is a project that begins at school but integrates the entire community. Learning Communities is a project of social and cultural transformation of an educational center and its surroundings to achieve an Information Society for all people (Valls, 2000). Learning Communities are considered relevant means of combatting social fragmentation and exclusion, as they promote and attribute a key role to families and the community. Thus, Family Education is considered one of the tools for overcoming this social exclusion through dialogic learning, according to which students learn through dialogue and interaction between all educative agents with whom they are related inside and outside the classroom (Elboj et al., 2002).

INCLUD-ED shows that social inequalities can be overcome by promoting the education of families and demonstrated that the family environment can be transformed. INCLUD-ED identified Successful Educational Actions (SEAs), which are practices that have given the best results in education and that have been endorsed by the international scientific community. These actions are characterized by reorganizing the resources available in the school and the community to support the academic success of all students rather than segregating some according to their capacity or reducing their education and

depriving them of opportunities. SEAs improve educational outcomes for many children and adolescents (Flecha and Soler, 2013). These actions are derived from a rigorous analysis of educational systems, especially 27 case studies in schools attended by families of low socioeconomic status who still obtained excellent educational outcomes in schools throughout Europe (Valls and Padros, 2011).

In this framework, one SEA is Family Education, a successful action we focus on in this article. Family Education programmes address non-academic families. This action in particular emphasizes promoting basic education among community members, in addition to other adult educational and cultural activities. When children are supported by these environments, their interest toward school and participation increases. The educational research shows the benefits derived from establishing strong and honest links between the members of the school community are collected widely (Epstein, 1991). As the literature presents it, mature students who participate in Lifelong Learning programmes have the opportunity to develop skills and knowledge and improve their personal lives and community well-being (Merriam and Kee, 2014). For these reasons, especially in lower socioeconomic students, social support should be considered, especially parents and teachers, as an objective for intervention (Malecki and Demaray, 2006; Tellado, 2017). Through a study carried out by Carrillo et al. (2017), as in the case of Family Education, dialogical approaches can contribute to the community's developmental processes in contexts that are severely affected by racial segregation and poverty.

## Community and Family Participation

Another major issue in the scientific literature highlighted in this article is the type of community/family participation that is successful in the school, as this is a subject of profound debate. First, to address reproductive theories (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1970), several authors develop theories able to transform inequalities, since they recognize the ability of agents to transform their situations (Giroux, 1988; Bernstein, 1990; Freire, 1997; Touraine, 1997). Apple and Bene (1997), through their inclusive school models, show that education can be a transformative tool for social inequalities.

Currently, international consensus relates to how schools can modify people's life trajectories and, consequently, their social structures (Giroux and Flecha, 1992; DeLuca and Rosenblatt, 2010). Giddens (1995) tells us that we are all influenced by our social context, our structure, and our developing activity in the social world around us; at the same time, we are structured by it, so we can create and modify the environment. Empirical evidence maintains that family involvement in schools improves children's learning (Dearing et al., 2006).

Hidalgo et al. (2002) defend families' participation in schools as more important than aspects such as family structure, socioeconomic level or parents' education, among others. The benefits of families or community members' school participation indicate an independence from economic level, family background, educational level or belonging to a vulnerable group (Henderson and Mapp, 2002; Koutroba et al., 2006).

Specifically, the literature indicates that families' participation in educational centers contributes generally to the children's educational success (Epstein, 1991; Sheldon and Epstein, 2002; Barron et al., 2010). Particularly, Dearing et al. (2006) find that families' increased involvement in schools improves children's literacy levels. Furthermore, even in those cases when family involvement levels are low, a gap exists between the literacy performances of children with either more or less educated parents; when family involvement is high, this gap disappears. In addition, when families participate and the center improves its educational quality (OCDE, 1997; Flecha, 2009; Tellado and Sava, 2010; INCLUD-ED, 2011), behavioral and affective areas of children's development are affected, as is the quality of parent-child interpersonal relationships, and positive attitudes toward school are generated (Epstein, 2001; Pomerantz et al., 2005).

In this sense, family participation increases children's cultural and educational interactions with these social agents and can contribute to reversing the tendency of school failure, even in children coming from non-academic families (Rogoff et al., 2001; INCLUD-ED Consortium, 2009; Diez et al., 2011; Oliver et al., 2011). Therefore, measures and policies must be implemented based on family participation (Giroux and Flecha, 1992; Teddlie and Reynolds, 2001; DeLuca and Rosenblatt, 2010).

In many cases, family participation in the educational system in the European context is materialized through the associations of mothers and fathers with the School Council (Egido, 2014). However, this participation is insufficient to transform reality. Comellas (2009) states that the presence of relatives in educational decisions related to their children is usually guaranteed, but a lack of real participation continues. Thus, INCLUD-ED acquires special significance with regard to the current evolution of scientific knowledge about European education and its relation to social exclusion and inclusion (Valls and Padros, 2011). Five community types are identified in this project according to the level and area of involvement.

INCLUD-ED's results indicate that not all types of family participation have the same effect or improve school performance (INCLUD-ED Consortium, 2009). Of the five, two do not have any kind of effect; specifically, informative participation and consultative participation are based on simple information or consultation without any kind of decision-making power. Despite favoring contact and coexistence, these two forms of family involvement play a very small role in terms of results and continuity in studies. As Wenger (2001, p. 22) also noted, in relation to participation, it "not only refers to local events of commitment to certain activities and with certain people but also to a process of greater scope, consisting of participating actively in the practices of social communities." Research shows that only the three following factors were likely to have a higher impact on students' learning:

- (1) Evaluative participation. This activity involves family and community members in the evaluation of students' learning processes or school programmes.
- (2) Decisive participation. Decision-making processes occur by becoming representatives in the school's decision-making bodies. The democratic participation of families and the community in decision-making processes helps to

promote cultural acceptance and to improve the educational performance of children belonging to cultural minorities previously silenced, as Weis and Fine (1993) noted. The recent study by García-Carrión et al. (2017) shows that the engagement of families and other community members in a school's decision making can prevent early school leaving among vulnerable youth and increases their enrolment in secondary education.

- (3) Educative participation. This activity occurs when families and other community members participate in students' learning process or in their own training as adults within the center. In the first case, people from the community, and specifically family members, join the centre's academic activities, thereby contributing human resources to learning. In the second case, families and members of the community participate in training programmes. This type of participation includes attending family education programmes that responds to family's needs such as literacy courses, graduate courses, dialogical literary gatherings or sewing classes, among others.

Redding (2000) emphasizes that when families are related to each other, social capital increases; children receive the attention of a greater number of adults; and parents share guidelines, norms, and educational experiences. This fact implies that we must build a meeting space, a school for everyone and everyone. Freire (1997, p.94) argues that the fight against discrimination, against the negotiation of our being, is only victorious if we do the obvious—unite in diversity—an essential principle in Learning Communities.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

The results presented in this article are obtained from the research project entitled SALECOM (2015-2017). The communicative methodology (CM) of research (Gómez et al., 2011; Flecha and Soler, 2013) is used in this case study, applying its principles, which are recommended by the European Commission for their suitability in working scientifically with groups belonging to cultural minorities (Puigvert et al., 2012). The CM is recognized as one of the methodological approaches that achieves the greatest social impact, especially in the educational (Gómez and Holford, 2011) and political spheres (European Commission, 2010b). In the CM, knowledge arises from the dialogue between the scientific evidence contributed by the researchers and the community, who from their life experiences (Habermas, 1984) make fundamental contributions interpreting the school's reality. That is, we apply the construction of dialogic knowledge (Gómez, 2014) with ethnic voices during the entire research process. This dialogue shows in previous searches (for example: INCLUD-ED, 2006-2009; Flecha and Soler, 2013) how it can increase the investigation's social utility and transformative expectations. In this sense, the social sciences face the challenge of going beyond diagnosing the situation of poverty and exclusion to have a social impact or to contribute to the formulation of policies and measures based on evidence oriented to solve social problems (Flecha et al., 2015; Girbés-Peco et al., 2015).

The methodology used in the research contemplates the seven principles of the CM. Firstly, universality of language and starting from the premise that all humans regardless of their culture, ethnic, or academic background can communicate and interact with others. Secondly, people as transformative social agent, for this reason, is essential the creation of liberation spaces. Thirdly communicative rationality, people use knowledge to search for a wide consensus rather than imposing. “The people seeking to change their own situation who participate in the research contribute to that dialogue with their interpretations and reflections based on their daily-life experiences and common sense” (Gómez et al., 2011, p. 242). In the same line, the fourth principle is the common sense. The fifth principle is related to the premise of an interpretive hierarchy, the comments of the people under the study may be as solid or more than those of the research team. Then, equal epistemological level, the investigators participate in the research under the same conditions as the people under the study. And finally, dialogic knowledge the knowledge resulting from the research is the result of a dialogue between all the agents.

## The Mediterrani School: A Communicative Case Study

To prepare this case study, first, a secondary documentary analysis was carried out. On the one hand, the notes of the children of the different courses have been consulted, in order to see the results. And on the other hand, participation data in adult training have been consulted, observing the number of participants in each activity and the results achieved. Data provided was used to contextualize and thoroughly know the school as well as to obtain evidence of the school’s transformation.

Likewise, the three authors of this article are volunteers in the Mediterrani School, so they have direct contact with different school agents, a fact that facilitated the possibility of carrying out the fieldwork and built the trust participants had when explaining their thoughts and experiences.

The Mediterrani School is located in Campclar, a peripheral district of Tarragona (Spain), where 11,424 citizens (Tarragona City Council, 2018) (“Ajuntament de Tarragona”, 2018) live. This neighborhood was created in the 1960s as a result of the city’s industrialization with the installation of petrochemical companies. Since its inception, it has been characterized by high rates of immigration and poverty; in Tarragona city, the poverty rate does not exceed 19%, but in Campclar, it reaches 48%.

This school is characterized by approximately 70% of students of Roma ethnicity and approximately 30% of the Muslim religion. The high rates of students with severe situations of poverty and a high rate of absenteeism has grown since its inception. A clear example is the 2011–2012 academic year, when absenteeism reached 48.4% in the mornings and 59.05% in the afternoons. Faced with this situation and a lack of solutions, in 2011, the center opted for the transformation to a Learning Community<sup>2</sup> and the application of Successful Educational Actions. A dialogical procedure began in which

researchers from the Community of Researchers in Excellence for All (CREA), families, teachers, children and community members, through an egalitarian dialogue, agreed to become a Learning Community. As one of the first stages of transformation in the Learning Community, all educational agents dreamed about the school they wanted. By sharing the families’ dreams, they realized one commonplace trait: many family members dreamed that students have the same expectations for their children as others do. Families made it clear that they did not want concessions. They wanted their children to learn. To achieve this dream, many families acquired a commitment from the start with the school. With relatives’ demands and leadership’s persistence, the school has expanded the educational offerings, and this year (2017–2018) begins the first year of secondary school.

Family Education started in the academic year 2012–2013, when the school and families conducted adult training courses. Specifically, in adult training, the type of activities that were developed in these 5 years varied depending on family members’ needs and demands. All activities aimed at improving the skills and knowledge necessary for today’s society.

In the Mediterrani School, the most in-demand courses are instrumental training courses. These courses are focused on adults with low SES to increase their skills in reading, writing, and elementary calculations. Some of them are oriented to prepare the participants to take exams to access vocational training. In the case of Mediterrani School families, they prepare for the primary and secondary school graduate exams. These courses are attended by people who did not finish their primary or secondary education and people who graduated in their native country with certifications that are not recognized in Spain.

In the 2015–2016 school year, two mothers, Lorena and Amina, passed the instrumental exam and obtained their official certification after the training they received at the Mediterrani School. Lorena was the first Roma mother in the school who took the course at the same school and passed the exam. Next, she planned to sign up for the graduate school, asked for the assessment to fulfill the need she had for a driving license; thereupon, she signed up at the driving school. Passing the Instrumental Training exam encouraged her, in her own words, to feel more intelligent. In the 2017–2018 school year, she attended the secondary education training course. On the other hand, Amina, after passing the exam, began the secondary education training course. Amina also participates in other activities both inside and outside the school, particularly in dialogical literary gatherings (DLGs).

DLGs are another form of adult education that takes place each year. The majority of the participants are Moroccans, but Roma women also participate. DLGs are exceptional for the diversity among the participants: women with or without academic degrees and from different cultures, ages and religions. In this space, dialogues, critical reflections, and knowledge constructions are shared around a work of universal classical literature. For example, participants at the Mediterrani School have read *Bodas de sangre* and *The House of Bernarda Alba*,

<sup>2</sup>See more information: <http://utopiadream.info/ca/> (Accessed on 27 April 2018).

two Spanish classics written by Federico García Lorca, and *The Arabian Nights*. The participants show their satisfaction and taste for reading. Likewise, reading is part of their daily lives, and they share it with their relatives or friends. This fact causes the gatherings to pique the interest of other people who want to read the same book and participate in the literary gatherings, even among people who cannot read and write fluently. Therefore, during 1 year, a literacy group was created that focused on the readings, and they read and prepared the contributions in relation to the chosen book. Currently, people who cannot read participate in the gatherings.

At the same time, oral and written Spanish courses are conducted during the whole course. Catalan is also conducted during a quarter of each year (a co-official language in Catalonia). These language courses focus on literacy while aiming to teach a new language. Therefore, the main objective is to read and write texts in Spanish and Catalan, according to students' personal and social needs. Following the premise of conducting training that would be necessary for the participants, relatives showed their interest in learning computer skills. For this purpose, during one academic year, a course was held in relation to information and communication technologies (ICT). It brought basic notions about ICT to the participants. The contents included the use of the computer, treatment of digital information, and navigation and communication in digital environments.

Three years after the start of Family Education, the school registered a massive response from the community, when 63 community members, 41% of the Roma enrolled in the training courses. Currently, 5 years later, approximately 80% of family members participate in learning activities. All courses are established according to the community's decisions through their active participation. The transformation of the school into a Learning Community where families have an educational participation means that the school's transformation quickly obtained results that demonstrated the school's change. For example, in 2011–2012, after embracing the Learning Community project, the enrolment rate increased by more than 66%, family participation in the center increased by 30%, and the absenteeism rate decreased from near 59% to less than 5%. Better academic results were also seen.

## Sample

In short, the Mediterrani School was selected for the project because it fulfilled the four requirements: (1) it was located in a high poverty area (2) where the community has a high unemployment rate, and (3) most students were characterized by a low socio-economic status and (4) belonged to vulnerable groups. The head of the Mediterrani School helped us in the final selection of participants using the following criteria: (1) involved in family education for more than 2 years, (2) involved in the school participating as a volunteer, (3) member of a vulnerable group living in a poor situation, (4) and having children in the school.

Following these criteria, six mothers were selected. Three of them were participating in a course to prepare for official certification of a primary education exam, and the fourth was a

participant who passed the exam, and the other two participants in the Dialogical Literary Gatherings. Finally, two students<sup>3</sup>, whose mothers are participating in the Family Education courses, were interviewed.

The interviews of the students were conducted in the school, and in the case of the mothers they were given the choice of deciding where they felt most comfortable, in order to generate a dialogical and egalitarian space. Therefore, through the CM, it is possible to include the knowledge and interpretations of families from cultural minority groups through egalitarian dialogue with researchers, at the same time they highlighted the difficulties encountered in family education processes.

## Data Collection

Throughout the SALEACOM project, quantitative and qualitative data collection techniques are implemented, as well as surveys, communicative daily life stories, semi-structured interviews and communicative focus groups. The concrete material for this article is based only in qualitative techniques, semi-structured interviews and a communicative daily life story.

- (1) One communicative daily life story with a one mother, Dina. This technique, based on reflective dialogue, enhances the reflection and interpretation of the person's daily life and focuses on the present moment and on the narrator's interpretations of their lives. The dialogue is conducted between a researcher and a person whose perceptions are evaluated to go "beyond constructing a biography and obtain an interactive interpretation of the past, present, and future life" (García-Yeste, 2014, p. 925). One of the advantages of using this technique is that the interviewer, the researcher, can introduce scientific concepts to the discussion, so interviewees find themselves connected to them and associate them with their own experiences (Ramis et al., 2014).
- (2) Seven semi-structured interviews with a communicative orientation for five mothers and two students. Two interview scripts were designed, one for mothers and one for children. These interviews are different from the traditional ones because they follow the postulates of the communicative approach. Basically, during the interview the interviewers introduce the accumulated academic knowledge about the researched subject and the interviewed people can take it into account when they answer the questions and make the contributions from their daily vision. Thus, interviewers break with the traditional hierarchy which establish differences between researcher (subject) and researched (object) and create an egalitarian space of intersubjective dialogue, highlighting the common sense of the participants and their capacity to understand critically the reality, contributing to transform it (Gómez et al., 2006). All participants contributed with their knowledge and experience in relation to the research topic.

<sup>3</sup>To guarantee the anonymity of participants, the names used throughout the article are pseudonyms.

## Data Analysis

This methodology focuses on social situations and personal processes, which are analyzed by identifying two dimensions: exclusionary (elements that perpetuate inequality and exclusion) and transformative (elements that contribute to overcome these inequalities) (Gómez et al., 2006). In this article, we focus on the second dimension, the transformative, highlighting the aspects of family education that promote opening possibilities for personal and social change about university access. In that way, this dimension shows the social impact of Family Education and the CM (Gómez et al., 2010; Macías and Redondo, 2012).

The contributions made by the participants are analyzed according to the criteria of the communicative techniques. The interviews were recorded, subsequently transcribed and then the data obtained was analyzed. They are structured on both dimensions, exclusionary and transformative and were classified in six categories of analysis: (1) Impact on the participants themselves, (2) Participation, motivation and knowledge acquisition, (3) Changes in family roles, (4) Impact on coexistence, (5) Impact on boys and girls, (6) Characteristics and elements of the environment. Likewise, the key characteristics and other information are also included in the analysis table.

## RESULTS: ADULT EDUCATION OPENING PERSONAL AND SOCIAL CHANGES

According to the interviewed mothers, the main motivations for participating in adult training are the desires to help their children complete their homework and, in general, participate in their learning process. The lack of referents for students' environments who have reached university studies is a remarkable factor. As a result of the exclusion and repeated educational failure that the mothers have suffered in their life trajectories, they have a negative self-concept. In this sense Lorena, referring to her Roma family, tells us, "we have never been to university." Likewise, the case study presented in this article shows that the transformation of the school into a Learning Community increases educational expectations. The main contributions are presented below.

After 6 years of relatives' involvement in adult education at the Mediterrani School, personal changes are observed that help change dynamics in the homes. In many cases, mothers have very low educational levels because they dropped out of school early, and participation in adult training caused them to acquire instrumental skills for helping their children do homework or even create spaces for joint learning where mother and daughter do their homework together, as explained by Lucía:

"I also have homework, and they too, and then we sit together to do it."

In the same context, Manuela tells us how doing homework together with her daughter becomes a motivation, since her daughter encourages her to continue studying:

"She arrives at home and she already knows we are going to work together. We have homework to do and she explains it to me and I

learn, and I also teach her what I know. And she says to me, mum, you are so smart!"

This support, along with that from the husband, is fundamental, as the mothers themselves point out, since it motivates students to continue studying. In this context, another mother, Lorena, shows the interest and the concern her children show regarding her learning as their mother:

"My children always ask me when I have exams, if I have homework..."

This mother shows how her self-esteem has also improved after her participation in school. She realizes that the work she does is important for her children, a fact that also increases her motivation to continue learning. On the other hand, the improvement in adult learning also causes a positive emotional impact.

In the same way, mothers perceive the sense and the meaning of the learning developed in the school. Due to their participation, they also conduct self-reflection and assessment. Therefore, they are encouraged to continue studying, as Dina says:

"I am going to encourage [my children] to go to the institute and that they pass everything they can."

The children themselves perceive it. When asked if he likes to go to school with his mother Kalifa responds:

Yes (...), because if I am there and I am seeing that she studies. And of course, it's important because I learn more.

Overcoming personal barriers means that people are empowered and can become a role model for others. The same mother, Dina, adds the following:

"I am an example for them [their children], I am the example, if I have made it they can make it."

The training makes it possible for the participants to feel they can restart (or even start) their educational trajectories and feel that they are capable of learning. They modify their expectations and their expectations toward their children because now they see higher education as a possibility. Now the children dream of being doctors, biotechnologists, anthropologists... And we know that for that reason they must go to the university. Mohamed's answer emphasizes it:

"... If I get the graduate, I can do the same with the university degree"

Mothers like Dina are an example for their children to continue studying because if she can do it, children feel they can do it too. This feeling is essential for families who have never entered university. Related to this fact, the results of the children both in the examinations and in the standardized tests of the Generalitat

(Catalan Government) have improved significantly. Loli started only 3 months ago; she brings her children to school and she participates in adult education courses. She also acknowledges that her both children had a very low educational level, since they came from a school with low expectations. Despite it, she explained the following:

“Well, the boy is getting good grades, for example, the girl was always very good at learning, but she is doing what other children are doing in the second grade and there are seconds-graders who do not reach the level she has; because the girl has a seconds-grader level in only three months, in three months.”

On the other hand, through their testimonies, they also show us the importance of creating social networks. As we have seen, Family Education empowers—in this case, mothers in their private lives—but it also gives them security. They acquire commitment in the social framework of the school and the community. Adult training is a space where the community members know one another since they learn and coexist together. Prior to the school’s transformation, they took their children to the school, but they did not pass through the door or interact, but after they started participating in training activities, they reinforced the bonds between different community members. Dina explains:

“We gather here [in the school]. We have a good time because you are with them [other mothers] and we talk and laugh. Before this happened, when we met on the street “hello” “hello,” but now, when we meet, we stop to chat for a while because this has united us.”

Thus, in addition to instrumental learning, these spaces encourage people to overcome the isolation that many families may feel, since, as mentioned before, most of the families in the school are immigrants. Therefore, this trust between relatives helps families to work together and discuss what problems have been found and how these have been overcome. Families themselves conduct community mentoring and peer support, which increases social cohesion in the center and the neighborhood.

Social transformations result from community members’ own participation in a dialogic way at school. Relatives’ testimonies show the transformation of their dynamics and educational expectations possible with the families’ participation, since from their own Family Education experiences, participants make sense of the education. In short, as Manuela explains, they want their children to continue studying:

“What I want now for the future of my children and my daughter, although I am half illiterate, is crystal clear for me, and if I do not know [something], I search for it, because something that I have clear is that I do not want my children to have the same experiences that I had. What I want is for them to study, to go to the high-school, to go to university and to continue studying, and I will do anything possible to make it that way.”

In short, starting with the participation of family members in training activities, the learning school–home link has been reinforced. Now, many families and students dream of going to university and see that it is possible, since both the school and family/community share this dream and work together to achieve it.

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The case study presented in this article suggests that the school as an institution that reproduces inequality (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977) is overcome by a school that provides the possibility of educational success for all social classes, starting with educational participation. The mothers interviewed demonstrate the emotional change they made. Based on the instrumental knowledge, they increased their self-esteem and improved their self-concept. This change causes mothers to be empowered and wish to continue with the training. Equally, their participation increases their educational expectations of their children. They perceive that transforming reality is possible; mothers interviewed experienced a connection to education and were able as agents to transform the situation (Willis, 1981; Giroux, 1988; Bernstein, 1990; Freire, 1997; Touraine, 1997) of educational failure.

On the other hand, as Castro et al. (2015) previously noted, parents’ high expectations are related to children’s educational success. The testimonies presented show how participation in training activities helped community members participating in Family Education increase their expectations about the role that education can play in achieving a better future and how it can promote social mobility. In addition, relatives’ participation in these programmes create role models that deviate from the path of educational exclusion. On one hand, mothers do not feel alone, and they are increasing social leadership (Redding, 2000). In addition, from the joint work performed with the training, mothers find themselves participating more in social networks, which empowers and motivates them even more.

The previous literature stated that poverty deprives people of educational opportunities (Giroux and Flecha, 1992; Ogbu, 1997; Orfield and Lee, 2005; Ferguson et al., 2007); similarly, the case study presented in this article reveals that training of family members can contribute to overcoming social exclusion. Family Education is a successful tool for overcoming the educational social inequalities of families belonging to vulnerable groups. Of course, poverty is not overcome by completing a basic education, but education is a condition for achieving this goal (Girbés-Peco et al., 2015).

Family Education shows the school’s community model fosters dialogue between the social agents involved in the formation of relatives and their educational participation (INCLUD-ED Consortium, 2009). The participants are protagonists of their own learning, increasing the formative motivation of the families and the students, as INCLUD-ED (2006–2011) presented. According to the mothers’ contributions during the interviews, the learning environment is transferred to the home, and children and family members learn together by



performing educational activities together. Therefore, from the case study led at the Mediterrani School, we can see that change has been enabled by transforming the school through Learning Communities and the importance of dialogue with a community to listen to its formative demands. As a result, the whole dream of achieving higher education is present in community members' expectations. As some authors explain (De Vries and Wolbers, 2005; Santa Cruz et al., 2011), achieving a higher education leads to better possibilities: people have a greater chance for a more stable job and are less vulnerable to poverty (European Commission, 2010a; European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, 2014). Therefore, to follow the community's transformation, we must continue with the research and verify how the dreams that we now project for higher education are completed and the impact these actions have on community members' work lives and long-term trajectories.

## ETHICS STATEMENT

This study was carried out in following the European recommendations for H2020 Model Grant Agreements: H2020 MGA MSC-RISE-Multi: v2.1-1.<sup>4</sup> October 2015, the

<sup>4</sup>[http://ec.europa.eu/research/participants/data/ref/h2020/mga/msca/h2020-mga-msca-rise-multi\\_v2.1\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/research/participants/data/ref/h2020/mga/msca/h2020-mga-msca-rise-multi_v2.1_en.pdf)

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beneficiaries must carry out the action in compliance with: (a) ethical principles (including the highest standards of research integrity—as set out, for instance, in the European Code of Conduct for Research Integrity—and including, in particular, avoiding fabrication, falsification, plagiarism or other research misconduct) and (b) applicable international, EU, and national law.

The protocol was approved on 21 December 2015 by the Clinical Research Ethics Committee of Hospital Universitari Sant Joan, Reus (Tarragona, Spain). All subjects gave written informed consent in accordance with the European Code of Conduct for Research Integrity.

## AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

All authors listed have made a substantial, direct and intellectual contribution to the work, and approved it for publication.

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**Conflict of Interest Statement:** The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

The reviewer CD and handling editor declared their shared affiliation at time of review.

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