

Listening to children: Evaluation of a positive parenting programme through art-based research

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Funding information

The author(s) disclose receipt of the following financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article. The research was supported by Obra Social La Caixa, project number FBG 309221 and FBG 308688. It has also been supported by the Spanish Ministry of Economy and Competitiveness and the European Regional Development Fund under Grant PSI2015-69971-R to M.J.R. Translation financed by the Aids to the research groups of 2018 from the Faculty of Education of the University of Barcelona (UB) and the SGR Aid (2017SGR0905).

Abstract

This paper presents data from a unique programme evaluation of the parenting programme titled 'Learning together, growing as a family' applied in 14 cities in Spain and targeting families at risk of neglectful behaviour. The programme evaluation is based on the voices of children using the qualitative methodology of art-based research. Eighty-six children 6–12 years of age were interviewed in groups. The outcomes of the evaluation reveal that children perceive improvements in the parental competencies of their parents and in themselves and that these changes serve as a catalyst for positive family change.

KEY WORDS

arts-based research, childhood, participation, positive parenting, socio-educational programme

INTRODUCTION

The adoption of the Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1989 (UN General Assembly, 1989) established the children's right to participate in decision making that affects their lives (Hart, 1992;

Shier, 2001; Van Bijleveld et al., 2013). The international framework has led to a recognition of the importance of allowing the voices of children to be heard and of their right to participate in aspects related to their development and well-being (Tisdall, 2017). This recognition poses the challenge of promoting child participation in different areas and designing techniques that draw on the multiple languages of children (Zubizarreta et al., 2016). Particularly in the family setting, it is essential that the participation of children and adolescents be fostered in the socio-educational innovation pursued by research and in professional practices. Despite this emphasis, when analysing research methods used to evaluate parental education programmes, the voices of children as key informants in evaluating changes in parental competencies are rarely considered. To achieve child participation both in socio-educational interventions at the family level and in research, it is necessary to develop alternative techniques to guarantee children's right to participate in the evaluation of programmes aimed at promoting positive parenting.

BACKGROUND AND RATIONALE

The positive parenting initiative

In recent years, there has been a qualitative change in the conception of parenting in society. This change has been promoted by recent European policies such as Recommendation 19 of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe (2006), which defines positive parenting as *'parental behaviour based on the best interests of the child that is nurturing, empowering, non-violent and provides recognition and guidance which involves setting of boundaries to enable the full development of the child'* (p. 3).

This approach also reflects an ecological vision of parenthood in viewing parenting as the activity of raising a child while balancing parental resources and limitations and contextual resources and limitations. This ecological perspective helps reinterpret cases of negligence by framing them through the holistic organisation of conditions of risk and protection for children and families. Social and contextual conditions, the personal characteristics of the parents, the characteristics and needs of children and parental skills in responding to the needs of children are factors that interact with each other to define child and adolescent well-being. According to this perspective, Lacharité defines an ecological model of negligence as *'The significantly deficient if not in fact non-existent response to needs defined by current scientific knowledge or, in the absence of such knowledge (or of consensus regarding the meaning of such knowledge), by the social values of a child's community as fundamental'* (Lacharité, 2017, p. 19).

The positive parenting initiative has highlighted the influence of children on parenting, including their right to participate in the family socialisation process. This participation means that children and adolescents, through their competencies and personal and social resources, can transform their own reality in the family (Martín et al., 2013). The positive parenting approach proposes a change in the views of the child and socialisation in modern societies. In this view, the child is competent and capable, and the role of parents is to help the child exercise his or her rights by providing direction and guidance appropriate to the child's evolving capacities. When translated into the family setting, values of mutual respect, equal dignity, authenticity, integrity and responsibility are foundations for developing parent-child relationships that promote children's rights (Daly, 2007). In challenging unidirectional theories of socialisation, this modern view defines socialisation as a bidirectional process of mutual adaptation, accommodation and negotiation performed during complex, bidirectional exchanges between parents and children (Grolnick et al., 2007; Kerr et al., 2003; Kuczynski & Parkin, 2007).

The modern view that recognises the active role played by the child in his/her own process of socialisation also emphasises the definition of a new set of parental competencies: observing the child's characteristics and needs and the situational constraints on actions that allow parents to consider all information to evaluate the child's behaviour; promoting cognitive and emotional perspective-taking as the parental ability to make inferences about the child's thoughts and emotions; 'mentalising' or attributing mental states to the child to individuate him/her; being flexible in the application of parental actions according to the child's characteristics and needs; using different communication formats to convey parental messages such as conversational and argumentative formats and not only direct orders; placing parental practices within a framework of mid- to long-term educational goals instead of using only short-term goals based on immediate child compliance; and promoting parental reflection on the consequences of educational practices for child and family outcomes (Azar et al., 1998; Reder et al., 2003; Rodrigo et al., 2008).

Parental education programmes

The European positive parenting approach also emphasises the promotion of parental capacities in order to move towards a strengthening approach that identifies parents' existing skills and strengths and builds on these capacities. Likewise, interventions should be based on empowering children by promoting their strengths and resources and helping them to communicate their feelings and needs. Spain has endorsed this view by carrying out a process of innovation and inclusion of the positive parenting view in the family and among professionals and services (Rodrigo et al., 2016).

With regard to parental education programmes, these dynamic and participatory elements of childhood have been taken into account in the so-called third-generation parental education programmes (Martín-Quintana et al., 2009). The main objective of these programmes is to promote the quality of family functioning as a system, going beyond those programmes based only on unidirectional mother to child influences (first generation) and mother-child decontextualised interactions (second generations). Third-generation programmes also go beyond the academic and technical model of parental education to reach a more experiential model where the reflection of the parents is sought to build episodic knowledge in a daily scenario. Research shows that these evidence-based programmes are effective in realising changes in parental competencies and especially in those competencies that facilitate adjustments to individual children. The term 'evidence-based programmes' refers to a specific subset of programmes that are theoretically based with their contents fully described and structured in a manual, their effectiveness evaluated according to standards of evidence and the factors that influence the implementation process identified and taken into account to explore variations in programme results (Rodrigo, 2016).

The analysis of studies evaluating the efficacy and effectiveness of the Spanish evidence-based programmes demonstrates how fathers and mothers improve their capacities to incorporate their children as active agents. Some findings include the following: (a) mothers and fathers participating in the group modality of the 'Growing up happy in the family (Crecer felices en familia)' programme showed positive changes in parental attitudes (expectations with regard to the development of their children, empathy for their needs, negative attitudes towards physical punishment and adaptation to their role) and in parental satisfaction and a decline in parental distress (Álvarez et al., 2015); (b) educational supervision and parental control improved significantly in single-parent families participating in the 'Living childhood as a family (Vivir la adolescencia en familia)' programme (Rodríguez et al., 2015); and (c) significant changes occurred in the mothers and fathers participating in the 'Family support and training programme (Programa de formación y apoyo familiar, FAF)' in terms of the management of affect in family relationships, perceptions of parental roles and family functioning (Hidalgo et al., 2015).

As mentioned above, the third-generation parental education programmes show positive results in terms of learning and changes in parental competencies; however, not all of them involve the participation of children in both programme intervention and evaluation. The ‘Learning together, growing as a family (Aprender juntos, crecer en familia)’ programme (Amorós et al., 2011) is one of the few that involves direct intervention not only with fathers and mothers but also with children. The programme is aimed at families with children 6–12 years old. The main objective of the programme is to promote development and family coexistence by fostering positive relationships between parents and children in accordance with the exercise of positive parenting (Amorós et al., 2013). The programme is aimed at families in situations of psychosocial risk to prevent situations of child abuse or neglect. The typical profile of psychosocial risk includes low-income parents who have poor models of parenting, lack personal empowerment, have inadequate life management skills, show inconsistent parenting, are punitive in managing children's behaviour or provide inadequate supervision of children and low attention to the child's needs. The level of risk was measured with the instrument Family psychosocial risk profile (Rodríguez et al., 2006) as the main inclusion criteria for participation in the programme. Social services professionals and community social entities are responsible for recruiting families. The programme is based on evidence and subject to complex and rigorous evaluation and has been shown to be effective and efficient in improving parental competencies and the quality of family interactions in families at social risk and high psychosocial risk (Amorós et al., 2016).

The quantitative results of seven annual editions of the ‘Learning together, growing as a family’ programme (since 2011–2012) show significant changes in families: the proportion of families using an authoritarian educational style is diminished; the use of criticism and rejection decreases; affectivity and communication styles improve; and satisfaction with family life increases (Amorós et al., 2015). The format of the programme, although which children participate in both individual sessions and in joint family sessions, gives rise to very rich processes of change (at both the individual and family levels) that children perceive at the end of the programme and that require the development of an appropriate data collection technique to measure. The programme consists of a total of 16 sessions, with a weekly frequency and duration of each session of 2 hr (1 hr for parents and children separately and a 1 hr family session). Hence, the art-based research (ABR) technique was used in evaluating the programme.

Art-based research

The use of methodologies to evaluate programmes that consider the perceptions of children and listen to their voices is required in this field of research due to the innovative nature of the approach and the difficulties involved. In the case of the ‘Learning together, growing as a family’ programme, in different evaluations of the programme (from 2011 to 2015), discussion groups with parents and children were conducted as part of the evaluation. However, the application of this technique with children revealed certain limitations: children, especially the youngest, showed difficulties speaking and tended to provide simple, stereotyped and mimetic responses. According to Haudrup (2006), who emphasises the importance of research practices such as reflexivity and dialogue, ABR was introduced in 2016 in order to elicit the voices of children in the representation of their own lives.

Art-based research is ‘a trans disciplinary approach to knowledge building that combines the tenets of the creative arts in research contexts’ (Leavy, 2017, p. 3) and includes all artistic approaches to research, for example, drawing. Research shows that drawing can be used as an alternative technique in contemporary research with children, as it allows them to communicate experiences, feelings and thoughts that might otherwise remain unexpressed or ignored (Mitchell et al., 2011). Drawing allows children to express emotional states and personal experiences that are difficult to express in words.

The art of drawing allows children to communicate their experiences on their own terms, encouraging them to participate through drawing and discussion groups (or group interviews) and offering them the opportunity to speak if they wish. The approach involves exploiting metaphorical speech and its communicative potential (Weber & Mitchell, 1996).

For these reasons, the ABR methodology is especially relevant to investigations aimed at directly capturing children's voices, encouraging them to describe the experiences of their daily lives through anecdotal dialogue (Ehrlén, 2009; Mauthner, 1997). Drawing is becoming an increasingly popular medium in research with children (and adults), as the activity encourages participants to freely communicate their 'felt experiences' of events, processes or spaces with relatively little intervention on the part of the researcher (Lavoie & Joncas, 2015; Leitch et al., 2007). This technique is used, above all, in studies related to the school environment, such as ABR studies in which children are asked about their experiences in preschool and early elementary school (Dockett & Perry, 2005a, 2005b, 2005c), their academic learning (Leitch et al., 2007), healthy eating in schools (Mauthner et al., 1993), etc. However, with regard to its application to parental competency programme evaluation and neglect studies, this methodology is in its early stages. In the field of socio-educational action and in other social settings, the technique can help contextualise social conditions and empower research participants (Foster et al., 2018), especially children.

The objective of this article is to capture children's perspectives on the effectiveness of the studied programme through ABR. ABR is an innovative approach to evaluation exploring children's perceptions of changes resulting from the programme both in their parents and in themselves.

METHODOLOGY

Design of the investigation

To analyse children's perceptions of changes in their parents and themselves through participating in the 'Learning together, growing as a family' programme, we employed a qualitative methodological design based on ABR. Weber and Mitchell (1996) suggest that the ways in which images create meaning is a dynamic process that involves 'dialectical negotiation' or an interaction between the person who draws and the social context in which they find themselves at a given moment. Consequently, it is necessary to clarify the meanings that children assign to images while preventing the adult from engaging in false interpretations, distortions and projections. It is necessary to highlight the advantages of ABR with regard to programme evaluation. This technique helps overcome the limitations stemming from children's limited linguistic abilities and favours memory.

Participants

The research participants were selected from an intentional sample of children taking part in the 'Learning together, growing as family' programme in 2016 and 2017 in Spain. In total, 3,827 children participated in the programme over the 2 years. The children were 8.92 years of age on average, and 53.2% were boys, while 46.8% were girls. The programme was carried out in Madrid, Zaragoza, Barcelona, Lleida, Tarragona, Gijón, Bilbao, Las Palmas, Santa Cruz de Tenerife, Murcia, Málaga, Córdoba, Palma de Mallorca, Valencia and Sevilla, which are cities that belong to the Caixa Proinfancia network. These cities were chosen due to their populations of more than 200,000 inhabitants and high poverty and social exclusion rates.

The study participants included 86 children, with an average age of 9.6 years and an equitable gender distribution of 51% boys and 49% girls. In terms of socio-demographic profiles, the families mainly included mothers (80.6%) with an average age of 37.3 years and 2.4 dependent children, with a two-parent family situation observed in 62.9% of cases. The number of participating children was determined by the following selection criteria: children between 6 and 12 years of age with parents seeking to improve their parenting skills. The families are characterised by low levels of education and high levels of unemployment (especially in the case of mothers), resulting in many of them being identified as low-income families. The sample includes a considerable proportion of immigrant families (38.7%) with a wide distribution in terms of geographical countries of origin. The target population is families at psychosocial risk, which in Spain are highly represented among immigrant families, as reflected in the high percentage of immigrant families in the sample. Parental negligence is associated with family members with serious illnesses in 34.8% of cases, lack of family support networks in 32.6% of cases and lack of social support networks (e.g. friends, neighbours and so on) in 32.6% of cases. In total, 69% of parents participating in the programme were assessed as having families at high psychosocial risk, thus forming a group at risk for neglect and abuse.

Information collection technique

The information collection technique was a semi-structured group interview using the following script:

1. In the first part of the interview, the children were asked to create a first drawing based on the following question: From all you have learned in this course (or from the lessons that you attended), could you draw what you liked the most?
2. In the second part of the interview, the children were asked again, following the same procedure as in the first part, to make a drawing based on the following statements: Of all the changes that happened in yourself and/or your home, could you draw the most important change or the one you liked the most? If you had to explain to your friend what has changed in your house since you came to this group, what would you draw?

Procedure

Eighteen semi-structured group interviews were conducted during the months of June and July 2016 and 2017. Between three and five children participated in each group interview following the recommendations of authors such as Leitch and Mitchell (2007). The selection criteria of the participating children were a sufficient level of verbal expression to express their opinion (recommended for children over 8 years old), motivation to participate and informed consent signed by the parents to participate in the study.

The group interviews lasted an average of 50 min. External researchers trained in the ABR methodology used the children's drawings for data collection. These researchers were unaware of the effects of previous trials/editions of the programme. After the drawings were completed, the children were asked to show and to describe them to the group. The group interview was audio recorded for subsequent transcription and content analysis. In addition, the creative productions of the children were collected to illustrate the results.

Content analysis

Content analysis was fundamental to analysing the transcriptions of the group interviews with the children as a way to obtain guidelines or interpretation rules through the systematic treatment of the information. This analysis aimed to make valid and well-founded inferences (Gibbs, 2012). To implement content analysis, the Atlas Ti 6.2 computer programme was used. This programme is useful for performing analyses when large volumes of qualitative data are involved.

Reviewing the scientific literature allowed some codes to be elaborated prior to the analysis of the textual information following a 'bottom-up' approach in the textual analysis process. The first phase of analysis was textual; that is, paragraphs, fragments and key quotes were selected within the transcription documents of the discussion groups. The second, conceptual phase involved a higher level of analysis, where codes or categories were created that would subsequently relate to each other. These two phases were continuously examined together in the analysis process. This approach allowed us to modify the degree of importance given at any moment of the analysis process to a quote or paragraph and to deepen the level of conceptualisation. Table 1 shows the dimensions and categories of analysis with definitions and illustrative examples.

TABLE 1 Dimensions and categories of analysis

Dimension	Category	Definition	Illustration of textual quote
Perception of change in the children	Behaviour in the social setting	Changes and improvements perceived by children regarding their social relationships	'I have learned that it is very important to get along with other children and be able to play with them'. Child's interview, Bilbao
	Behaviour in the family setting	Changes and improvements perceived by children regarding family relationships	'I drew how to convince parents with arguments, in terms of things we wanted to do, and it worked for me'. Child's interview, Santiago
Perception of change in parents	Parental competencies	Changes and improvements perceived by children with respect to the abilities of their parents in the parental exercise	'They have learned the same thing as us, that we have to be closer, communicate, go out together and be more united'. Interview with girl, Valencia
	Perception of the parental role	Changes and improvements perceived by children with respect to the role of their parents in exercising their parental competencies	'I've drawn myself with my mother, telling her what I've done in school because before she did not ask as much as now. I have noticed a change in my mother, who now cares more and asks me more'. Child's interview, Bilbao
	Satisfaction with the parental role	Changes and improvements perceived by children regarding how their parents live, experience or feel about their task of being parents and how they carry out this task	'In this drawing, there is a child who is in bed, and his father is telling him a story (...). Your parents show you that you are important to them. They are very happy'. Interview with girl, Barcelona

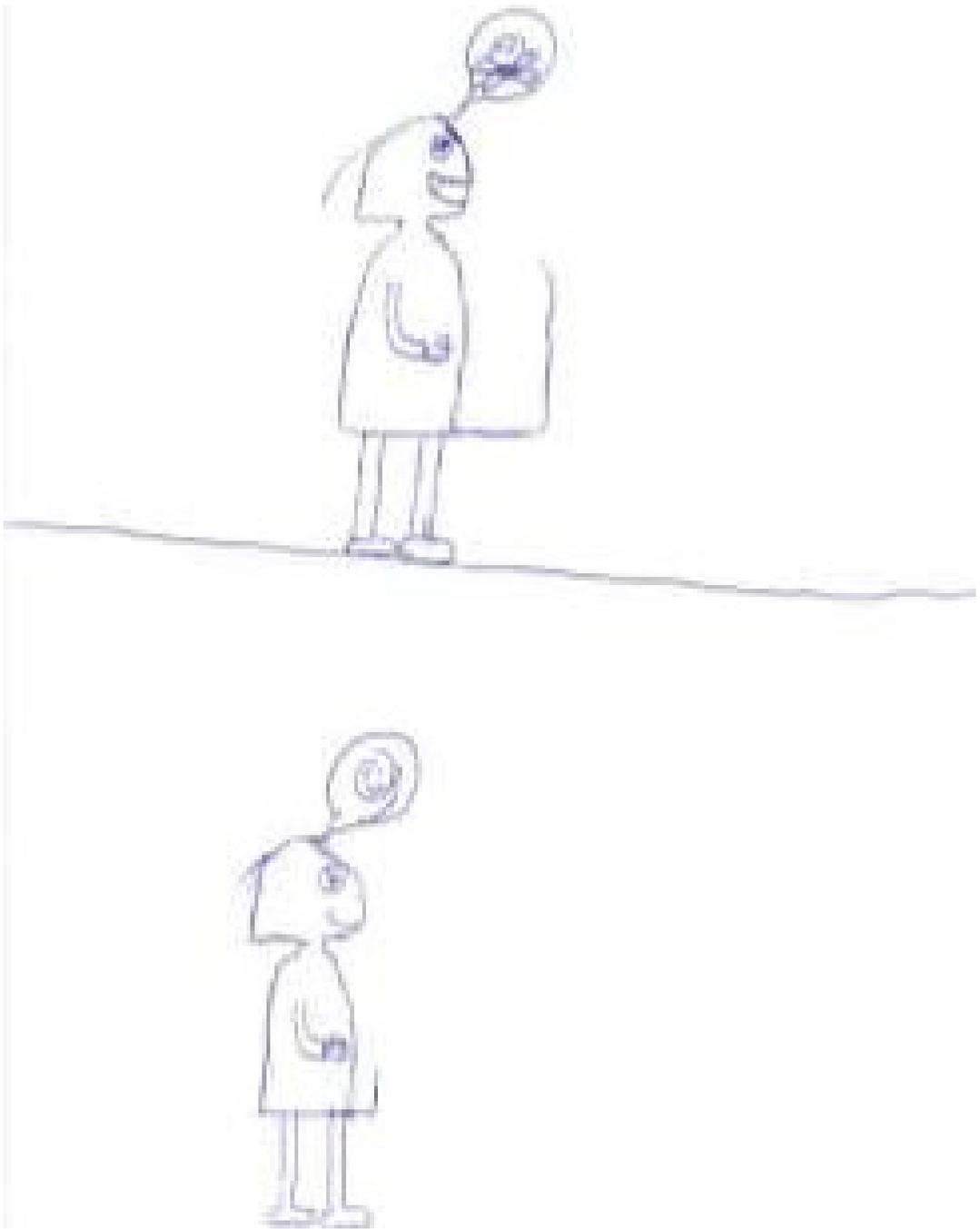


FIGURE 1 Children's social behaviour. EN. MAL01

Reliability and validity of data

To guarantee the internal and external validity of the content analysis of the group interviews, the following actions were carried out:

- Consistency check: the description of the categories, the construction of the codes as well as the first exploratory content analysis (finding the text that belonged to the designed categories) were carried out by two researchers, separately and independently, for later verification of the degree of agreement.
- Credibility controls (validation of the codes by experts): once the categories and codes of analysis were designed, the researchers who carried out this process presented their proposal to two external persons for validation of the codes by judges, taking into account the theoretical framework on positive parenting (bottom-up analysis process).
- External validity check: this process was related to the sample selection method being random with respect to the selection of families from the different participating cities but intentional with respect to children participating in the evaluation, establishing selection criteria for the children of the selected families to guarantee that they could participate (children over 6 years of age who were able to express themselves verbally and motivated to participate in the evaluative study).

Ethical considerations in the research

Finally, it is especially important to highlight the ethical commitment of the present study. All participants in the evaluative research were duly informed of the study process. Informed written consent was obtained from the parents, who agreed to the interviews being audio recorded and to the collection of their children's drawings. An oral version of informed consent was also obtained from the children, who also agreed to the interviews being audio recording and to the collection and reproduction



FIGURE 2 Children's behaviour in the family setting (housework). EN, MAL02

of their drawings. A protocol was put in place in the investigation to ensure the confidential treatment and anonymity of the information obtained. The Ethics Committee of the University of La Laguna approved of the study's protocol.

RESULTS

The results are presented according to two main dimensions of analysis: (a) perceptions of changes in the children (social and family behaviour); and (b) perceptions of changes in the parents (parental competencies, perceptions of parental roles and satisfaction with parental roles).

Perception of change in children

Behaviour in the social setting

The results obtained from the boys' and girls' reports suggest that their active participation in certain areas was related to perceived changes in family and social relationships. Specifically, changes were observed in their relationships with other family members, classmates and children who participated in the programme. The children also described having acquired capacities to contribute to healthy mutual relationships both in the family context and in their peer relationships at school and during programme development.

'I have learned education and behaviour and that I have to respect my parents'. EN, GIJ01

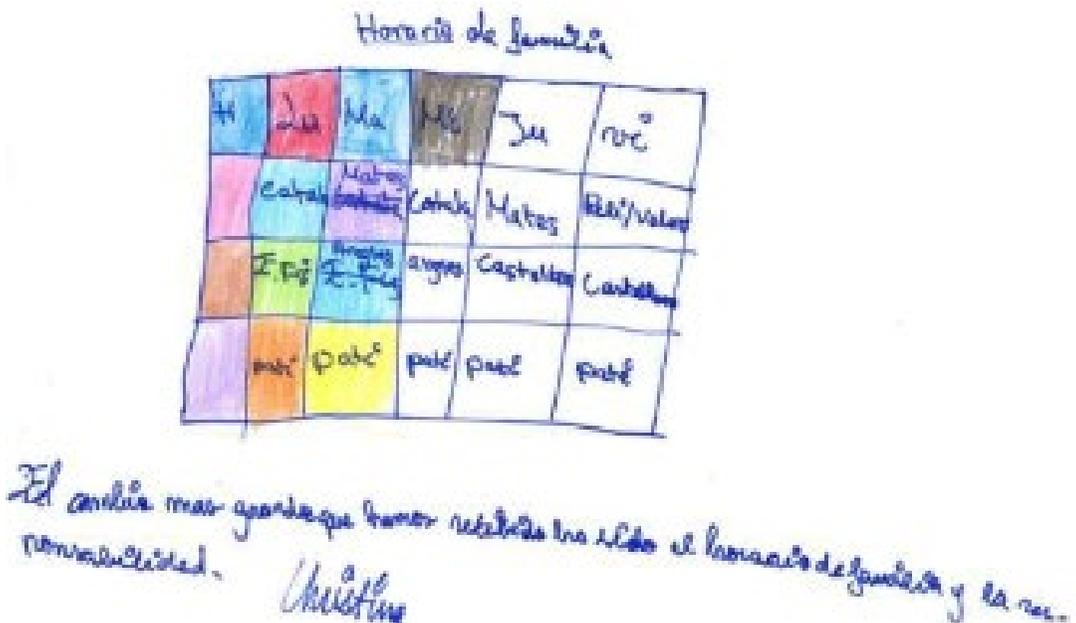


FIGURE 3 Children's behaviour in the family setting (respect for schedules). EN, BCN01

'I have learned that it is very important to get along with other children and be able to play with them. If you play, you have more friends, and I have learned not to fight'. EN, BIL01

'I have changed in not disliking anyone and not being pushy. Before, I never shut up and despised people, telling them bad things'. EN, PGCO1

Behaviour in the family setting

In the family environment, children perceived changes at three levels. First, the children identified an improvement in their active participation in relationships and family dynamics (some even highlighted improvements in their relationships with their siblings). In addition, there were changes in developing habits and routines, typical of a structured environment, favouring a progressive autonomy. Finally, the children developed habits associated with daily family life such as organising their room or respecting the rules for computer use.

'I have learned not to hit my sister and to help her with her homework'. EN, SEV01

'I drew how to convince my parents with arguments, in terms of things we wanted to do, and it worked for me'. EN, SAN01



FIGURE 4 Parental competencies (affection). EN, MAL03

'I have drawn myself in my room because before, I didn't clean it, and now I do. I have it neat, and the bed is made. Now my parents don't have to repeat themselves so much because I do it without being told'. EN, MAL02

'In the drawing, I'm turning off the computer because before, I played on it for 1 or 2 hr, and now I only play for 30 min. In the course, I learned to respect my schedules'. EN, MAD01

Perception of change in parents

Parental competencies

Regarding parental competencies, children identified changes and improvements in how their parents developed their parental responsibilities, especially those related to affection, communication and participation and family leisure. The children identified improvements in affectivity as a result of their parents paying more attention to them and demonstrating affection and love on a daily basis. The results indicate a special sensitivity towards the demonstration of affection.

'My parents now give me much more love'. EN, MAL03

The children perceived important changes linked to the communication abilities of the parents. They recognised that their parents had improved in their abilities to listen to them to take their opinions into account:

'I made some blue and green spots, which are cold colours, and then yellow and red that are warmer, to express the change in the home environment, from more serious to getting along better and communicating better'. EN, VIG01

It is important to emphasise that the children perceived a greater degree of participation in day-to-day family decisions, as their opinion was taken into account more often.



FIGURE 5 Parental competencies (communication). EN, VIG01

‘Sometimes, my mother and I do not have the same opinion, and my mother does what she wants. Now, sometimes, we do what she says and sometimes what I say. My mother has learned to listen to me, and I have learned to tell her my opinion’. EN, BIL02

Learning and changes related to family leisure show that children perceived an improvement in the ability to enjoy shared family leisure time. This awareness of the benefits of sharing leisure time with the family translated into more leisure time, sharing, communication of experiences, etc.

‘I have drawn my family playing a family game. My father is there, my mother, my brother and me. We all went to the workshop. What we have learned the most is to spend more time together and play more together’. EN, MAL04

‘I like being with my parents because now we play more’. EN, VAL01

Perception of the parental role

Children perceived changes in the exercising of parental roles. First, they perceived positively the parents’ greater predisposition to give them support and help in a more positive, proactive and unconditional way.

‘You always have to work hard for homework. I like it that my father helps me because this way he explains things that I don’t understand. They have learned to help me’. EN, GIJ02

Another remarkable result observed concerns changes linked to children’s participation in the family and in the recognition of children as active agents. There was a greater awareness of the influence of children in all the settings. In this sense, children appreciated how this participation implied responsibility in



FIGURE 6 Parental competencies (shared leisure time). EN, MAL04

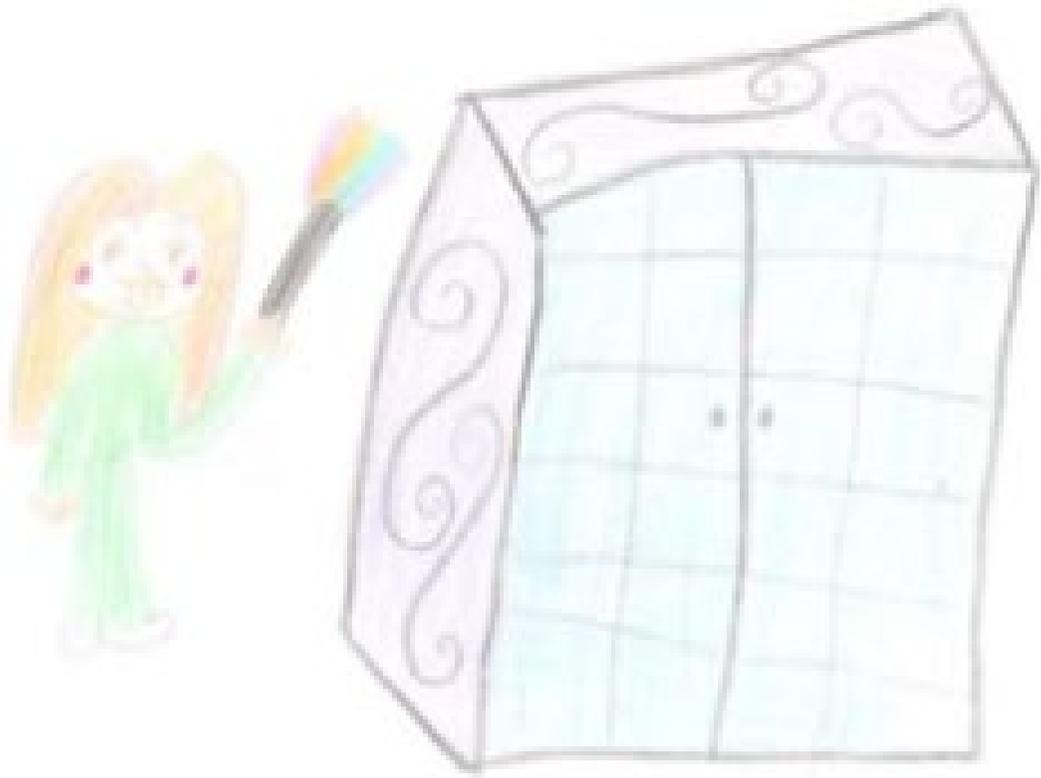


FIGURE 7 Perceptions of parenting tasks. EN, MAL05

both domestic and day-to-day issues. Similarly, they ended up being more aware of their active role in the family environment and in the household dynamics.

'I have made a drawing helping my mother with housework at home. Now I dust, broom and mop, and my mother is calmer and spends more time with us'. EN, BIL03

'I have learned to help my mother with many things. In the drawing, I'm sweeping. My mother is dusting. I have always liked to learn to help at home with my family'. EN, MAD02

Some older children were able to reflect on their direct participation in family dynamics and on how changes in family dynamics were related to their parents but also to their own active role.

'They have learned the same things as us, that we have to be closer together, communicate, go out together and be more united'. EN, VAL02

Parental role satisfaction

Likewise, the fact that the parents achieved greater satisfaction in exercising their parental roles was perceived and valued by the children as pivotal to the development of more positive relationships.



FIGURE 8 Parental role satisfaction. EN, GIJ03

'What I liked the most about my parents is that we can live together better, and they have learned to treat us better and with more respect. The most important thing we learned is a single word: respect'. EN, MAD03

'We spend more time with my mom, my cousins and my aunt. Now we spend more time together'. EN, MAD04

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study highlight the perceived changes and improvements that children identified in themselves and in their parents through participating in the 'Learning Together, Growing as a Family' parental education programme. The self-perceived changes observed suggest that the children were able to develop prosocial behaviours in different social contexts and in family settings. In the latter case, the results indicate that the children became more active agents of the improvements observed in parenting tasks. These findings support critiques of views of the triumvirate of 'good' parenting behaviours including parental nurturance, consistent discipline and an appropriate balance of control/autonomy without taking into account the influence of children on these parental strategies (Rodrigo, 2010). This aspect is especially relevant in the case of child neglect because the self-assessment and self-recognition of its influence on surrounding environments is a protective factor that helps youth to cope with and perform better in life as they develop into adults despite their vulnerabilities and the unfavourable conditions of their contexts (Thomas et al., 2005).

Children's perceptions of changes in their parents and their abilities to recognise their own influence on family changes are crucial to revealing child's agency in reading and interpreting parental messages (Grusec & Goodnow, 1994). In turn, such changes point to a need to promote parents' personal development in delivering understandable messages, as both parents and children recognise them (De Mol & Buysse, 2008). The results from this line of research may help to delineate the task of parenting in modern societies (Daly, 2007). Enabling the establishment of secure bonding for the child and providing structure and guidance for the learning of parental norms are two primary aspects of the parenting task that have already been proposed in previous theories of socialisation. From his or her parents, the child needs warmth, acceptance, sensitivity, responsiveness, positive involvement and support. The child also needs boundaries and guidance for his or her physical and psychological security and the development of his or her own values and sense of personal and social responsibility. This conception supports results showing that when children perceive more demonstrations of affection from their parents, they feel greater empathy for their parents' views, which facilitates a more positive family environment. Observed improvements in these elements demonstrate the preventative effects that they may have on negligence. Indicators of deficiencies in communication, expression and affective regulation are associated with consequences of negligence directly attributable to parental figures (Lacharité et al., 2006) and to difficulties with interaction and emotional support (Wilson et al., 2008). These findings reaffirm children's capacities to assess mechanisms and manifestations of negligence (Lacharité et al., 2006) based on the psychological capacity of their parents to cater to their educational needs and based on mechanisms related to difficulties experienced in parent-child relationships.

The methodologies of third-generation parental education programmes, which aim to bring about changes in parents and their children, serve as a catalyst of the changes observed. When children participate in evaluation, they feel that they are an active part of the process of change by and for their families. This perception promotes increased feedback regarding changes and improvements among family members for the good of the whole family. The methodology of such programmes strengthens the importance of children in all spheres, and in this sense, children appreciate how this participation in evaluation involves their responsibility in domestic, day-to-day issues in the same way that they become more aware of their active role in the family environment and in the organisation of family life. The work by Sinclair (2006) shows that if participation is to be more meaningful to children and effective in influencing change, it is necessary to move beyond one-off or isolated participation and consider how participation becomes embedded as an integral part of our relationship with children.

Moreover, increased social support for parenting tasks acquired through the programme serves as a protective factor against negligence, as current studies show the importance of contextual factors. The ecosystemic view of negligence (Bérubé et al., 2017) leads us to critically consider economic, cultural, social and personal difficulties as ecological conditions that limit parents' capacities to appropriately respond to the needs of their children.

The ABR methodology is found to be an inclusive tool because it involves children by paying attention to their voices during both intervention and programme evaluations. The advantage of this technique is that any child, of any age, knows how to draw. However, its correct application requires the inclusion of certain criteria for the selection of participants, such as their ability to express themselves verbally and a certain maturity and degree of reflection. As Weber and Mitchell (1996) point out, drawing is a form of text that the child explains and interprets without the adult's mediation. The methodology highlights experiences and relationships largely hidden by traditional ways of collecting data that had previously been used to evaluate 'Learning together, growing as a family'. In line with Hernández (2008), the act of drawing serves as a foundation for the narrative of investigation to the extent that it is not the end result of data collection but rather serves as a starting point from which children can engage in more in-depth discussions about a given topic.

Three limitations of this study are identified. First, while in our quantitative evaluation of the programme, the use of a pre–post design was considered, this was not the case for our qualitative ABR approach. Future research should capture differences between drawings and comments obtained before and after children participate in the programme. With respect to these differences, it would be interesting to expand the questions that guide the evaluation and find out more about those elements that have not yet changed but that children would like to see changed. In this sense, it would also be relevant to deepen the differences that occur by age or level of developmental status of the child. Second, as sentences included in the children's drawings were not always legible, this content was taken into account but not related to a specific drawing. Finally, our non-disaggregation of data by gender, age and origin in our group interviews is a limitation that could be addressed in future studies. These limitations should lead to a revision of our interview process with children to address such shortcomings in future evaluations.

CONCLUSION

The positive parenting approach has highlighted the importance and influence of children and adolescents in the processes of family development. Through this study, it has become clear that children's perceptions of their own learning improvements and their interpretations of changes in parenting roles serve as very valuable source of evidence for family interventions, for the evaluation of programmes and for better understanding the dynamics of families at psychosocial risk. The use of the ABR methodology made it possible to identify these perceptions and revealed a new perspective on work and research conducted in social settings and especially for the evaluation of programmes that promote positive parenting to prevent child neglect. Participatory approaches that take into account children's voices and reflections through ABR represent a challenge for professional practice and for current research in the field of negligence.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

The author(s) declare no potential conflict of interest with respect to the research, authorship and/or publication of this article.

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How to cite this article: Mateos A, Balsells MÀ, Fuentes-Peláez N, Rodrigo MJ. Listening to children: Evaluation of a positive parenting programme through art-based research. *Child Soc.* 2021;00:1–20. <https://doi.org/10.1111/chso.12439>