

Chapter 6

Students With a Migrant Background and Their Families at School: Promoting Participation for Educational Achievement and Inclusion

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ABSTRACT

This chapter includes a summary of the evaluation of the Family Support Program for Educational Success (PSAFEE in Spanish), which was operational between 2013 and 2020 and involved the participation of more than 10,000 people in neighborhoods with populations at risk in thirteen Spanish cities. The program aimed to promote the increase and quality of family participation processes in the schools of their neighborhood, often hindered by cultural, economic, social, and gender-related factors. The program was carried out through the application of various cycles of participatory action research, and its evaluation was conducted using a mixed quantitative and qualitative methodology. The evaluation results have allowed the identification and understanding of factors that facilitate or hinder participation, adherence, and educational transformation in the program's application contexts. The analysis concludes with the need for community education to improve family involvement and the challenge of promoting such interventions in a post-pandemic context.

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INTRODUCTION

Family involvement in schools is widely recognized as a key element for the development of school communities. The benefits of such involvement extend to a wide range of dimensions. In Spain, family involvement in schools has been politically recognized as a lever for democratic strengthening. Seizing public space as something of one's own, participating in debates about the educational model, managing activities for the collective benefit, or making decisions have represented valuable formative opportunities for many adults, whose first exercise of democratic participation has been within an educational setting.

In terms of social development, family school involvement has drawn scenarios of greater social inclusion, with special mention to those with migrant origin. The school has supposed in all cases the first welcoming space for the newly arrived population, and access to the school has represented an opportunity to establish links with neighbors in their environment, to learn or deepen the learning of the host language, and ultimately to develop a sense of belonging. But not only has this participation contributed valuable aspects from an intercultural perspective, it has also done so from a gender perspective. The school, inherently feminine in nature, has facilitated the participation of many women in processes for the first time, has recognized non-normative family models within its environment such as those represented by same-sex or single-parent families, and has opened its doors to the reality of transgender and non-binary identities.

Strictly from a pedagogical perspective, the positive impact of family involvement on students' educational success is well known. A greater presence of families in schools increases opportunities for communication between them and the teaching staff and generates an educational adherence climate that strengthens motivation for learning in their children (MacHancoses et al., 2022). The gap between school and family culture is reduced in favor of everyone, and "participatory assembly" formats seem to be the most effective (Crisol-Moya, 2022) – an important fact to consider in validating our intervention proposal.

Despite considering all these advantages, we must acknowledge the objective difficulties that still exist for family involvement in schools to be effective and beneficial. Factors such as lack of understanding of how participation works (Burriel, 2022), low competence in participation, working conditions, or rejection of family collective dynamics by teaching staff (Burriel, 2022; Riera-Jaume et al., 2022) largely explain these difficulties. If we add to these the complexity derived from living in an environment at risk of poverty, these difficulties significantly increase.

If we wish to move towards a scenario of social justice and make the right to participation in education effective, it seems necessary to deploy actions that inhibit factors acting as obstacles and promote innovative processes that strengthen and consolidate it. This has been the focus for almost a decade of the Family Support Program for Educational Success (PSAFEE in Spanish), carried out in contexts of poverty risk in thirteen Spanish cities between 2013 and 2020. After such a broad action, the driving team has carried out a results evaluation that provides a detailed description of the achievements obtained based on the objectives set, and an impact evaluation, thanks to the longitudinal dimension of the program that has provided data on the transformations achieved over time. With this, we aim to gauge the degree of program effectiveness, identify intervention success factors, and ascertain to what extent – following Galindo and Martínez's schema (2017) – the program has been innovative (testing a promising approach); replicable (whether it can be scaled up and transferred to a different situation); signifies a relevant strategy (requiring considerable resources and covering, or capable of expanding

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