Adolescents' perceptions of education according to personal identity

Percepciones de adolescentes sobre la educación según la identidad personal

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Abstract

Adolescence is an important period in the process of constructing personal identity, particularly at times of educational transition. One such transition occurs at the end of compulsory secondary education and it results in an important biographical assessment of the school career that the adolescent has pursued. One factor that appears to be fundamental in this career is the dynamic of human relations. Focusing our attention on students, we have examined their perceptions of this matter, shaped by their level of personal maturity and linked to their awareness of their identity status or style. A biographical-narrative approach was used with a sample of 121 students, using quantitative and qualitative techniques and instruments (EOM-EIS-II questionnaire, autobiographical accounts, interviews and discussion groups). We have observed differences in young people's perceptions depending on their level of maturity. At the same time, by comparing their perceptions as a whole, we can see that their family (the main agent in the construction of their identity) and peer group, more than school, are the most highly valued areas. Quality educational processes appear to require careful interpersonal relationships, regardless of the areas in which they are developed. Corroborating various deficiencies in human relationships through adolescents' perceptions alerts us to their importance. The need to find suitably contextualized models for convergence between the main areas in which our students develop is also shown. This study involves the identification of certain elements that play a role in advancing the process of achieving personal identity. These require attention if the development of personal maturity during the compulsory stages of our school system is to be improved.

Keywords: Secondary education, teenagers, interpersonal relationships, maturity, personal identity, compulsory education.

Resumen

El proceso de configuración de la identidad personal encuentra un periodo significativo en la adolescencia y, particularmente,

en momentos de transición educativa. Uno de estos se halla al término de la Educación Secundaria Obligatoria y señala un balance biográfico relevante de la trayectoria escolar realizada. Un factor que parece fundamental en dicha trayectoria está constituido por la dinámica de las relaciones humanas. Focalizando nuestra atención en los estudiantes, hemos indagado sobre sus percepciones al respecto, matizadas por su nivel de madurez personal, vinculado al conocimiento de su estatus o estilo de identidad. Se ha utilizado un enfoque biográfico-narrativo, en una muestra de 121 estudiantes, utilizando técnicas e instrumentos de carácter cuantitativo y cualitativo (cuestionario EOM-EIS-II, relatos autobiográficos, entrevistas y grupos de discusión). Constatamos diferencias en las percepciones de los jóvenes según su nivel de madurez. Al mismo tiempo, relacionando el conjunto de percepciones, la familia (principal agencia para la construcción de la identidad) y el grupo de iguales constituyen los ámbitos mejor

valorados, por encima de la escuela. Los procesos educativos de calidad parecen reclamar la existencia de cuidadosas relaciones interpersonales, independientemente de los ámbitos en los que se desarrollen. La corroboración de deficiencias diversas en las relaciones humanas, mediante las percepciones de los adolescentes, nos alertan precisamente sobre su gran relevancia. Asimismo, se revela la necesidad de hallar fórmulas de convergencia, necesariamente contextualizadas, entre los ámbitos principales donde se desenvuelven nuestros estudiantes. De este estudio se desprende la identificación de ciertos elementos que participan en el desarrollo del logro de la identidad personal, a los que conviene atender si se pretende mejorar el desarrollo de la madurez personal durante las etapas obligatorias de nuestro sistema escolar.

Descriptores: Educación secundaria, adolescentes, relaciones interpersonales, madurez, identidad personal, educación obligatoria.

1. Introduction

Educational relationships unquestionably play a lead role in shaping personal identity, especially during the early stages of life when these influences are especially significant, more so in adolescence. During this stage of life, the subject must take decisions to address society's demands and expectations, from the weakness of their incipient identity that is shaken by environmental changes and the changes typical of individual growth, incorporating values and beliefs and adopting certain social roles.

All educational relationships are ones where «something valuable» is created as

a result of the interaction. This notion has evolved in parallel with the thinking and historical reasons that have been projected in the different practices (Jover, 1991; Sánchez, Lledó, and Perandones, 2011). On this journey, a turn has occurred inspired by the increasingly central role given to the pupil.

In this research, we examine in detail the complexity of the multiple modes of educational relationship that appear in different learning environments, focussing on the suitability and influence of the immediate areas that are most significant for the development of identity in adolescence.

1.1. Adolescence as transition

Clearly different from childhood, in adolescence a sort of new biological and social birth is experienced. During adolescence, what can be seen as the «birth of intimacy» occurs (García Hoz, 1950) as a combination of factors, namely, the steps required for a genuine inner life. In other words, this is the clear birth of this «intimate division» of the relations with the other, with which the subject is initially confused in a symbiotic relationship of «synchretic sociability» (Wallon, 1959), or the move from a «primary consciousness of psychological community» in a state of confusion with those who surround us, in Vygotskian terms, to the abstract elaborate and individual but multiple psychic community that, ultimately, shapes our identity.

Educational systems are generally structured around different periods in the life cycle of individuals: early childhood, middle and late childhood, and adolescence. This last phase corresponds with the *secondary education* period (from the age of 12 to 16 or 18). Compulsory secondary education (CSE) ends at the age of sixteen, bringing a period of ten years of schooling to a close. This is a biographically important moment for adolescents who complete a journey in which they move from childhood to the age at which they are entitled to enter the world of work and continue with post-compulsory studies. This can be seen as an ideal moment for taking stock of what they have learnt and experienced, and evaluating their intellectual, reasoning, emotional, spiritual, and relational capacities.

1.2. Adolescents' perceptions of the educational relationship

These perceptions include psychological sensations of facts as well as knowledge, ideas, opinions, feelings, and judgements on things or people who inspire them. The locus of any «implicit theory» or set of perceptions is the representational system of a subject and is built through each individual's capacities, but the content of these representations reflects social norms within a cultural context. These representations are individual and are shaped by social interaction (Zacarés & Serra, 1998). Consequently, the perceptions of the adolescents themselves become a focal point for further examination by educational research.

We might state that adolescents' self-perception, in general terms, is not usually dissonant with their observable public behaviour (Bisquerra & Pérez, 2007). Anxiety behaviour and emotional instability have been linked with perceived personal dissatisfaction (Garaigordobil & Maganto, 2011), and feelings of solitude, isolation, and dissatisfaction with one's own life have been linked with aggressive behaviour (Moreno, Ramos, Martínez, & Musitu, 2010). If we compare by gender, female adolescents have frequently been associated with more attention and concern for their feelings and emotional experiences than male adolescents, as well as with sharing them (Singh-Manoux, 2000). Self-evaluatory perceptions in adolescents generally relate to self-esteem, self-efficacy, and life satisfaction (Reina, Oliva, & Parra, 2010). Enquiry into the nature of adolescence has also been complemented from a variety of perspectives, including

that of the adolescents themselves (Casco & Oliva, 2005).

On the other hand, we are also aware of research into adolescents' perceptions of the family environment: some regarding the elderly (Santamarina, 2010) and some the family social environment (Moral & Ovejero, 2013) or family relationships themselves (Domínguez & Rodríguez, 2003). Likewise, studies have been carried out on the values perceived by adolescents in the media (Sevillano, 2001).

Focussing on the field of formal education, we find works that are now seen as classics regarding adolescents' perceptions of the longitudinal changes in academic and psychological adaptation (Roeser & Eccles, 1998), and the mediating role of objectives in the school setting and their link with the behaviour of the students (Roeser, Midgely, & Urdan, 1996). Research has also been carried out into students' ideas about coexistence in educational centres (Rodríguez-Muñoz, 2007) and the quality of the education (Marchesi, Lucena, & Ferrer, 2006).

There is a considerable body of research on adolescents' perceptions with a range of settings and specific contents. Nonetheless, it appears to be necessary to go into greater depth with studies that explore the implicit theories about the educational relationship, in their various spheres and different scopes. Studying educational relationships from the perspective of the construction of personal identity reveals great complexity and a lack of available knowledge, although there are some pieces of research that have linked personal identity statuses to

educational competences and have analysed, from an autobiographical viewpoint, schooling trajectories and competences of the teachers and students (Bernal, 2014). In this research, we aim to discover the perceptions of adolescents in the final year of compulsory secondary education regarding the dynamic of the educational relationship, taking into consideration their identity status (level of maturity).

2. Method

Our exploratory research is qualitative, oriented towards descriptive knowledge and understanding based on the principle of social interaction (Denzin & Lincoln, 2013). The methodological focus is biographical-narrative (Bolívar, 1998), as this supplies the tools needed to uncover the meanings that develop from people's lived experiences. This focus allows us to find out how adolescents build their world view through their experiences in relevant terms (Bogdan & Bilken, 2007). Following the criteria of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmation (Bisquerra, 2004), we controlled for irrelevant elements with methodological triangulation, (purposive) theoretical sampling, detailed description of the informants and defining the context (age, gender, identity status, place), and verification of the participants (cross-checking the information with the informants).

2.1. Design

The methodological design (Flick, 2015) is three phase, linked to the final selection of the sample in accordance with the study's research criteria. The fieldwork

was performed in three different moments: *Time 1*, *Time 2*, and *Time 3*, corresponding, respectively, to the start of the research, the first year, and the second year.

The phases are:

1) *Time 1* (T1): quantitative (q) and qualitative (Q1).
2) *Time 2* (T2): qualitative (Q2).
3) *Time 3* (T3): qualitative (Q3).

The model adopted is represented as: T1 (q + Q1) → T2 (Q2) → T3 (Q3).

2.2. Participants

The sampling is purposive (Ruiz, 2012) and 121 students from the fourth year of compulsory secondary education from a public educational centre in Andalusia were selected. The initial sample group was progressively segregated in the different phases of the research: 121 (T1), 53 (T2), and 25 (T3).

2.3. Instruments and procedures

In the first phase (*Time 1*), the EOM-EIS-II questionnaire (Adams, Bennion, & Huh, 1989) was used to classify the subjects according to their personal identity status. Among the objective measures that significantly surpassed those initially created by Marcia (1966), we have used the most widespread version: the Extended Objective Measure of Ego Identity Status II, more widely known as EOM-EIS-II. We can identify different levels, statuses, forms, or styles of identity, depending on the decisions taken about whether or not there is a period of search and crisis as well as the degree of commitment adopted to particular values, to a particular ideology,

and to a specific professional plan. Consequently, four distinct statuses appear: a) *achieved identity*, the outcome of a state of crisis and searching, as well as the establishment of a commitment that is axiological, ideological, and involves a plan for the professional future; b) *identity moratorium*, characterised by the individual not yet having acquired commitments as they are actively searching, exploring, investigating; c) *identity diffusion*, characterised by having acquired commitments and, to a certain extent, by abandoning the search, without this causing great concern, resulting in the subject falling into an obvious diffusion; and d) *foreclosed identity (acceptance or rigidity)*, distinguished by displaying a clear commitment to certain values and projects, without there having been any process of crisis or search (typical of adolescents prone to conformity and linked to certain ethnic groups, certain subcultures, or authoritarian families).

By considering the root causes of the various identity statuses or styles we can establish a correlation between them and the level of personal maturity. In this way, *identity achieved* corresponds to a mature identity (a greater level of maturity) and *identity diffused* to an amorphous identity without expectations of change (a lower level of maturity). Between these two, we find *identity in moratorium*, where a clear axiological commitment has not yet been established but the individual is in a process of identity crisis and exploration, and the *foreclosed identity*, typified by having an ideological commitment and values, but without passing through a critical period or a thorough search. It is even possible to speak of another status,

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that of *moratorium or low profile* identity, comprising subjects situated at the level of identity in moratorium, but in a poorly defined way, sharing similarities with subjects from the foreclosed identity level. These can be seen as forming a separate group given that they display ambivalences that make it difficult to place them clearly in the other identity levels. Consequently, the different identity statuses could be grouped into two blocks (as we have done) according to the degree of maturity (Meeus, 1996): subjects with achieved and moratorium identity statuses are included in the «active» status block associated with characteristics of greater maturity, while those with foreclosed and diffuse identity statuses are in the «passive» status block associated with characteristics of a lower level of maturity.

A qualitative technique was also adopted in this first phase: autobiographical narrative. Personal narratives by the adolescent students were analysed to discover their perceptions about their social inter-

action (Fivush & Haden, 2003), principally with their family members, friends, teachers, and classmates. These autobiographical narrations had no length requirement and included brief guidelines regarding the content, with which we are interested. From the total number of participants, 102 narratives were accepted, the rest being rejected because of significant failures to follow the instructions. From these 102 narrations, 53 subjects were selected for the next phase in accordance with the identity status provided by the EOM-EIS-II (achieved, 17%; moratorium, 4%; low profile moratorium, 41 %; rigid, 36 %; diffuse, 2 %), based on balancing the sample according to the criterion of «active» subjects (Group A, GA) and «passive» subjects (Group P, GP), as shown in Table 1. Although it is a group that is usually ignored in research, we included a third one comprising subjects with *low profile moratorium* status (LPMG), as it was strongly present in the sample, in case their contributions provided any specific interest.

TABLE 1. Groups of «active», «passive» and «low profile moratorium» subjects for the second phase (Time 2).

GA	Identification of the subject (No.)	GP	Identification of the subject (No.)	LPMG	Identification of the subject (No.)
Achieved	15, 18, 23, 25, 28, 29, 37, 48, 84, 97, 98, 99, 113, 119	Rigidity	16, 38, 44, 45, 64, 66, 67, 68, 71, 76, 77, 86, 87, 90, 91, 102, 107, 120,121.		46, 59, 74, 75, 79, 83, 85, 105, 114, 115, 117.
Moratorium	19, 54, 62, 65, 92, 96, 101,118	Diffusion	95		
Totals	22		20		11

Source: Own elaboration.

In the second phase of the research (*Time 2*), the script for the *semistructured in-depth interview* was prepared (Witzel & Reiter, 2012) and used on selected subjects. The script's categories prepared in two ways: inductively, based on the information that came from the autobiographical narrations in *Time 1*, and deductively, based on the knowledge available from a study of the state of the question. The script was submitted to expert opinion for validation (Gómez, Rodríguez, & Ibarra, 2013). In accordance with the eight experts' contributions and recommendations regarding its design, clarity, and understanding of the script, the final version was prepared, with an expected duration of 45 minutes. The category design comprised two metacategories (see Graph 1): *description of the field* and *influence of the field* (we distinguish three fields: family, school, and peer group). The first metacategory is subdivided into two categories: «Atmosphere or environment» and «Communication». The second comprises the categories of «Educational attainment», «Personal independence», «Moral development», and «Well-being». Each of them covers three cross-cutting dimensions, relating to the subjects' life experience: «Perceptions of life story», intended to evoke and access memories; «Current perceptions», intended to access the present; and «Projective perceptions», intended to examine the future. The information obtained was analysed using the NVivo 10 program, respecting the vertical criteria (the structural contribution of each narration) and the horizontal criteria (comparing profiles to observe similarities and differences) (Kvale, 2011). The subjects were given codes according to the group to which they belong and the number assigned to each participant (for example: subject number 101 belonging to the active group, GAS101).

FIGURE 1. Categories examined in the interview.
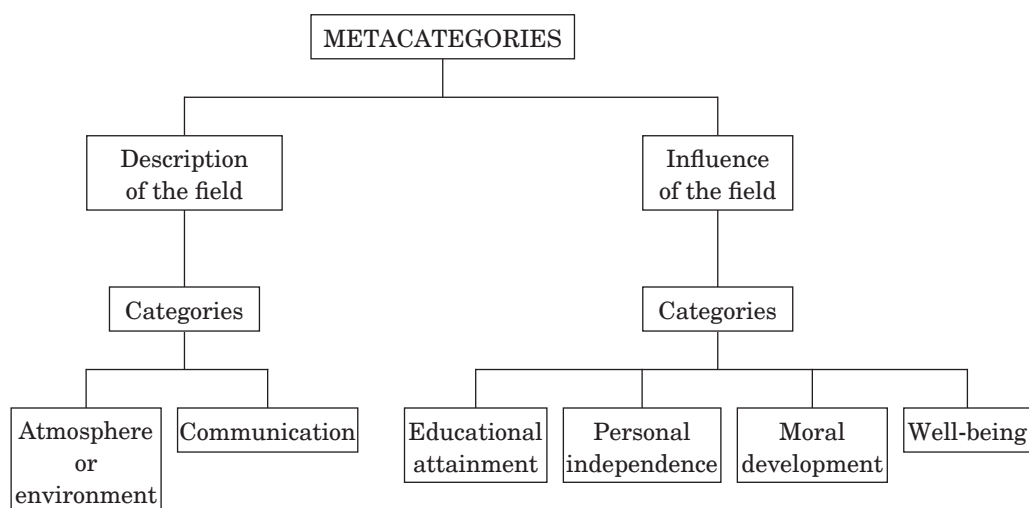
Source: Own elaboration.

Having completed *Time* 2, a new selection of subjects was carried out for *Time* 3. In this last phase, the *discussion group* technique was used (Barbour, 2013). Four discussion groups were established (DG1, DG2, DG3, DG4), with a total of 25 participants. The composition of the groups followed criteria of uniformity of maturity statuses and the members were selected in accordance with their commitment and the quality of the information provided in the interviews. In Table 2 the description of each group can be seen. In the sessions held, the content relating to the meta-categories involved in the interviews was

covered in depth, using a two-pronged critical perspective: the reality and ideality of the educational relationship. These sessions were of over an hour in length and started with a brief motivational document provided by us to elicit interventions. The information obtained was also analysed using the NVivo 10 program to achieve the best possible scrutiny of the conversations (Rapley, 2014). The subjects were allocated codes according to their discussion group and the number assigned to each participant (for example: subject number 98 belonging to discussion group 2, DG2S98).

TABLE 2. Constituent features of the discussion groups.

Discussion group	No. of subjects	Polarity by maturity status	Age	Polarity by whether they are repeating the year	Polarity by family status
Discussion group no. 1 (DG1)	7	Passive	15 = 57 % 17 = 29 % 16 = 14 %	Not repeating = 57 % Repeating = 43 %	Living with both parents = 71 % Living with one parent = 29 %
Discussion group no. 2 (DG2)	6	Active	15 = 25 % 17 = 50 % 16 = 25 %	Not repeating = 75% Repeating = 25%	Living with both parents = 75 % Living with one parent = 25 %
Discussion group no. 3 (DG3)	6	Passive	15 = 83 % 17 = 14 %	Not repeating = 83 % Repeating = 14 %	Living with both parents = 50 % Living with one parent = 50 %
Discussion group no. 4 (DG4)	6	Balanced	15 = 83 % 17 = 14 %	Not repeating = 83 % Repeating = 14 %	Living with both parents = 67 % Living with one parent = 33 %

Source: Own elaboration.

3. Results and discussion

A series of spheres linked by an ebb and flow that jointly and concurrently act on the development of the subject would be a useful representation of the contexts that limit the shaping of personal identity, as the ecological model for explaining development has argued (Bronfenbrenner, 1987). The family and school are two characteristic *microsystems* (immediate frameworks in which the person is located and where his or her meaningful experiences occur). These are discrete, but they are not fully independent from each other. Between them, the circle of friends is another specific field and is especially interesting during adolescence. We adopt a «mesosystemic» level of analysis, relating to the connections, similarities, and differences between the microsystems.

The adolescents' perceptions reveal differences according to their identity statuses (see Table 3). Comparing the group of perceptions of these different fields, the family and the peer group are the most highly valued, above the educational institution. The active group (GA) sees the greatest capacity for educational influence in the family, just as the passive group (GP) sees an equivalent influencing power in the different fields. The subjects from the low profile moratorium group (LPMG) show erratic behaviour, as is to be expected, finding the most conducive field in their peers and. In contrast, they see the strongest capacity for formative influence in the family.

The family is perceived by adolescents as the principal agent for constructing their identities. Taking into account their statements, aside from the identity levels, we observed that norms, values, beliefs and forms of behaviour typical of the culture to which they belong are transmitted through the family. Family socialisation has a significant effect on the development and social adjustment of identity. Likewise, this socialising process should be understood as a process which is bidirectional, dynamic, and more complex than has traditionally been believed. Particular attention should be paid to this aspect, to the socialisation that has an effect on the communication of expectations and aspirations, along with the participative commitment with the educational centre and the supervision and consolidation of academic work.

Adolescents, with nuances typical of their developmental dynamic, find a group of agents in their friends and classmates who are liable to influence their moral, cognitive, affective, and independent development. Conformity with the group usually reduces as they develop their own opinions and develop their critical sense. The danger of conformity, as well as certain levels of insecurity and risk, seem to reduce with the opportunities generated by educational activities that favour the process of creating a personality. Seen as a favourable environment for human relationships, the peer group has pedagogical possibilities that we should not ignore, through ethically regulated practices that are dialogic, cooperative, inclusive, and participatory, and it becomes a key point of intersection between the fields of school and family.

School does not have a positive image among the adolescents interviewed,

particularly among those who have a higher level of maturity or are closer to achieving it. The environment in the centres is far from ideal for arousing their interest. Trapped among practices that are frequently obsolete and have a limited degree of personalisation, the school agency, must, without forgetting its cultural and social functions, innovate in search of pedagogical care practices that renew the ultimate purpose of education, the complete education of the personality. This is an area of research that should be explored and evaluated appropriately, looking for relevant formulas for conciliating school and family.

TABLE 3. Evaluation of adolescents' perceptions (+, positive overall assessment; -, negative overall assessment; =, ambivalent overall assessment).

Microsystems or fields	Climate	Communication	Educational attainment	Personal independence	Moral development	Well-being	Levels of maturity
Family	+	+	+	+	+	+	GA
	+	-	+	-	+	+	GP
	=	-	+	=	+	=	LPMG
School	-	=	=	-	-	-	GA
	=	+	+	+	+	=	GP
	-	=	=	-	+	-	LPMG
Peers	=	=	=	=	=	+	GA
	+	+	+	-	+	+	GP
	+	+	=	=	=	+	LPMG

Source: Own elaboration.

We will now move on to a detailed analysis of the specific fields in the study.

3.1. Family environment

Family relationships are generally highly valued by all of the adolescents, regardless of the maturity group to which they belong. The process of adolescence involves an unavoidable family crisis resulting from winning independence from the attachment figures from childhood, figures who continue to be fundamental. Although new areas of confidentiality are sought with peers, with whom new desires for communication are channelled, adolescents still need the unconditional support and availability of the attachment

figures for their own security (something more evident in clear situations of vulnerability) and to be able to open themselves adequately to the broadening of new human relations.

Exerting personal independence requires efforts by the young person. Although all of the subjects, regardless of their identity status, say that they have confidence in themselves, those in GP express a lower capacity for exploration and greater doubts about their creative possibilities than those in GA. These two contrasting testimonies illustrate this: «I normally take the initiative in various activities and I am always available» (GAS29); and «I don't have any imagination and I find it hard to take the lead» (GPS45). Similarly, from an autobiographical perspective, the idea that the development of responsibility as an ethical category is more clearly favoured in the family (García, Escámez & Pérez, 2009) is apparent from the discourses, albeit with some nuances, as well as the flowering of structural relationships conductive to the unfolding of spirituality (Dowling *et al.*, 2004).

Regardless of their identity status, the interviewees believe that the main locus for the transmission of human values and the privileged area for the educational relationship is in the family (Buxarrais, 2012). This is because, in effect, its power, far from having broken down, has become consolidated in the individual biography and the collective imagination (Santos Rego, 2015). They all state that the family plays a decisive role in educational attainment. Examples of this include the following testimonies: «the education you get depends on your family» (DG1S46); and «...communication has a big effect, and what your parents think of you» (DG2S98). Even so, the most mature subjects argue that success depends fundamentally on personal behaviour, in the words of DG2S77: «at the end of the day, the decision is yours, regardless of your setting».

Family models become key identity referents, their evaluation improving with the habitual practice of dialogue, associated with the subjects belonging to GA. The intimacy, support, and emotional security experienced in the family setting seem to create the ideal conditions for establishing satisfying personal relationships (Domínguez & Rodríguez, 2003). As has been shown in other pieces of research (Herrero, Estévez, & Musitu, 2005), the existence of open communication with parents has a positive influence on the adolescent's school self-esteem, and its absence is linked to psychological distress. Communication problems in the family context can lead to difficulties adjusting to the school environment.

3.2. School environment

The educational institution does not inspire enthusiasm in the adolescents, even among those who do wish to pursue post-compulsory studies. They are not just critical, but also disillusioned, and in general they call for a substantial improvement in human relations. The reasons put forward reiterate the importance of a good climate for creating emotional well-being that is favourably disposed towards study, work, and cooperation on

various tasks, as other authors have noted (Cohen, 2006; Collins & Parson, 2010). The positive youth development model (Pertegal, 2014) insists that emotional well-being is not only an active factor for promoting personal development, but can also prevent problems from arising.

There are many narrations of frustration when school experiences are mentioned. Poorly designed timetables, teachers' limited social skills, didactic styles that drain motivation, and so on: «There are subjects we do not like and that are at awkward times...» (DG1S91); «the teachers often arrive saying that they have had a tough day with other groups, but they should think about what we have done during the day... and try to motivate us» (DG1S64).

When they set out their ideas about what the school institution should be like, they mainly call for a good environment. When setting out their expectations about their classmates, GP and LPMG subjects say that they feel weighted down by bad experiences with certain classmates («I don't feel understood a lot of the time, I would like them to be closer and less brusque», said LPMGS74), certain fragilities in this regard being apparent in them. Those in GA show that they trust more in the values of dialogue and mediation, even if they do also acknowledge unedifying experiences, revealing a problem specific to this stage. In effect, tact in relations seems to be a fundamental means for establishing inclusive dynamics that are likely to contribute to the personal development processes of all of the students, in particular those lagging the most, through cooperative and signi-

ficative practices that encourage commitment, independence and responsibility (Vázquez, Escámez & García, 2012). This phenomenon includes the teachers, who are accused, on the whole, of paying insufficient attention to individual needs and not verbalising positive expectations towards students, these being rather more reactive in character and resulting from marks and good behaviour. So, DG1S64 says: «if a teacher just comes to do the class and doesn't even look at us or ask us anything...», emphasising the teachers' limited interactive skills; and DG4S114 insists: «although there are some teachers who are friendly, most of them don't pay any attention to you». They all believe that the teacher is a key figure, both for their motivation and for their academic achievements. Those in GA associate the quality of the learning with the quality of their relationship with the teachers (who should stand out because of their vocation), being less vulnerable to a low-quality or inadequate relationship than the subjects from the other groups. Listening to the subjects, the enormous power of influence of the teachers becomes apparent: «if a teacher is good and listens to us, we trust them and follow them...» (DG1S121).

When taking stock of the years spent at school, the less mature adolescents consider, with some nuances, that the education they have received might be sufficient for their appropriate moral and social integration. In contrast, the ones from GA (in particular those with identity achieved) associate their assessment with the demands that society itself establishes, expanding their expectations to include

substantial improvements that can increase educational quality (Angelides & Ainscow, 2000). Consequently, their list of educational content that should be promoted includes cultural knowledge corresponding to the different curriculum areas and the set of values that make education into a complete experience (comprehensive education), in a setting of quality human relations.

Taking responsibility in the educational process is a generalised demand among the more mature ones who call for methods that will allow them to develop their personal initiative and require a relational dynamic tending towards independent development, deploying their critical sense and the formation of their own judgement (Ibáñez-Martín, 1991). As GAS92 states: «They should let us express ourselves more and ask our opinions, there should be more debates, they should make us interact with each other…». Meanwhile, the students from LPMG insist that teaching should be based on relationships that principally promote motivation; the students from GP do not see a need for methodological changes. The least mature ones, unlike the most mature ones, tend to attribute their learning to external factors (teachers, media, etc.).

Most of them call for more participation in everyday tasks and in school life, as has been stated in other studies (Susinos & Ceballos, 2012). However, differences in their specific demands are apparent: the members of GA call for participation to develop critical thinking, creativity and the ability to take decisions («they should let us make mistakes; we shouldn't be

scared to get things wrong…», GAS18); those from the other groups link participation to teaching styles (they participate with pleasure if the teacher makes them feel good), and do not find it necessary in all cases. In the practices they recognise, in any case, an inclusive educational space that can facilitate the search for personal identity, developing individuality and cooperation between young people, and boosting the influence of peers in the participation (Simons-Morton & Chen, 2009).

3.3. Peer group

Although friends do not go so far as to be true attachment figures, they can fulfil some similar functions. The peer group, which is single sex at the start of adolescence but soon becomes mixed, can be a favourable or unfavourable environment for constructing identity (Molina, Inda, & Fernández, 2009). In general, participants value friendship highly and believe that it is necessary for constructing their own identities, albeit with differing nuances: the GA subjects are more confident in these links than the others, even though they display greater critical potential. This is illustrated by DG2S119: «Friends have a big influence. Before I used to get good grades, but I started to hang out with people I shouldn't have and everything went wrong, but things changed and I still have some good friends».

The ideal of friendship is linked to a long-term relationship in which confidence, solidarity, and intimacy are felt. The GP and LPMG students believe it is important for happiness. The GA students,

on the other hand, relegate friendship relations to a different level after their first experiences of dating, in accordance with patterns that are typical of adolescent development (Urbiola & Estévez, 2015). The greater the level of maturity, the more importance personal bonds relating to patterns typical of adulthood seem to present. Consequently, the most mature subjects are more open to recognising the existence of enmity.

Leisure activities make it possible to explore personal preferences, and choose them and get involved through a particular personal commitment to one or other of them, thus favouring identity development. As DG2S98 states: «My friends influence me as much as my parents or more». We observed that, for all of the statuses, studying generally displaces leisure time that is set aside for friends, something that might affect studying in a different way. A lack of motivation and family problems are recurring reasons given to explain school failure (while identity achieved subjects add that bad company along with a certain degree of immaturity are also significant causes). Peers can have a positive or negative effect on the adolescent's behaviour (Benson & Saito, 2000), as through their relationships isolated habits and behaviour patterns are transmitted, whether or not emotional support is provided. They are also a notable factor that regulates personal behaviour when interacting in the group or gang.

The new context of the network society has expanded possibilities for interaction in relation to friendship through multimedia content, the benefits of instant communication, access to information, the opportunities to shape an online identity, and the development of specific skills relating to using a network. The adolescents with the least achieved maturity statuses have the most friends on the social networks, while those with identity achieved have the least. Cultivating friendships in real life, alongside care and education, primarily in the family environment, as can be seen in the contributions of the most mature, might be an antidote to the risks of the relationships established in the virtual world, regardless of the communicative advantages that this entails (Espinar & López, 2009).

4. Conclusions

The family is a vital framework for the well-being and psychosocial adjustment of adolescents who are looking to build and develop their identity. Furthermore, the existence of an appropriately functioning family seems to help prevent inappropriate and risky behaviour. Its coordination with the educational influence exercised in the school also seems to be fundamental, although there are probably no universal formulae for coordinating and implementing synergies. Consequently, a prospect of community educational demands opens up that transcends these specific areas.

A quality educational process requires good human relationships in the classroom. This is illustrated by the more mature adolescents, but is also noted in the particular needs and shortcomings expressed by those with a lower level of maturity who are more emotionally

vulnerable when faced with relationships that are not adequate or ideal.

Teachers can change lives. The least mature subjects place in them their hopes of finding sources of motivation and perseverance in their education, demanding clearly personalised attention, and the more mature subjects recognise the teachers' power to push them to do better and help them find their own path through everyday learning.

A curriculum and educational project based on caring for human relations can facilitate the development of an achieved identity. In the students' own words, this complex and difficult process requires: active participation in the life of the centre and in the classrooms; the cultivation of personal responsibility in all of the educational process; the promotion of meaningful learning which encourages dialogue as a means of communication and personal enrichment as well as for overcoming conflicts; enhancing motivational processes; and tact so that the personal character of the education is not neglected.

A refuge and source of support while attaining ever greater autonomy from family relations, the peer group is especially important during adolescence. However, relationships with peers are ambivalent; they can turn out to be appropriate or harmful, of great help for learning and for confronting events that are typical of this stage, and as negative pressure to perform inappropriate or antisocial behaviour. Peer relationships are the area of confluence between the principal microsystems (family and school), and are a field of unmistakable interest for an

educational activity directed towards facilitating personal maturity and trying to establish continuities between these microsystems.

Finally, it is worth considering and carefully experimenting with particular training strategies with a cross-curricular aim or specific to the domain, among others: associating exposure to crisis situations with teaching care practices; promoting recognition of the emotional complexity of the educational relationship and cultivating pro-social competences; and stimulating the creation and implementation of personal projects, adjusting aspirations and possibilities, that are capable of conciliating the requirements of self-realisation and social demands.

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