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Social Adjustment and Cooperative Work in Primary Education: Teacher and Parent Perceptions[☆]

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ABSTRACT

Cooperative work is useful in education, as it has a positive impact on the social, emotional and academic environment of the student. This study aims to assess whether working in cooperative groups (CG) in the classroom promotes pro-social and adaptive behaviour, and decreases maladaptation in primary education (PE) children. A total of 78 3rd and 4th year of PE schoolchildren were included in the study. The effectiveness of the intervention – from the perception of teachers and family – was assessed by using a pre-test/post-test design with a non-intervened group (NIG). Results were analysed using analysis of covariance (ANCOVA). Results were more significant from a teachers' perception than from a family's perception in the variables: pro-social, adaptive, and maladaptive behaviour. The intervention was shown to be effective in improving pro-social and adaptive behaviour in primary school children. However, differences are observed between the perception of teachers and family when assessing the behaviour of the children.

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Adaptación y trabajo cooperativo en el alumnado de educación primaria desde la percepción del profesorado y la familia

RESUMEN

El trabajo cooperativo es útil en educación ya que obtiene resultados positivos en el ámbito social, afectivo y académico. El objetivo del presente trabajo es evaluar si trabajar en grupo cooperativo (GC) en el aula fomenta las conductas prosociales y adaptativas, y disminuye las inadaptables del alumnado en Educación Primaria (EP). Han participado en el estudio 78 estudiantes de tercero y cuarto de EP. Para determinar la eficacia de la intervención –desde la perspectiva del profesorado y la familia–, se ha llevado a cabo un diseño pretest-postest con grupo no intervenido (GNI) analizándose los datos mediante análisis de la covarianza (ANCOVA). La intervención arroja más resultados significativos desde la percepción del profesorado que desde la familia en las variables de conducta prosocial, adaptativa e inadaptable. La intervención llevada a cabo muestra su eficacia en la mejora de la conducta prosocial y adaptativa del alumnado aunque se observan discrepancias entre la percepción del profesorado y de la familia en la valoración de la conducta infantil.

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Introduction

School is where most children get to know their peers, make their first friends and participate in group activities. School relationships have positive and negative effects on adjustment, academic performance and the sense of belonging (Hamre & Pianta, 2001; Klem & Connell, 2004). The quality of friendship in childhood influences school adjustment in adolescence (Wentzel, McNamara-Barry, & Caldwell, 2004). The degree of integration in the peer

group has important implications for personal wellbeing and psychosocial development (Carrasco, Alarcón, & Trianes, 2015). On the contrary, peer rejection predicts an increase in internalised and externalised problems (Kraatz-Keily, Bates, Dodge, & Pettit, 2000). Suffering rejection by peers predicts anxiety, depression, avoidance of social relationships (Gazelle & Rudolph, 2004) and, over time, the risk of antisocial behaviour in adolescence, even if the exteriorisation of problems has been controlled during childhood (Ladd & Burgess, 2001). Moreover, children who have no friends in childhood are likely to suffer from limited prosocial behaviour and emotional problems (Wentzel et al., 2004). In sum, the association between suffering problems with peers in childhood and showing psychosocial adjustment problems in adolescence has been proven.

Using Cooperative Work (hereinafter CW) as a methodology in classrooms has proved useful in education. CW involves an interactive approach to organising classwork in which students are responsible for their own learning as well as their peers' learning (Rodríguez & Herrera, 2010). After listening to the teacher's instructions, each Cooperative Group (hereinafter CG) has to organise, plan and carry out the task by consensus (Rodríguez & Herrera, 2010). Therefore, CW is an instrument to encourage learning in students, regardless of their personal characteristics and educational needs, and so as to promote dialogue, coexistence, solidarity and cooperation skills (Pujolàs & Lago, 2011). CW has proven effective to: (a) develop social skills in students (Lavasani, Afzali, & Afzali, 2011); (b) facilitate the inclusion of students with learning difficulties and promote interpersonal relationships with students with different learning needs and different cultural and ethnic backgrounds (Gillies, 2014); and (c) decrease racist attitudes (Díaz-Aguado, 2003). Also, CW has a positive effect on emotional development, as it: (a) promotes self-esteem (Bertucci, Conte, Johnson, & Johnson, 2010); (b) increases intrinsic motivation (Hanze & Berger, 2007); (c) increases the group's perception of cohesion and social responsibility towards the learning of others (Gillies, 2004); and (d) increases team power, that is, the trust in the team, hence the effectiveness of the group in future CW situations (León, Mendo-Lázaro, Felipe-Castaño, Polo, & Fajardo-Bullón, 2017). To achieve good results in the CG, teachers must define the goal of the task (Prien, Taylor, Renn, & Janz, 2000). In fact, one of the reasons why CW is sometimes not effective is the lack of teacher training (Sharan, 2010).

Since CW is an increasingly common methodology (Suárez, 2010), it is necessary to assess the effectiveness of programmes promoting it. A review of psycho-educational interventions in recent years in Spain shows that most of them have been assessed by students (Cerrillo-Martín, 2006; Coelho, Sousa, & Figueira, 2014), teachers (González-Valenzuela, Martín-Ruiz, & Delgado-Ríos, 2012), mediators (Cerrillo-Martín, 2006) and external researchers (Justicia-Arráez, Pichardo, & Justicia, 2015). Regarding the assessment of the Programme presented in this study, it shows relatively innovative aspects, as it has taken into account the perception of parents (family). A multi-source approach was used, in order to involve the participation of teachers/tutors and family (student's parent). Both sources are considered reliable and valid for assessing children's behaviour (Trianes, Blanca, García, Muñoz, & Fernández-Baena, 2007). Additionally, these two sources provide different information, depending on the context, the informant's prospects or bias and the possible errors of measurement (Kraemer et al., 2003). The use of a multi-source approach is not intended to identify which source has the exclusive truth about the child in question, but rather to draft a more comprehensive view of the child's behaviour in the different contexts (Rubin, Bukowski, & Jeffrey, 2006).

This study aims to assess the effectiveness of a programme to develop competent social relationships in primary education (Trianes, 2012) in the third module *learning to help and cooperate*, aimed to promote prosocial behaviour and school adjustment as well

as to decrease maladaptation, based on data collected from teachers and family. In particular, the aim is to analyse the differences between students involved in the intervention (IG) and students that are not (NIG), in relation to the following variables: *prosocial behaviour*, *adaptive behaviour* and *maladaptive behaviour*. Expected results would involve a significant increase in *prosocial behaviour* (Hypothesis 1) and *adaptive behaviour* (Hypothesis 2), along with a significant decrease in *maladaptive behaviour* (Hypothesis 3), in the IG in relation to the NIG. Also, teachers are expected to shed more significant results than family, due to their greater proximity to students in the school context where the assessment is taking place.

Method

Participants

Participants were 86 schoolchildren (50 boys and 36 girls) aged between 7 and 10 years old ($M = 8.62$, $SD = .76$), attending a public PE school in a town of the province of Malaga (Spain). Students were divided into two groups depending on whether they participated in the intervention programme or not. The intervened group (IG) was composed of 42 students (23 boys and 19 girls) from 3rd and 4th years (two classes), while the non-intervened group (NIG) was composed of 44 students (27 boys and 17 girls) from the same years (two classes). Participants were also 86 families of the students and four teachers/tutors from the two classes (two men and two women).

Neither the choice of school nor the assignment of students to groups was made randomly. The school where the research was conducted was the school assigned to one of the authors of this study (who is also a teacher) by the Ministry of Education of the Regional Government of Andalusia, which did not participate as an informant in this research.

Instruments

BASC-2 (Behaviour Assessment System for Children and Adolescents)

This test assesses four adaptive aspects and ten maladaptive aspects of children's behaviour (Reynolds & Kamphaus, 1992). Its Spanish adaptation (González, Fernández, Pérez, & Santamaría, 2004) was used in this study. In addition, this research used the P-2 questionnaire to be completed by families (134 items) and the T-2 questionnaire by teachers (149 items). While both questionnaires assess the same aspects, T-2 provides an extra analysis on study skills and learning problems. Both questionnaires have a Likert response format and five answer options.

The study assesses four aspects of *adaptive behaviour*: *adaptability*, *leadership*, *social skills* and *study skills*; and ten aspects of *maladaptive behaviour*: *aggressiveness*, *hyperactivity*, *behavioural problems*, *anxiety*, *depression*, *somatisation*, *atypicality*, *withdrawal*, *learning problems* and *attention problems*.

In the Spanish version, the T-2 and P-2 scales show a reliability of around .80 measured by the Cronbach's alpha coefficient, thus showing adequate internal consistency in the different normative groups. Test-retest correlations showed satisfactory values after three months (.82 and .88, respectively).

In the study sample, the T-2 scale scored Cronbach alpha values (α) of .90, McDonald Omega (Ω) of .91 and a percentage of explained variance of 68.66. As for the P-2 level, results are similar ($\alpha = .89$, $\Omega = .90$ and 67.54% of explained variance). Results are satisfactory.

PBQ (Prosocial Behaviour Questionnaire)

The Prosocial Behaviour Questionnaire (PBQ) assesses positive aspects in the social behaviour – *i.e.* helping, cooperating, sharing

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