

# Moral Education and Improvement of Coexistence in Secondary Education (12-16 Years) in Spain

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Coexistence and moral education are areas of great interest in Spanish compulsory education, especially in the period that comprises between 12 and 16 years of age, named “compulsory secondary education” in Spain. With the aim to improve the processes of coexistence within this level, this research team on education from the University of Salamanca has conducted an experimental study, implementing a programme to provide moral education through ICTs (information and communication technologies). So as to verify the positive influence of the programme, a series of means have been applied with consideration for two groups—control and experimental—and certain stages of pre- and post- test assessment. The first results denote that there has been an improvement in social-personal values in the students that were involved more actively in the programme.

*Keywords:* assessment, programme evaluation, testing and measurement, experimental research on education, student behavior

## General Description of Research Questions/Theoretical Framework

Throughout 20 years of studies on the matter of coexistence in Spain, several contributions have been evaluated (Martín, Fernández, Andrés, Del Barrio, & Echeita, 2003): The SAVE (Sevilla AntiViolencia Escolar) programme showed a reduction in the number of victims and aggressors, as well as an improvement in the atmosphere of the centre. The evaluation of the Educational Programme for the Tolerance and Prevention of Violence among the Young (Díaz-Aguado, Royo, Segura, & Andrés, 1996) confirmed a meaningful positive change in the adolescents’ attitudes towards violence and its alternatives. Another contribution was held in Zaragoza with a plan of moral education (Orduña, 2006), in which strategies of computerized monitoring of coexistence and other tactics were implemented using the technologies as medium and that, at the same time, promoted a dialogue network that grouped different countries belonging to the European Union.

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Cava and Mositu (2002) supported that improving the coexistence allows to help adolescents generate autonomy, improve the self-esteem, make easier the work of the teachers, improve academic learning and defend as a strategy cooperative work among other reasons, because it allows favorable interpersonal relationships. What is more, through collaborative learning, competencies are developed and knowledge is gained (Waldegg, 2002). If we reflect on the potentialities of technologies in this field, as Winther and Balsley (2004) have stated, collaborative work is encouraged, especially through the use of blogs.

In the US, it was evidenced that the use of ICTs (information and communication technologies) for the teaching of conflict resolution is an appropriate alternative. After the application of a programme, it was qualitatively and quantitatively demonstrated that adolescents manifested more abilities to solve and prevent conflicts (Goldsworthy, Schwartz, Barab, & Landa, 2007).

Ryan, Sweeder and Bednar (1998), after running a programme that developed empathy towards people with AIDS through the use of chat rooms, briefly pointed out that educational technology is a specially effective tool to develop values, such as solidarity, responsibility, equity and self-control in class.

The values that rule coexistence, solidarity, honesty, equality, responsibility, freedom, love, respect towards life, difference and human rights, cooperation and peace and justice (Cortina, 1996) must be promoted in the everyday life of the educational institution and in the curricula areas (Tuvilla, 2003). Therefore, if it is evident that there is an urgency to undertake a moral and attitudinal education (Gil, 2001, p. 21), we should join forces in order to educate people committed to the above-mentioned values.

### **Methodology**

The aim of the present paper is to prove that the implementation of a programme for moral education through the use of new technologies<sup>1</sup> enhances the social values for the coexistence of adolescents in secondary education classrooms. In order to confirm the hypothesis, a quasi-experimental methodology has been set out, with the design of non-equivalent groups, and with a pre- and post- test assessment. A manipulation and control of variables through the assignation of an experimental and a control group has been carried out. Likewise, interfering variables that could affect the studied dependents will be considered (Shadish & Luellen, 2006). To prove the impact of the programme, diverse instruments of assessment were applied. In this paper, we present the results obtained in the questionnaire on socio-personal values (De la Fuente, Peralta, & Sánchez, 2006).

We worked with a total of 50 students, of which 12 belong to the experimental group that was selected by the punctuations that had been granted to them as they participated in the different activities of the programme.

The implemented programme is called VES (values in situation, "Valores En Situación"). Its starting point is the everyday life of the secondary school and the acknowledgement through an express congratulation in a blog because of having performed actions or positive conducts that reflect one of the values. Taking these actions into account, we put forward the theory about that value and questions to encourage the reflection and participation in the comments on the blog. The duration was 9 weeks, working in each one of them with a different value.

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## Results

As we have previously pointed out, we only display the results obtained after the application of the questionnaire on socio-personal values for coexistence. The equality hypothesis (n.s. 0.05) in the pre-test situation was confirmed for the control and experimental groups in the analyzed variables. We foretell that meaningful statistic differences are observed (n.s. 0.05) in 15 of the 93 items formulated. In Table 1, we present the results of the t-test for independent samples in these 15 items.

Table 1

### *T-test for Independent Samples*

Items	Control N=23		Experimental N=10		t-test for independent samples	
	$\bar{X}$	$S_x$	$\bar{X}$	$S_x$	t	p
71. When I observe I have done something well, I usually tell myself: "Come on! It's worth working hard".	3.51	1.30	4.31	0.75	2.7041	0.0104
68. I am a person that usually thanks people for favours and help received.	3.74	1.37	4.38	0.65	2.2559	0.0291
23. I am sure that when I act with justice I avoid problems.	3.39	1.57	4.23	0.83	2.4334	0.0195
63. I am a person that behaves nicely towards others.	3.46	1.37	4.46	0.78	3.2491	0.0025
16. I think that respecting others avoids problems and makes life nicer for everybody.	3.71	1.43	4.62	0.65	3.0772	0.0036
51. I feel very happy when I achieve my goals.	4.38	0.94	4.85	0.55	2.1498	0.0385
2. I am sure that helping others without expecting anything in return, is satisfactory.	3.74	1.21	4.62	0.65	3.2962	0.0021
64. I am a person that likes doing favours for others, although they do not return them.	3.33	1.44	4.08	0.95	2.1193	0.0421
17. I believe that being polite is a good quality in people.	3.97	1.33	4.77	0.44	3.2455	0.0021
1. I think that behaving kindly is important.	3.92	1.22	4.85	0.38	4.1635	0.0001
22. I consider I am a person that helps others.	3.72	1.28	4.54	0.52	3.2827	0.0019
25. I think that if we are orderly we will act better in life.	4.08	1.20	4.69	0.48	2.6310	0.0114
50. I feel proud of myself when I achieve my goals because I work hard.	3.97	1.24	4.69	0.48	2.9769	0.0045
76. I usually show good manners and have nice words for those around me.	3.44	1.39	4.38	0.87	2.8890	0.0067
83. When outsiders arrive, I always try to look after them well.	3.64	1.42	4.25	0.75	1.9326	0.0612

Participants expressed a more favorable opinion in the post-test about the suggested statements. In this way, people who were more involved in the programme show results denoting that they had a greater capacity to recognise their own success. On the other hand, a person who is grateful for a favor done is somebody that has developed empathy, being this one of the most worked values in the programme. The capacity to give thanks, kindness, education and good manners were favored. Moreover, a positive influence of the programme on the perception of the value of "justice" is observed. Finally, the sense of respect and solidarity was stressed and the students interiorized these values. This is made obvious, because those who were more involved in the programme agreed more in that helping others is satisfactory and that respecting others avoids problems and makes life nicer.

## Discussion and Conclusion

Prior results have allowed us to state that the application of specific programmes in order to improve coexistence through the development of socio-personal values offers indications of positive results in

compulsory secondary school students.

Studying school coexistence to find models of intervention and consolidated research constitutes an important challenge due to that it is a field of research relatively new and is of great concern in present-day society. As stated by Ortega (2006), it has been studied in Spain for barely 20 years. This previous research made it possible to structure some of the approaches, methods and strategies implemented nowadays to deal with this problem.

In this sense, we chose moral education as strategy to enhance coexistence. It is complex to visualize “moral education” from the perspective of intervention as we place ourselves in a field dealt with by literature, philosophy, and even politics. In spite of this, a psico-pedagogic approach has tried to be developed, so as to allow implementing a programme of educational intervention.

To contextualize this intervention in our present society, we introduced the strategy and medium given by ICTs. In a society of knowledge and information, and working with adolescents, we find that ICTs not only offer a great motivational potential but also are structuring the thought and learning of the students, as well as transmitting knowledge in an attractive and creative way. These characteristics positively influence the attitudes and the feelings of the subjects in whose personality, when they do not forget the pedagogic objectives, knowledge is more easily integrated.

After the application of the programme, we can conclude that reflection and moral learning has been encouraged to achieve the improvement of coexistence, even when statistically significant differences were not obtained in the coexistence variable, as they were obtained in that of socio-personal values. This data allow us to consider that the objectives of the programme referred to moral education were achieved. Possibly, if a more extensive programme were developed, with a greater implication of the whole education community, the results would be promoted as well.

Our research coincides with that of Perez (2007) in which, after carrying out a similar study to ours, no statistically significant differences were found either in the area of coexistence. However, both their research and ours permit to conclude that there have been some modifications in the classroom atmosphere, favoring social relationships.

Another coinciding research is Goldworthy, Schwartz and Barab’s (2007), in which they also use ICTs as a tool to transmit knowledge that leads to learning how to resolve conflicts. In both studies, it is possible to conclude that those experiences which relay on these mediums allow a cognitive development and learning from experience which produces a great impact on personality and has repercussions on people’s behavior and sociability.

Using Fernandez’s (2008) words, we believe that creating programmes to intervene in coexistence demands a design based on values that guide future actions. It is also believed that a research, such as this, can be useful as a first stage towards a deeper intervention to educate the education community in values that can structure school coexistence.

Authors with ample experience in the field of school coexistence (Ortega, 2008) pointed out moral education as valid strategy. This study hence becomes an innovative contribution that responds to the demands, not only of the research community, but also of education institutions and society as a whole.

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