

## AN ACADEMIC AND PROFESSIONAL NETWORK FOR PSYCHOLOGY IN EDUCATION

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In mid-September 2010, an agreement was signed in Spain on the incorporation of the educational psychologist into the Spanish education system. As stressed at the time, there was a clear and relevant need for a network that would make possible the bringing together of efforts by parents, teachers, educational psychologists (including professionals), academic authorities and practitioners from academia and professional psychology (Conference of Deans of Psychology and Psychological Associations) for improving the state of non-university formal education in Spain. What is presented here is an outline of the Network, which seeks to integrate the advantages of Web 1.0 (one way) and 2.0 (multidirectional and participatory). It is organized around 5 core categories: educational psychologists, parents, teachers, the academic world, and support institutions. All such groups are offered the possibility of access to relevant and up-to-date information (on legislation, intervention programmes, services, etc.) and of participating, either intra-or inter-group, in teaching and learning activities (discussions, grant applications, proposals, initiatives, advice, etc.). The idea is that this network will added to and transformed in on-going fashion (with the incorporation of Web 3.0), through the cooperation and participation of all those involved or with an interest in academic and professional education, especially from Spain, but also from other countries, if they so wish.

**Key words:** Academic and professional network, Educational psychologists, Teachers, Family.

A mediados de septiembre de 2010 se firmó en España un Acuerdo sobre la Inserción del psicólogo educativo en el sistema de educación español no universitario. En ese momento ya se indicó la pertinencia de la implementación de una red que posibilitara la unión de esfuerzos de padres, profesores, psicólogos educativos (entre otros profesionales), autoridades académicas y profesionales del mundo académico y profesional de la Psicología (Conferencia de Decanos y Colegios de Psicólogos) para la mejora de la enseñanza formal no universitaria. Lo que ahora se presenta es un esbozo avanzado de esta Red, que trata de integrar las ventajas tanto de la Web 1.0 (unidireccional) como de la 2.0 (multidireccional y participativa). Está, de momento, estructurada en torno a 5 núcleos de interés: psicólogos educativos, padres, profesores, autoridades académicas e instituciones de consulta. A todos estos grupos se les ofrece la posibilidad de contar con información relevante y actualizada para cada uno de ellos (legislación, programas de intervención, servicios de conexión, etc.), a la par que la de participar, bien intra o intergrupos, en actividades de enseñanza y aprendizaje mediante las TIC (discusiones, ayudas, propuestas, iniciativas, asesoramiento, etc.). Esta Red, que ve la luz pública en estos precisos momentos, está llamada a ir construyéndose y transformándose continuamente (incorporación de la Web 3.0), gracias a la colaboración y participación de todas y cada una de las personas pertenecientes al mundo académico y profesional de la educación, sobre todo dentro de España, pero con el deseo de que puedan integrarse, si así lo desean, también otros países.

**Palabras clave:** Red académico-profesional, Psicólogos educativos, Padres, Profesores.

### THE AGREEMENT

On 21st September 2010 an Agreement was signed to regulate the incorporation of the educational psychologist into the Spanish non-university education system. The institutions and groups that signed

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the Agreement were widely representative of the Spanish educational community: the Federation of Public School Heads (FEDADI), the Spanish Confederation of Parents' Associations, the National Catholic Confederation of Parents and Pupils' Parents, the educational psychology community, the Psychology Deans' Conference of Spanish Universities, and the General Council of Spanish Psychological Associations. The most relevant core issues covered by the Agreement can be summarized as follows: a) that there are strongly felt and expressed educational needs which can only be adequately met by professionals, including of course educational psychologists; b) that the principal functions of the

educational psychologist are, among others (Watkins, Crosby, & Pearson, 2001): assessment, counselling and specialist intervention, be it corrective (pre-referral), preventive (tertiary, secondary and primary prevention) or optimization-related (improving the processes and products of teaching and learning); c) that the appropriate exercise of such functions inevitably requires a specialized, profession-oriented Masters degree representing at least 60 ECTS credits and focused on the functions mentioned above (Fernández, 2011).

**THE ACADEMIC AND PROFESSIONAL NETWORK**

There is little doubt today about the relevance of Internet, and especially of social and information networks (Facebook, Twitter, Tuenti, etc.), for our everyday lives, and most particularly for activities within the context of formal education; in this regard we would obviously include Information and Communications Technologies (Castells, 2008; Clarke, 2001; Gackenbach, 2007; Jonassen, 2006; Nilson & Nocon, 2004; Orihuela, 2011; Zhao & Frank, 2003). This does not mean, however, that this great technological revolution is without its less-than-positive collateral effects: superficiality, fragmentation of information, traps, digital deception, and so on (Baker, 2008; Carr, 2010).

Bearing in mind the two sides of the coin – the positive and the negative repercussions – we have aimed to develop a network (a set of actors/nodes that develop certain virtual connections between one another) which includes the most positive features of the current networks (Web 1.0 and Web 2.0), trying at the same time to avoid as far as possible their more negative aspects (Churruca & Rouhiainen, 2010; Redondo, 2010; Tapscott & Williams, 2006). One of the most notable features of this network is its eminently academic and professional character; that is, it combines the academic world (university lecturers) and the professional psychological world serving the different agents of the non-university educational community (teachers, parents and academic authorities as direct targets, and students as indirect targets). Thus, it aims to be much more than just another social network. The various agents of the teaching and learning community will be not mere spectators, but protagonists, with a mentality that is more digital than analogical, seeking progressive innovation and utilizing 360° connectivity, that is, total circularity (Fernández, 2008; González-Alorda, 2010). Working with this network involves having access to new types of services

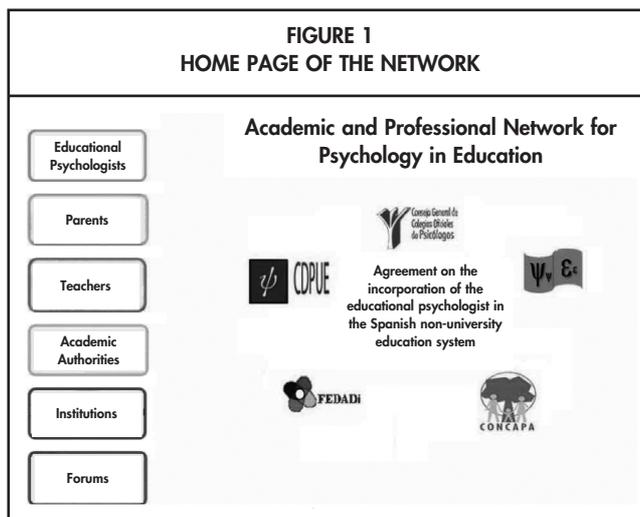
that imply a new way of thinking, a new attitude, a new culture, and even a new ethics (Jarvis, 2009).

**STRUCTURE OF THE NETWORK**

Once inside the academic and professional network, one gains access to various itineraries: that of educational psychologists, that of parents, that of teachers, that of academic authorities, that of specialist support institutions, and that of the forums. This can be seen in Figure 1.

On entering the itinerary of *Educational Psychologists*, various routes open up, as shown in Figure 2:

The first of these revolves around resources, which are broken down according to thematic areas. Those shown here constitute merely an illustrative sample, though as the network develops and evolves their numbers will grow, always in line with at least two factors. On the one hand, the felt and expressed needs of the educational community; on the other, the advances that science can offer on daily basis and a worldwide scale. Inter-resource browsing (as an illustrative example we have chosen bullying, in the knowledge that the rest of the resources are structured in basically the same way) always provides us with the same menu: a) an initial definitional approach, the elements of which are selected by specialists who have devoted decades of research and professional activity to this subject area; b) the most relevant and representative studies on the matter in question, on a worldwide scale; c) the intervention programmes that have shown themselves to be the most valid and reliable; d) the assessment instruments with the most scientific endorsement; e) consultations on real problems in relation to each area in three different



formats (forums, e-mails and videoconferences); and e) a selection, made by specialists, of videos or films that help provide a better understanding of the matter being dealt with. It is important to note that a large part of the content of these resources can be downloaded from the network right now, as they are already in digital format.

Up to now we have taken a first look at what can be offered by the resources section, within the basic framework of Web 1.0 (one-directional: what is available in the network, selected by expert professionals in their respective subject areas). However, at the present time, now well into the 21st century, such a context is totally insufficient. What is needed is an approach

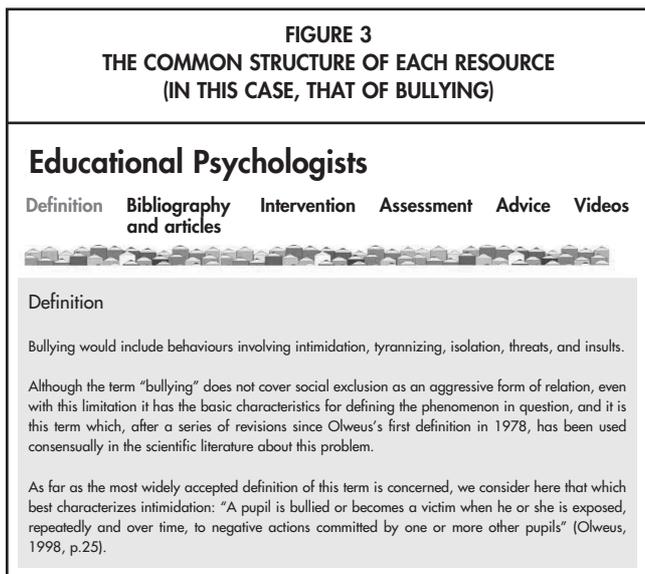
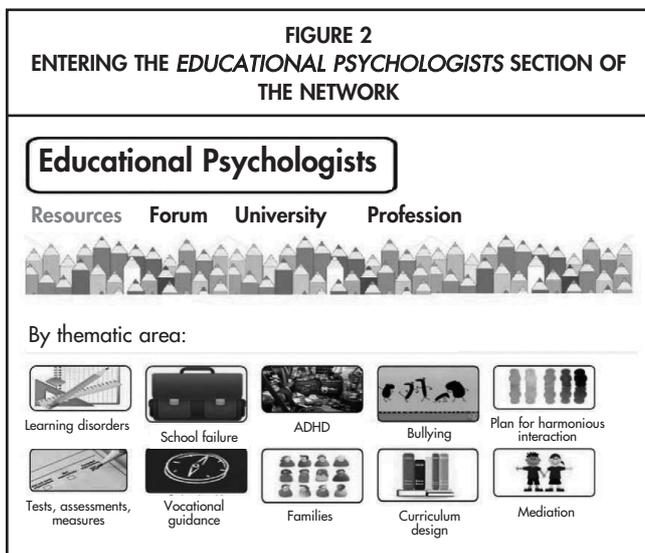
corresponding to Web 2.0, that is, the *Forum* (see Figure 4). This is reserved for psychologists from all over Spain, so that they can remain in constant contact, sharing their professional experience. This could provide an elegant way of incorporating, in each workplace, the advances continually being achieved throughout our country.

Given that the network is academic and professional, it should ensure permanent contact between professionals and the academic world, in both directions. This is in fact what is offered on entering the *University* section. Here we find all the most relevant offers in relation to courses, programmes and scientific meetings (Masters courses, doctoral programmes, conferences, workshops, etc.) from the departments of developmental and educational psychology at Spanish universities. The information found here can be (and perhaps should be) complemented with what appears in the *Profession* section. In this section one can browse in all the networks of professional psychological associations; moreover, one can consult all the legal regulations relevant to educational psychologists, as well as job offers and opportunities.

What was said about the structure of the *Educational Psychologists* section, obviously changing what needs to be changed at the request of parents, teachers and academic authorities, also applies to the next three sections appearing in Figure 1. The objective is for parents, teachers and academic authorities to be able to express in Web 1.0 and Web 2.0 format anything that is interesting or important to them, participating at all times in discussions with a view to the improvement of the non-university education system.

As far as the section on *Institutions* (for support) is concerned, the ones shown here (see Figure 5) are only those which would in principle be prepared to take part in this project for an academic and professional network. Even so, as the network develops, many more will undoubtedly apply to be included. Indeed, many university departments other than those of developmental and educational psychology have expressed a wish to be considered. What is interesting to highlight here is that such institutions make it possible for different members of the network, within a given timetable, to seek support (advice) related to the specific competences of each institution.

And finally, the *Forums*. So far we have referred to two types of forums: those which are specific for educational psychologists (and only for them) and those corresponding to each resource (for people interested in



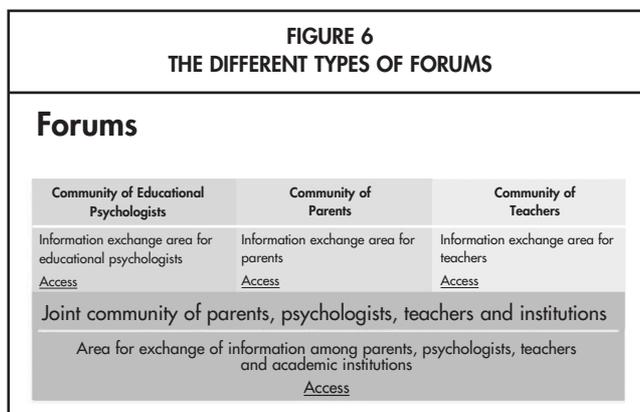
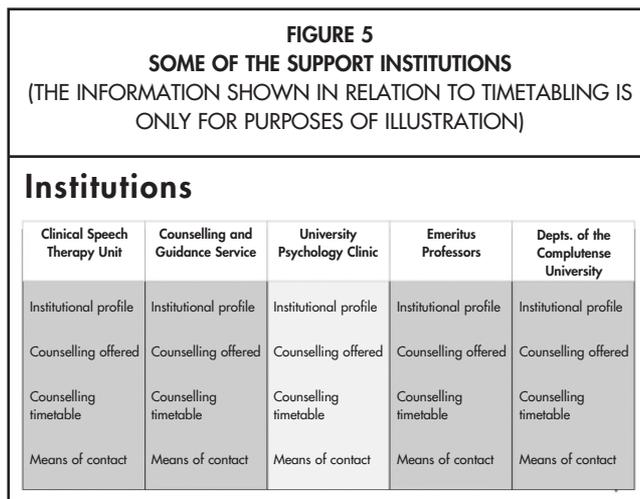
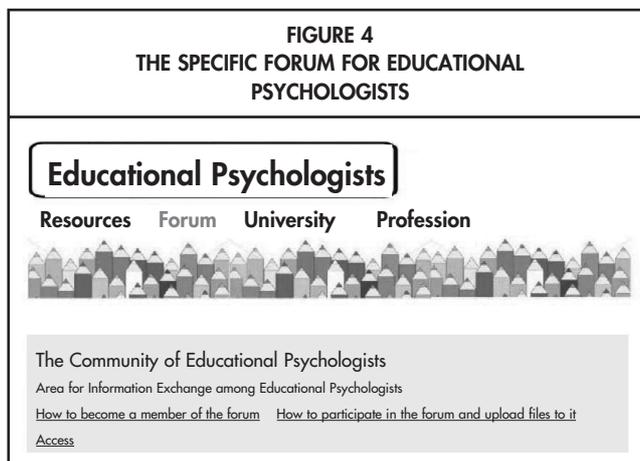
keeping up to date with a certain knowledge area and exploring a subject more in depth). Now we look (see Figure 6), in addition to the forum specifically for psychologists, at those which are specific for parents, for teachers and for the entire educational community, respectively, in an effort to combine two things which at first might appear incompatible: sections for each type of educational agent, and at the same time unrestricted access for all members of this broad educational group.

**THE ADDED VALUE OF THIS NETWORK**

There are various aspects of this network worthy of note, and that clearly distinguish it from existing ones within both the national and international contexts. While it is true that there is a great deal of overlap with social networks (with the same advantages: the possibility of sharing information in constant and immediate fashion), it also a fact that it is highly specific, insofar as it is **exclusively academic and professional**. Within this framework, we should highlight **its capacity to record rapidly and efficiently the felt and expressed needs of each institution (e.g., school), group or individual**. Any type of educational agent (parents, teachers, educational psychologists, etc.) can upload information about such needs in any of the various forums available in the network. This makes it relatively easy to detect the similarities and differences, in terms of needs, between the different schools or other educational institutions. The type of response to such needs is also a distinguishing feature of the network, since it is based on close collaboration between the academic world (all too often locked away in its ivory towers) and the professional world (sometimes too cut off from the world of research). This is a gap that was identified a long time ago, since when there have been widespread calls for the problem to be addressed. This network goes at least some of the way to achieving this objective. Moreover, it gives form to and synthesizes the three functions typical of the educational psychologist as opposed to the mere psychologist-counsellor: carrying out assessments, both clinical and educational; providing psychological counselling and advice for the different educational agents (parents, teachers, pupils, academic authorities, etc.); and organizing interventions of a corrective, preventive and optimizing nature.

On entering the *Resources* section, we find the *Intervention* itinerary (see Figure 3). Browsing around it gives access to a set of programmes with very special characteristics. We are talking here about semi-structured

programmes for intervention in a wide range of areas. A highly positive feature of these programmes is that they have been developed jointly by academics and professionals, all with at least 10 years' experience in their respective fields. We call them "semi-structured"



because, starting out from a common denominator, they are sufficiently flexible to be adapted relatively easily to the demands of different educational contexts. Moreover, all of these programmes are designed for parents and teachers to work together, always guided by the educational psychologist responsible for the school or other institution, who in turn enjoys three types of support: professional (from his or her colleagues in the network), academic (university departments) and institutional (from the support institutions participating in the network).

Another distinctive feature of the network is that it makes possible joint research projects between the different agents of the educational community and the academic world, using the most modern technology available – which greatly facilitates the collection and processing of data. Furthermore, the network permits a near-immediate response, as well as the use of information included in the response in intervention programme formats.

While in this article we have focused on content, in constructing this network we also took into account its form (a very clear and intuitive structure, practical examples for gaining access to it and for uploading or downloading relevant content, etc.). The idea is that anyone with even a basic knowledge of computers can participate, taking advantage of the knowledge (not mere information) constantly in circulation within it. Such participation in the network will in time give rise to a feeling of belonging to an educational community, with all the satisfaction that this can imply. At least, that is one of the objectives of its creators.

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