



Family Enrichment: a friendly revolution

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Almost fifty years ago, before there were any indications of the turbulence which was going to shake up the family, a few visionaries, concerned about their children's upbringing, decided to apply to the context of the family the same methodology that business and law schools were using, following the example of Harvard: the case study method.

This idea may seem strange, especially in that particularly moment and time, given that in sixties Spain, when this initiative was born, society had fairly uniform characteristics in terms of morals and customs, at least at a superficial level.

Attempting to achieve, in an overtly protectionist environment, that parents took charge of their children's education, was undoubtedly a novel idea, and, unfortunately, this continues to be the case in many countries, whose leaders assume the right to make decisions about the future of their citizens' children.

The idea of Family Enrichment has expanded over time, and, thanks to these pioneers, today, when we are more in need than ever of strong families in which to grow happy, free and independent people, we are lucky enough to have an institution, the IFFD, which is well prepared to take a leading role in this major cultural evolution that true humanism, which considers man in all its dimensions, demands.

But, don't be alarmed! In this talk, I'm not going to theorize about the Family Enrichment methodology. In the World Leaders Meeting which has taken place in the days leading up to this congress, we have had the opportunity to talk about the most relevant aspects of our activity in sufficient depth, and the conclusions reached will be implemented in all countries, meaning that in this 45-minute talk it would be difficult to add much more.

So, I won't theorize. And neither will I bore you with statistics on the number of courses and activities carried out, as you can find all of this information on the IFFD website. In this talk, what I want to do is give you an overview of the different courses we offer. And, loyal as ever to the case study method, I will adapt this to a conference format in order to explain what we mean when we talk about the "friendly revolution" that IFFD is promoting. And as the case I know best is my own, I hope you will excuse me if I illustrate some aspects of these courses with my own personal anecdotes, given that my experience in Family Enrichment is so typical that I am sure many of you will identify with at least some of the areas.

First Steps

The first family enrichment course, First Steps, tends to appear like the first-born child: by surprise! Generally, as if the arrival of a new baby didn't already provide enough upheaval and novelty in one's life, someone (normally the wife) suggests that it would be a good idea to attend a family enrichment course. "A *what?!!*" is normally the first, surprised, reply that comes out of their partner's mouth, but after the first few weeks of sleepless nights - and after desperately searching for the instruction manual,



without success - they normally let themselves be convinced, and end up attending, often reluctantly and with a certain amount of skepticism, as was my case, their first family enrichment course.

And it's in this course, that they discover the truism that society, more interested in modeling clones than in awakening personal freedom, has cunningly kept hidden: that the main educators of children are their parents, and there are no children without education, meaning that if we don't do this task ourselves, someone else will do it for us.

So, this means that my children are my main business, and, if I fail in this important task, any successes that I may achieve in other areas of activity will be practically irrelevant.

In this first course, we also generally discover something else: a couple who, if they carry out their role of team leaders well, will become lifelong friends. In our case, José Miguel Reig and Vickie Teetor were the best guides we could have had for our first introduction to family enrichment. When the course was over, we organized some follow-up sessions in order to be able to carry on meeting up, and in no time at all they ended up infecting us with the Family Enrichment bug!

First Conversations

After First Steps, comes First Conversations, although not in my case, as this more recent course didn't exist at that time. In this course, with the accumulated experience of so many family enrichment sessions, we start to see the importance of the child's perspective. Once, in a restaurant, a four-year-old child in a family of five, after seeing the mother order rice for everyone, said to the waiter that he would rather have beef. The waiter took the risk of bringing the little boy, off his own initiative, a beef dish, rather than the rice the mother had ordered. The child looked at his mother and said, "*See, Mommy? He thinks that I'm a person!*"

And they *are* people, and, in families, it is their interest, although not their whims, that is most in need of protection. This is why, when we think about what an ideal family would look like, it is very useful, every now and then, to think about the family from the perspective of a child. What does a four-year-old child need to be happy? They don't need things or money. What they really need is a) to know their parents, b) to be loved by their parents, c) for their parents to love each other, and d) to share their parents with at least one other sibling.

Of course, in this second course, doubts start to arise: "*Given how little time I have, with young children, trying to establish my career, and the frenetic rhythm of our busy lives, aren't I stealing time from my family if I spend so many hours on a family enrichment course?*"

I also had these very same doubts. And two people helped me resolve them, in addition to my wife: one of our children and Rafael Pich.

One day, our second child (who was 7 or 8 at the time) told my wife and me that his friend Juan had been given a toy. We asked him if it was his friend's birthday, and he said no, it wasn't his friend's birthday, but his friend's older *sister's* birthday, but the parents had felt bad that he didn't have a toy and had bought him one. Before we could say anything, he added, "*Don't you think Luis's parents should do a family enrichment course?*"

Our son, who knew, because we had told him, that his mother and I weren't going out so many nights just for the fun of it, but in order to do a course to learn how to be better parents, made me see that



the time invested in family enrichment always ends up benefitting the family itself. Let's not end up like a teacher who has so many classes to give that he or she doesn't have time to prepare them or update his or her knowledge.

At this time, Rafael Pich, one of the pioneers of Family Enrichment, asked me to lead a recently launched First Steps course. When I replied with the highly unoriginal excuse of not having enough time, and started to explain about my many highly demanding roles as a young lawyer and father of a new family (I obviously didn't know who I was talking to!), he just smiled and replied with a typically Catalan expression, which literally translates to "Ah, the business, the shop", and added, "But, Javier, I'm talking to you about changing the world and you're replying with excuses about your job as a lawyer!"

First Letters

When you get to the third course, First Letters, you have already found out that every child is different and what works with one won't necessarily work with another. All the way through our experience as parents, every new educational guru tries to introduce a theory: Early Stimulation, the Sensitive Periods, Attachment Parenting, the Wonder Approach, etc. Each one promises to be the definitive solution.

However, they are theories, but we are not a theory: we're parents! It's all very well to have as much knowledge as possible in order to bring up our children as well as we can, but it's the parents who have the last word. This is why, in IFFD, we have always avoided simplistic "recipes" and we don't try to impose an educational style from outside the family. This is always the temptation of the expert: to try to impose their way of educating on others.

We have almost 25,000 experts every year: the parents who attend our courses, and our facilitators, who are also parents, in addition to their varied professions. We address the family from the perspective of the family, because we want every single person to discover and develop their own personal, marital, and family project. A famous Spanish thinker once said, "*What we admire shouldn't be imitated, but contemplated*". In the family enrichment courses, we don't want admirers, or even imitators, we want close friends who can accompany us on our journey to educate our children and to develop our personal, marital and family lives.

When we stop being active participants in our own personal journeys, and we take refuge, uncritically, in the ideas of specialists, without thinking for ourselves, we can get a nasty surprise, which is what happened to me when I tried to explain to another of my children how babies come into the world, following the wise advice Tomás Malmierca (a wonderful moderator and one of my closest friends) gave in one of the family enrichment courses. After managing to overcome my son's natural reluctance to talk about these things with his father, and trying to talk about the beauty of birth in the most romantic way possible (as Tomás had done) – how the doctor and the midwife first take out the baby's head, then the shoulders, then the stomach, the legs, and, finally, the feet – I must have forgotten to clarify a key part, because my son looked up at me with an expression indicating that he finally got it, and then said, "*Ah, now I understand... So, then they pick up the pieces and put it together?*"

Naturally, this doesn't mean that we shouldn't take moderator training seriously, and we offer our moderators three vital training tools: (a) the PIMOF (named after its title in Spanish, "Programa Intensivo para la Formación de Moderadores de Orientación Familiar"), to learn moderation and adult-learning techniques, (b) the FM40, a face-to-face moderator training course in which we discuss the



essential elements of family education in more depth, and (c) a post-graduate degree in Marriage and Family Education, with the UIC, which is offered in both English and Spanish, and which was designed expressly to give moderators an in-depth anthropological and pedagogical grounding in these areas, which allows them to consider the most complex questions regarding the family, marriage and family learning. (In the bookshop, you can find leaflets for the course, which is given 100% online.)

First Decisions

The family enrichment courses allow us to reach the age of our children's First Decisions with strong skills to face this stage and the challenges it can bring. We will have raised our children to make decisions not with their heads, which can so often get the human side wrong, nor with their hearts, which can end up leading us, but with the whole package of their human condition (intelligence, will, feelings, body, memory, imagination, etc).

Human beings are family people, and only in families are they capable of discovering their own truth. This means that we shouldn't be surprised that the family is a battle field of ideologies, because all the "isms" (materialism, consumerism, relativism, capitalism, etc) are very aware of the fact that man without his family is alone and helpless. Without family ties, man looks for any kind of connection, and is likely to find ideologies willing to adopt him.

The IFFD is focused on promoting the family perspective, not just in each family, but in all the States in the world. The United Nations will always have a loyal ally in us in this battle for freedom, which is helping to reveal, through the family impact report that we are promoting, the consequences for the family that any policy, law or public initiative may have.

The first decisions of our children may coincide with our own in relation to the area of our activity related to Family Enrichment. We may have already started to suspect that it would be a good idea to learn some proper skills to help us in the task of raising our children, or to help other people raise theirs. Maybe even someone has suggested that we take on a position of responsibility in our local family enrichment center, but it doesn't seem very important to us. Or, perhaps the opposite... Maybe we think that we're not up to the job, that we don't have what it takes to do the job well, which is what happened to me when I was asked to take over the management of Fert, the family enrichment center in Barcelona, Spain.

This is the answer that I have gradually learned over the years: in an organization as unusual as ours, nobody is irrelevant, the project is so big that it overwhelms us all. The only thing to do is to humbly accept that someone has seen something in you, which you may not even know you possess, and which they believe could be useful for something, and try to give into it, because the goal is so big, so inspiring, and there are so many people involved, that the generosity and capabilities of other people will soon draw you along, without you even realizing.

Pre-adolescence

In this stage, children who have been brought up with the same family style as their siblings start to develop their own personalities, and pre-adolescence is a particularly sensitive time, in which the strong convulsions of adolescence start to develop and appear.



At this time, it is necessary to combine strength and respect. In Family Enrichment, respect for the family comes from respect for the person. As John Paul II famously said at the beginning of his pontificate, "As the family goes, so goes the nation, and so goes the whole world." The family is, without a doubt, the solution to all modern crises; however, the best way to help the family to resolve crises is to let it be what it should be. The family is, and has to be, above fashions and politics, and, beyond supporting families financially, and looking after the most vulnerable ones – which isn't strictly a family policy, but a welfare policy – the best way of supporting families is to let them be what they are, without forcing or favoring with public aid any specific type of family or human cohabitation, and helping parents to receive the training they need so that they can decide for themselves the type of family that they want to build.

In the IFFD, it is the profound respect we have toward the person that leads us to treat families in a 'personal' way. To all effects, the family is the human society which is most intimately linked to the person and it deserves to be treated in a personal way, rather than trying to apply a 'one-size-fits-all' approach. If we don't do this, the family will stop being a place for people, and will start to become a laboratory experiment, at the fate of sociological fashions.

This is why, although we want to change the world, we are not interested in looking at all the families in one go, but in each and every one in an individual way. We're not interested in numbers, but in people: *non multum, sed multa* (quality not quantity). We want to change hearts, each heart, so that these hearts can then change other people's hearts in whatever way they believe is right.

From this perspective, I should say, to paraphrase Tomás Melendo, that our Family Enrichment, if we want it to respect the person, must comply with two conditions. We must always:

- ✓ have our own family as a starting point, and not allow ourselves to neglect it on the pretext of putting other people's families first, and
- ✓ be focused on creating conditions which promote the personal approach which we are entitled to as human beings and which allows each person, in a free but supportive environment, to discover his or her own path toward happiness.

More important than the content of the family enrichment sessions themselves is the fact that couples who attend the sessions feel that the only thing we care about is them, and their personal and family happiness. And this message almost always comes through more clearly through experience and example than by being told about it. A couple of years ago, I attended a conference, accompanied, as is usually the case, by Loles, my wife, who, as is also almost inevitable, I mentioned during my speech. At the end, one of the people who came up afterwards to kindly congratulate me said, "*the talk about marriage was interesting, but what I most liked was the example you are giving of being here together, because you are living what you preach in a way that I haven't found in any other family speakers.*"

In the IFFD, when we travel around the world, we always try to ensure that couples go together, not so much just to set a good example, but, more importantly, to help them reinforce and strengthen their own marriage. As José Antonio Sánchez, president of IFFD Spain for many years, likes to say, "*Let Family Enrichment not separate what God has united!*"

Adolescence



The much feared disruption of adolescence always arrives, to a greater or lesser extent. The foundations laid start to tremble and our children seem to be caught up in the uncontrollable urges of a strong wind, which may seem to threaten to uproot them forever.

The family and marital unit is a safe refuge, which offers them, although they will stubbornly resist recognizing it, something to hold onto when the storm begins to blow.

This is the sustainable family which we don't tire of defending: a family which is united around a strong marriage and which will endure through time. This is the family which allows us to face and overcome the worst social shortcomings, which reduces the level of absenteeism, school drop-outs, depression, violence, addiction, and dependency in young people, and which allows us to avoid family break-ups, which inevitably end up in the feminization and infantilization of poverty. Although strongly ideologized politicians don't want to see it, all the statistics confirm that this is true.

The IFFD is also interested in generating a culture based on family, as it is not enough to just rely on the parents or politicians, we also need to create a breeding ground for positive family development. The Family Watch, IFFD's think tank, carries out studies, produces reports and prepares people who are capable of transmitting the reality of the family, based on real facts and figures, to the world. Faced with the subjectivity of adolescence, the crude reality of scientific data and studies.

Being a parent of adolescents also offers us a remarkable personal experience, which can even be relevant for your Curriculum Vitae, as I learned from the rector of a Spanish university. As we all know, educational institutions are considered to be notoriously difficult to manage, as they are made up of experts from different areas of knowledge, who all resist being told what to do. This rector told me that whenever he was looking to for someone to take on a management position, he preferred someone who was married and with experience as a parent, because, he said, parents are used to giving orders... and to not being obeyed!

Marital Love

As you know, the personal training path designed by IFFD includes two or three courses on Marital Love: at the beginning of married life, at the mature stage, and at the veteran stage.

When faced with any difficulty which may arise with our children, the first person we should look to should be our partner, not our child. Before everything else comes the marital unit. It is true that after that comes the help, the "recipes", the educational criteria, etc, but the most important thing that our children need to see is that the commitment we have made to them, by bringing them into the world, is love and union with our spouses. Our children have a right to our mutual love.

Nobody gets married in order to separate, and nobody brings a child into the world to make them unhappy. In the IFFD, we are very clear about these priorities, and this is why marriage is a major focus for us. Sometimes, people have criticized the fact that our courses are designed for united couples, not for single or divorced parents, and we always give the same reply: this is our area of specialization.

The IFFD is an NGO with an eminently preventative approach, aimed at reinforcing the family union, helping to prevent ruptures. This is our area of expertise – it is what we know how to do – and it wouldn't be intellectually honest of us to claim otherwise. We do not discriminate against those who are in other situations, just because it's not our area of expertise. Can you imagine *Save the Children*



discriminating against the elderly just because that's not their main area of action? No; however, society requires increasingly greater levels of specialization, and we know, through proven experience, that happiness resides in the union, not in separation.

This is why, when Rafael Pich, asked me to take on the role of Secretary General for IFFD, and I analyzed my competences – I'm not particularly "executive", administrative and management tasks have always bored me; I don't have any special gifts for sourcing financing; I don't have much time; I don't travel much; my English isn't great, etc, etc – I didn't even think to argue with him about his idea. I just told him that I would think about it and did what I had to do: talk to my wife. I spoke to Loles, my wife, and she convinced me to do it. Amongst other things, she said, *"All of that is true, but – as well as describing other talents, which as a good wife, she believes (or at least did a good job of pretending to believe) I have – you have the most important quality you need in order to lead: you are docile and obedient."* With this comment, she was referring to the concept of obedience which Andrew Mullins has described in his talk: if obedience toward his or her parents is a child's guarantee that later on they will know how to obey their own reason when it opposes a whim they may have, in the context of Family Enrichment, obedience toward our elders, those who have preceded us, constitutes the guarantee that later on we will be capable of obeying our own well-formed criteria, standing on the shoulders both of the giants who have gone before us and those who are currently standing by our sides, to paraphrase the famous quote by Isaac Newton. By obedience, I am, as I am sure you are all more than aware, referring to an intelligent and creative obedience, which knows how to continue actions which have already been established, as well as adapting them to changing times.

As the organizers of this congress well know, in Family Enrichment the roles are a burden (and not remunerated), so I accepted the challenge and discovered that, indeed, it can be enough just to not get in the way; particularly if you have Leticia and Lorena in Back Office!

Grandparents

To finish (missing out the course of Personal Project for young professionals for now), before we know it, we're attending a course for Active Grandparents, and perhaps this is a good moment to discuss the IFFD logo: three different leaves, placed one on top of the other, but linked by a common stalk, which is rich with symbolism.

- ✓ The family triad: child, father and mother.
- ✓ The stages of life: infancy, adulthood and old age.
- ✓ The diversity of unity: different cultures united in a common and universal core: the family.

As well as all these meanings, the leaves also symbolize the human being and his or her life path, which can be compared to all the people who generously dedicate their free time to the splendid and universal task of Family Enrichment.

Leaves live and carry out their functions at the edge of the tree: they protect the fruit from the burning sun, the howling winds, and the stormy rain, which they collect and gently pass on to its destination. They also sing and dance in the breeze, and offer shade to people passing by. And then, after a life giving themselves to others, the time comes for them to be replaced, they are not ripped off the tree,



they gently and nobly let themselves fall, and stay at the bottom of the tree, as long as is necessary, creating a soft path underfoot, until eventually becoming the nutrients which feed the very same tree from which they were born.

In Family Enrichment, nobody retires, they just make way for other people to take their places. Once again, Rafael Pich gave us an excellent example of how this should be done. Despite having been everything to Family Enrichment, he stepped aside when the time came to let new people through, and he didn't stick rigidly to his personal vision for the organization, but made himself totally available to help the people taking his place. There he was, meeting up with me periodically to give his opinion on whatever matters were being dealt with, whilst, at the same time, respecting and supporting everything that Marina, our president, and I decided. Before every trip he made, he would ask me, *"Javier, I'm going to this place, what would you like me to say or do for Family Enrichment there?"* Even before the trip that he already suspected would be his last, he called me and said, *"Javier, I'm being taken into hospital tomorrow, is there anything you need me to do before I go?"* And, my goodness, did he do it! He took the spirit of Family Enrichment with him and, judging by the increase in the number of courses and activities, he is promoting it even more strongly than ever!

Conclusion

So, as I have tried to describe in the short space of this talk, this is Family Enrichment. A way of finding happiness in the family. I haven't yet said that the first condition for a family enrichment course is happiness: having fun. And freedom to make mistakes, because, if we've done the course well, we will have made some wonderful friends, who we can be completely ourselves with, and who, if they see we're doing something badly, will tell it to us straight and help us to improve.

If each of us, over the course of our lives, attend an average of 10 family enrichment courses, in which we make friends with 3 or 4 couples, we will have the opportunity to influence and be influenced by approximately 80 people in the area of marital and family happiness, and each of those people, like us, will, between family and friends, have an area of influence of at least 100 people.

Let's do the math: 80 (friends from the courses) x 100 (people who they can influence) x 25,000 (course attendees in 2013) = 200,000,000 people who are prepared to find happiness in their lives, without making any other effort than attending the courses. And this is just one generation, just imagine the numbers we could achieve with just a bit of extra promotion!

This is the friendly and quiet revolution which I refer to in the title of this talk, based on the personal treatment which I've been talking about. I once said something, in Madrid, to Renata Kaczmarek, who is kindly honoring us today with her presence, and which I am now extending to Margarita Zavala and all the authorities which have been invited to this congress: Do you know what the difference is between the IFFD and most NGOs you work with? When you leave your political position, you will no longer be relevant as a person to most NGOs; however, the IFFD will continue to be interested in your personal happiness, and will continue to suggest that you take a course in family enrichment!

Thank you!