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ABSTRACT

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Between school, family and media: do the children carry energy-saving messages and practices?

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Keywords
networks (social), children, practices (of energy use), households, families, school, education, sensitisation campaigns, coordination, Belgium

Abstract
Today, children are the focus of communication and sensitisation measures to increase their environmental concern and their energy saving behaviours. This paper aims at exploring whether, with whom and how children may be actors relative to these environment and energy issues. In particular, this paper identifies the sources of information and influence of the children and shows whether the children influence other actors, especially their family, to save energy in their daily life. This paper is based on a qualitative research that has been realised in French-speaking Belgium in 2007-2008; data were gathered in 13 families whose elder child is 10 or 11 years old. In-depth interviews were realised with at least this child (and sometimes with younger brother(s) and/or sister(s) too) and one parent. Topics covered included energy-related practices and knowledge of the children as well as the network of actors surrounding them. Results indicate that the child is neither powerful nor passive, nor a trustful carrier of energy-related ‘good’ practices. The necessary conditions for the child being such a good carrier are shed into light and depend on the relations within and between the different organisations the child belongs to (family, school, pairs) or has access to (media, Internet).

Introduction
Today, children are told about environmental issues and asked to have energy saving practices at home. These messages are issued by different sources – the school, their family and the media – but none of them is mainly devoted to environmental education. Here and there, some sensitisation measures are specially focused on children to increase their environmental concern and their energy saving behaviours. These various messages are thus intermittent and more or less numerous. Does this situation have an impact on children’s agency (the agency being defined by social scientists as the ability to act as an agent of change and the associated feeling of power)? This paper aims therefore at exploring whether, with whom and how children are actors in these environment and energy issues. In particular, this paper identifies the sources of information and influence of the children and shows whether the children influence other actors, especially their family, to save energy in their daily life.

To analyse the relations between different actors, this paper mainly focus at the coordination, or its absence, between these actors. As presented in the next section, the main theoretical reference is a sociological Swiss study, published by Kellerhals and Montandon in 1991, on families’ educational strategies and types of coordination with other external agents of socialisation. The Swiss study had a general scope: to define “educative styles”, made of differentiated objectives, methods, roles structure between the two parents, and types of coordination between families and other actors. The present paper instead brings into focus these types of coordination on a specific topic – the education on environment and energy issues – and it questions, 20 years later, one of its results: “more and more
Theoretical framework

From their survey on 13 years old children in Geneva, Kellerhals and Montandon (1991) found a still relevant typology of four possible links between the family – but in fact, they focused on the parents – and what they call the ‘external agents of socialization’ – especially the child(ren)’s school(s), their friends, professionals, books and conferences on education, as well as the media, which mainly referred to the television at the time of their survey in the late eighties. They interviewed 508 families thanks to a structured questionnaire, which generally took two evenings to be completed (two times 2 or 3 hours, p.42). The part of the questionnaire dealing with these other agents (school, TV, friends and professionals) is made of more than 20 questions.2

To analyse the types of coordination between the families and these other agents, Kellerhals and Montandon (1991) build a typology that is based on two summary variables that they call, on one hand, the variable participation/withdrawal and on the other hand, the variable diffusion/specifi city. Each family has either a low or high score for these two variables. A high participation score is obtained when “the family actively exchanges with the other socialisation agents: the family uses external models (friends, books etc.), uses television as a pedagogic instrument and is very open to the child’s friends.” (p.193). On the contrary, a low participation score refers to a “withdrawal attitude” (p. 194). The second variable, diffusion, refers to “the cases where the family recognises a wide education role to the other socialisation agents by accepting the ideological mission of the school, by finding formation virtues in TV programmes, by explicitly acknowledging the positive function of pairs for the development of personality and by having recourse to professionals” (pp.193-4). In the opposite situation, if the family only recognises a specific and narrow education role to the other socialisation agents, its diffusion score is low. These two variables, participation and diffusion, are then combined into four ideal-types: opposition (both low participation and low diffusion), delegation (low participation and high diffusion), mediation (high participation and low diffusion), and cooperation (both high participation and high diffusion).

In this paper, this typology is used and tested. Results indicate that this typology should be developed by including the status and empowerment of children. This last topic has been discussed by French sociologists J.-M. de Queiroz (2004) in his review of the similarities between the evolution of school practices and family relationships, as well as by F. de Singly (2006) in his empirical study on 11-13 years old children and the construction of their autonomy.

In the field of sociology of consumption, Martens et al. (2004) stress the relevance of focusing on children in consumption studies. According to Bauman (2006, p.148), children are increasingly seen by their parents as “wise deciders” because contrary to their parents, children do know what is out of fashion and their advice is more and more requested by adults. As Bauman emphasized it, the marketing for children’s supplies (games, TV, etc.) is designed to create a permanent state of dissatisfaction by stimulating their desires for new products and by redefining what precedes as unnecessary junk (Bauman, 2006: 147-150).

Among studies on “ordinary consumption” (as defi ned by Gronow and Warde, 2001), French sociologist Kaufmann (2005) has shown how seemingly ordinary practices (in his case, food preparation and meals) reveal and build family dynamics. Regarding practices related to energy, a group of French anthropologists (Desjeux et al., 1996) have conducted a detailed qualitative survey on the relations within families around electrical objects.

Data

This study is based on a qualitative survey realised with children and their parents in French-speaking Belgium (a family was interviewed in the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg). The survey was carried on with in-depth interviews techniques (Kaufmann, 2004). To be part of the survey, the families had to meet two criteria. First, the eldest child was to be 10 or 11 years old and this child could be interviewed1 and, second, this child – and possibly his/her younger brother(s) and/or sister(s) – was living with both parents. This second condition was set to facilitate the comparison between children on the coordination of the infl uences that they receive from different sources, which is the topic of this paper. Following the principle “one different intermediary per interviewee” to avoid built-in similarities between the families, each of my students1 found an intermediary (for example, a teacher or a colleague) who contacted a family having the required characteristics and that the interviewer did not know at all before conducting the interview with this family. The resulting sample is made of thirteen families of diverse social backgrounds, in rural or urban areas. Parents’ professions are reported with the corresponding quotes in the results’ section.

As it will appear in the results section, the family composition may infl uence the child agentive power. So the families are now quickly presented. Three children are only children (Mia, Cédric and Laurent), one boy (Gaël) has a younger brother (6 years), four boys have a smaller sister whose age varies between 6 and 8 (Alex, Alexandre, Arthur, Daniel), Anaïs and Zazie are in the reverse situation and have a younger brother of that age range, Arnold is followed by twins (aged 8), Mélissa has two younger boys (7 and 2) while in Robin’s family, there is a another boy (6) and a newborn. All first names have been changed.

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1. My translation, as all quotes from this book (Kellerhals and Montandon, 1991) to which I refer several times in this paper.
2. As inferred from the tables pp.197-199.
The main part directed to the child and the adult, the child be-
of the child of reference and one parent (sometimes both) for
The interviews were conducted simultaneously in the presence
on their opinions and education practices with their children.
(domestic practices aft er the evening meal) and, for the parents,
school (home-school route, use of television and other screens,
change) have built a wind turbine at and for the school, a child
some (among those who participated to the activity on climate
education) is not uncommon.
'school migration' (a change of school during the primary edu-
ton the children we met were thus very variable:
the results presentation details the various components of
of this network of influences without forgetting that we inter-
mainly children and have therefore their perception of
influential actors. This presentation is partly based on another
publication that compares French-speaking Belgium to France
(Garabuau-Moussaoui et al., 2009).

School: a sensitisation that depends on the teaching staff
Primary schooling lasts 6 years, from 6 to 11 years. There is a
rather wide variety of pedagogic methods and parents choose
the school according to their background and preference. Most
schools have a parents’ association, whose role and involve-
ment in school affairs are quite variable though. What is called
'school migration' (a change of school during the primary edu-
cation) is not uncommon.
Wide latitude is given to teachers of primary education to
address or not the issues of environment and energy. Awareness
and knowledge of the children we met were thus very variable:
some (among those who participated to the activity on climate
change) have built a wind turbine at and for the school, a child
from another school became “addicted to recycling” (Cédric,
11 years, whose father is military and mother, post employee)
since the preparation of the feast of the school on this topic
whereas other children are not aware at all:

[Interviewer] “And you, Robin, do you feel a little sensitised
to it, well I do not know if you have ever heard at school, but
...”
[Robin] “No.”
[Interviewer] “For example, TV programmes...”

Results
In this presentation, a first section describes each actor and its
relations with the others, the major part being devoted to the
families. In the second section, the typology of Kellerhals and
Montandon is further tested and discussed.

CHILDREN IN SOCIAL NETWORKS OF ACTORS
When questioning the children about the information they
have received in regard to energy and their sources, it ap-
ppears that the child is located at the crossroads of multiple and
possibly contradictory influences. Indeed, the child receives
knowledge from school and possibly extracurricular activi-
ties, through the media (television, magazines for children),
from the family (or families) she/he belongs and from her/his
circle: grandparents, families of friends, etc. The first section
of the results presentation details the various components of
this network of influences without forgetting that we inter-
viewed mainly children and have therefore their perception of
influential actors. This presentation is partly based on another
publication that compares French-speaking Belgium to France
(Garabuau-Moussaoui et al., 2009).

Media: ambivalent messages
During the schooldays and after school, children’s activities at
home are mainly devoted to homework and informal activi-
ties, like television and video games while parents are absent
or engaged in domestic chores.
Children’s TV programmes have not primarily an environ-
mental content: cartoons and series, as well as game shows are
the most popular. In addition, advertising incites to consume
rather than to reduce consumption.
While watching TV, some children are not passive, they are
zapping: “during the second round of ‘The Wheel of Fortune’, Zoé
is insisting for looking at ‘The Simpson’ in English, so we look at
the Simpson in English. And during the advertisement on this
channel, we return to ‘The Wheel of Fortune’ [in French].” (Alex,
11 and Zoé, 8, parents: international high officials). Some chil-
dren are playing with the TV on.

5. On February the 1st, 2007, the day before IPCC presented its 4th assessment
in Paris, several NGOs from France and Belgium proposed to switch off the lights
for five minutes, before 8 PM.
6. The Kyoto Protocol came into force on February the 16th, 2005, 90 days after
its ratification by Russia. To commemorate this event, Flemish-speaking schools
organised a ‘big sweater day’ (dikke-truiendag) that day and were quickly followed
by French-speaking schools and enterprises.
However, the news and other broadcasts may address environmental topics: this is an opportunity for discussion within the family. Specialized emissions focused on sciences (“It’s not sorcerers”) are appreciated by children and encouraged by encountered parents: “In terms of DVD, they have “It’s not sorcerers”, you see! And I like it ... So I prefer that they watch it instead of cartoons, for example.” (Nurse, mother of Gaël, 9 and Quentin, 6)

Indeed, when the parents encourage this type of broadcast, on TV or on DVD, they better control the cultural and social risk that they perceive in television. In fact, some parents consider television “stultifying” (farmer, mother of Robin, 11), preventing children to make other activities or to play with friends. A lesser evil is when they watch television with environmental content. Even if parents perceive social or cultural risks in the use of communication objects, such as TV or computers (Internet, e-mail, live chat...), parents play the game of “ordinary transgression” (Badot, 2002) with their children, by agreeing to watch TV with them as exceptional and valued sociability times: “Sometimes on Friday, we watch the family film. [...] It is very exceptional because Mom hates TV, so it’s really a gift when from time to time, we will celebrate, we will make a TV tray” (Alex, 11).

All these activities are supported by energy consumption that parents do not call into question. To the contrary at other times, some consumption are negotiated: in particular, when parents have time to watch what their child is doing, when they find that their child is too long before a video game... Attention to energy consumption depends on the parents’ state of mind, between laissez-faire and education, within more or less flexible limits. For example Arthur’s father forbids his children to watch TV while it is not dark outside.

Books and children’s journals were rarely mentioned in the interviews, but there was no specific question on this topic. Arnold seems to be an exception as he reads ten minutes before sleeping.

Families

The education given by the parents: various and sometimes opposite logics

Except for Gaël’s family where the desire to minimize the impact on the planet prevails, the majority of interviewed families appear to try reconciling two rather conflicting approaches: financial savings and a right to consumption, and therefore to some extent, a right to thoughtlessness, obtained by parents’ work. In several families, energy or water saving practices learnt at home with the aim of saving money find an environmental echo at school, as said by Zazie’s mother: “it’s true that at school, I’ll say it’s maybe more for the planet, we tend maybe to have more an economical concern, by force, and by respect too and then, it doesn’t help to keep the lights on”.

A father also justifies this double right (to consumption and to thoughtlessness) by his actions (he has well insulated their two- façades house before moving) and by his refusal to mix the roles of the two generations: “I do not see children as agents of change in a family: we adapt ourselves to them and so on, but adults have to think like adults, (...) children do not have to assume that [responsibility]” (specialised educator, father of Alexandre and Marine, 10 and 6 years).

In addition, several families find important to promote health by sport practices and, less often, by healthy eating, such in Cédric’s family, as he puts it:

[Cédric] “I must also say that my mother prefers to eat in a healthy way. Me too, I like to eat in a healthy way but sometimes I prefer the exceptions”.

[Investigator] “Like?”

[Cédric] “For example, I ask for a dessert. She says you can have a dessert but it is a yogurt or a fruit. (...) Last Sunday, I wanted something else, Dad offered me a magnum ice cream, I took a magnum.”

[Mother] “Because I did not hear.”

[Cédric] “You know what she did? She shouted ‘Cédric, it is either a yogurt or a fruit, not a magnum.' But I want something else.” (Cédric, 11, whose father is military and mother, Post employee).

Energy-related practices in families

However, concerns for protecting the environment are not always associated with consistent practice, and conversely, energy-saving practices are not always motivated by ecological principles. There is a “basic” set of environmentally friendlier practices: waste sorting (which has often been mentioned as an energy-saving practice), closing the doors as well as turning off the lights when leaving a room and turning off the tap when washing teeth. In addition, several families are equipped with CFLs: “One has though, one tries though to use CFLs, we have three of them, rather ‘ugly’, they consume a lot less. One tries to pay attention, though. [...] We are trying to recharge the batteries” (Mother of Alex, 11 and Zoé, 8; both parents: international high officials). Some families are involved in more energy efficient practices, such as carpooling (“it simplifies everybody’s life, it is a help in fact” says Arnold’s mother, computer specialist) or use public transport or are tracking devices left on standby. The mother of Arnold sensitises her three children to their clothes cleanliness to reduce laundry loads and energy consumption.

This rise of environmental concern and energy saving practices of daily life are rooted in organizational and family dynamics; both dynamics can be either brakes or levers for a higher moderation of energy consumption (Bartiaux et al., 2006). Moreover, today’s education is made of paradoxical injunctions: consumption society and moderation society are both influential (Moussaoui, 2007): children’s socialization requires indeed energy consumption for playing video games, watching TV, chatting on Internet and so on. But these energy-consuming practices also refer in their management to the value of environmental protection. The social identity is thus constructed both by energy consumption and by the attention paid to it.

Family mobility meets the same requirements and the same paradoxes. On one hand, families are trying to manage the temporal and spatial constraints of the routes between home, school, workplace, shopping centre, and so on. The car is the mean of transportation for multiple or distant trips. Indeed parents, and especially mothers, have to manage the schedules and activities of each one in the family; this mental zapping and the daily mileage require both a minute organisation and
Children's ambivalence on energy savings

Children also experience these contradictions and sometimes, they are comforting their parents about their inconsistencies by underlining the 'greener' practices of their family:

[Father] "(…) we keep lights on the whole night and things like that…”

[Alexandre] "Here we are. And I find that in this house, there is something that is very good: one rarely has the heating on (…)"

[Father] "We don't overheat, that's for sure. It was well insulated during the renovation works." (Specialised educator, father of Alexandre and Marine, 10 and 6 years).

Children are also ambivalent in their relation to energy. On one side, they are very sensitive to environmental initiatives, sometimes quite radical in their proposals for changing society. They do not hesitate to criticize the lack of actions of their parents and they present themselves as the best 'knights' of Earth protection. On the other side however, these same children accumulate electrical appliances and time of use of these devices. Children see the lights switched on but have four or five appliances on in their room during the whole evening. They denote their brothers and sisters but forget to do what they advocate for others.

Let's hear again to Cédric (11 years) and his mother (post employee):

[Mother] "Cédric on one side is a boy who…"

[Cédric] "who is lovely and everything"

[Mother] "who is keen on video games and play-station and so on, and on the other side…”

[Cédric] "but another one who is keen on ecology"

[Mother] "(he has) a knowledge on so many things".

SOCIAL TYPES OF INTERACTIONS WITHIN NETWORKS OF ACTORS

As explained in the beginning of this paper, Kellerhals and Montandon (1991) developed a typology of four types of coordination between the parents and the external agents of socialization – especially the child(ren)'s school(s), their friends and television. Their typology is based on two variables, participation and diffusion, each of them being characterised by a low or high score. A high participation score is obtained when "the family actively exchanges with the other socialisation agents" (p.193) and “relays the influences of the other actors. The family may ignore them (even when legitimating them) or, on the contrary, tend to comment them, to accompany them” (p.35). The diffusion indicates “the wideness of the role (tasks or competences) attributed by the family to the other agents of socialisation” (p.35); therefore, a high score refers to “the cases where the family recognises a wide role to the other socialisation agents” (pp.193-4).

These two variables, participation and diffusion, are then combined into four ideal-types:

- Opposition (both low participation and low diffusion): the family “only recognises a very specific competence to the other agent and does not feel necessary or desirable to interfere” (p.35)
- Delegation (low participation and high diffusion) refers to the cases where “the role recognised to the other agents is very diffuse (widely overlapping the one of the family) but no mediation is organised (no implication in what the other agent is doing)” (p.35)
- Mediation (high participation and low diffusion) “consists to recognise a very specific competence to the other agents, while relaying their efforts or messages” (p.35).
- Cooperation (both high participation and high diffusion) refers to “the situations where the recognised competences are very diffuse and where the efforts or messages of the other agent are mediated (delayed, criticised, accompanied)” (p.36).

These four categories are ideal types or theoretical types and one ‘real’ family never exactly matches one ideal type. Nevertheless, Kellerhals and C. Montandon class each of their 508 surveyed families in one of these types, by adding their scores obtained on several items of the questionnaire. By transferring their method to this qualitative material, it is possible to illustrate these different types of coordination by different families.

 Opposition (both low participation and low diffusion)

Two families illustrate this mode of coordination: the ones of Anaïs and the one of Cédric. In both families, the participation is low, especially in the case of Anaïs who does not tell much about school; so her mother was somewhat embarrassed when asked whether her daughter had school activities that were related to environmental issues. She then remembers that her daughter had a lesson on water consumption and her son participated to the “big sweater day”7: "Well it's true that it's good, that teaches them but I think that principally, one learns that at home" (executive secretary, mother of Anaïs, 10, and Julien, 6). Competences recognised to school are rather restricted, television time is strictly limited, and the children have no access to Internet: the diffusion is low.

Cédric is much more talkative, he is an only child. Although he has access to several TVs and to Internet, the diffusion is also low in his family because the mother thinks that the other agents have specific and limited competences: “The school will not educate the children, it is just a follow-up. (…) The school is there to teach, not to educate”, no friends are coming at home. The participation is low too because the parents do not relay the advice from school:

7. See footnote 5.
Children’s agency

Weak child’s agency
To go further in the analysis, the child with his or her influences from school, TV, other families and so on, may be seen as an external agent, whose message will be heard or not, accepted or not and distributed or not in the family. Children who are “under control” (as said by Laurent’s mother) or seen as “too small” (according to Arthur’s mother) have few agitative power, if any. It should be underlined that the families of both Arthur and Laurent are also characterised by an opposition style, with a child whose agency is low. In the next quote, the silence following Laurent’s sentence tells much on the limited power that he can have, at least for the moment:

[Interviewer, to the mother] “When it comes to heating, do you also set up things, do you teach him…?”

[Mother] “Yes, for example to close the doors, not to leave everything open but that, he systematically does it right. There is no problem.” [(…) She then explains that they have other habits to limit water consumption.]

[Interviewer] “Thus [these practices] mainly come from you”

[Mother] “Yes.”

[Interviewer] “Neither from TV nor from school”

[Mother] “No, from us”

[Interviewer] “From you”

[Laurent] “And alone I have also learned a little. [Silence]” (Laurent, 10, his mother is speech therapist in a primary school, his father is following a training session away from home to become policeman).

Stronger child’s agency
In Cédric’s family, the message from the school (to sort waste to protect the environment) is, for his mother, in contradiction with the example given by the authorities: “That’s why with Cédric when he speaks about his waste etc … I told him once - I threw his drink package in the trash and he said "Mom it goes in the blue bag" - I say, “Look, I say that while the Minister of your father, who is the Minister of Defence, will take a helicopter8 to go to see a movie, your mother will throw her waste.” That came like that (…), but I do sort like everyone else. I try, I have my bags, and so on. But it is true that sometimes, I rebel against that. Why is it that we should sort when we finally pay enough money, therefore…, and our big fishes do not.” She is angry and reluctant about her appropriation of the participation process, as shown by her changes in defining the waste (her sons, your mother’s, my bags). Domestic power (according to the expression of F. de Singly, 1976) is at stake too here. In this difficult coordination style – between opposition and mediation – and in addition to a potential loss of domestic power, there is a sort of conflict about ‘pedagogic power’ as well: Cédric’s mother tries to maintain an opposition style in her relationship with the school (“The school will not educate the children”), whereas her son tries to impose a mediation style and his view on domestic organisation. Indeed, he ends his part of the interview by: “please Mum, firstly, tries to sort your waste; secondly, tries to sort your waste and thirdly…” before being interrupted by his angry mother.

As echoing the situation in Cédric’s family, ‘Take the power’ was the name of a sensitisation campaign on energy savings that was directed to children in French-speaking Belgium during the winters 2007 and 2008. Children’s agency is clearly at stake.

Consequence for the typology
Although these two families may be both characterised by an opposition style, their difference shows that the coordination typology should also include a new variable: the child’s agitative power, which results from parental education and the other influent agents. The other styles of coordination which are presented below are therefore illustrated by two families, one with a child with a high agency, another one with a child with little agitative power.

One dimension of child’s agency that is influenced by the adults in the family is whether the child reports or not what is going on at school. Laurent and Arthur do not feel like telling about school, as said by their mother: “Laurent does not tell much” (Laurent’s mother, speech therapist); “What is happening at school is often a black box (…) he doesn’t tell much about school.” (Arthur’s mother, chemist). That children somewhat tell their parents what they have done while they were on their own (at school or watching TV alone) is however an evident condition of a high score on the participation variable, as it will be shown after the presentation of the delegation type.

Delegation (low participation and high diffusion)
According to Kellerhals and Montandon (1991), the delegation type of coordination refers to the cases where “the role recognised to the other agents is very diffuse (widely overlapping the one of the family) but no mediation is organised (no implication in what the other agent is doing)” (p.35). This type is found in our sample in families with busy parents.

Weak child’s agency
In Arnold’s family, both parents are computer specialists and Arnold (11 years) is followed by twins of 8 years. Nearly every day, Arnold is playing basket. Daily life is routinised, even during the holidays (“the only difference is that they have no homework to do [for school]. Otherwise, the schedule is about the same” says the mother). Arnold is rarely on his own, except before going to bed, and he plays with Playmobil toys, sometimes with his younger brother.

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8. Socialist Minister of Defence has mobilized in March 2007 a helicopter to fly from Brussels to Hasselt (85 km) to see Al Gore’s movie (“An Inconvenient Truth”) on global warming. This has caused much debate in the press and “between twelve and twenty times more greenhouse gases than if he had made the trip by car” (according to two newspapers at the time).
Stronger child’s agency
Alex and her sister are the same age as Arnold and Joséphine (but no twins in Alex's family!), but every day after school and their several after-school activities (sport and piano), Alex takes care of himself and of his sister. “I tend to trust him because I know my son” says the mother. The children do their homework for school, repeat their music exercise and then are free to watch television and select their programmes (see the quote for this family in the media section), until one parent comes at home, usually around 7.30 PM. (The parents are both international high officials and travel a lot for their work.) Some days and during the week-end, Alex also plays with his ‘Nintendo light’: “It is not too regulated, I may play whenever I want, except, yes, when I have finished my schoolwork” Alex says. Alex seems to have more agentive power that also comes from his school, which has an active pedagogy (inspired by Freinet) and requires from all the children who are in the last grade of primary school, as Alex, to prepare at home and at school a “masterpiece” that they will present to other children. Its preparation requires several months and Alex was quite busy with that at the time of the interview.

Mediation (high participation and low diffusion)
In “mediation families”, the parents have a high collaboration with the other agents (school, television, and friends) by commenting their actions while recognising a very specific competence to these external agents. In Kellerhals and Montandon’s study on 13-year teenagers, this type is less frequent but not rare, for two reasons: parents helping their children with school work (while restricting the school role to teaching, not to education in a broad sense) are in the mediation style; furthermore, the other agents also include professionals such as speech therapists, psychologists and so on. On energy and environment issues, there are no specific agents or specialised bodies whose role would be to deliver a mandatory environmental education. But still, there are a few families in the sample matching the mediation style.

Weak child’s agency
Mediation as a mode of coordination is found in Robin’s family. Indeed, parents relay the message from the agent, school in this case. They listen to their children when they tell what they have learned. For example, the mother said that now, she prepares an apple for the snack of her older son because he requested it, after an activity on food held at school. The mother has thus relayed the school message. The father concludes that story by saying: “he often comes back from school by saying ‘the teacher has said that…’. Children listen well to their teacher.” (Father of Robin, 11, farmer). And he could have added: the parents are listening to their children when they speak about school.

It has to be noted that in this family, parents are not aware of TV broadcasts watched by their children while they are still working in the fields. This attitude to the TV is thus closer to opposition than to mediation. The same family may thus combine two styles for different external agents of socialisation.

In Alexandre’s family, school competences are seen as restricted to delivering information, school is not supposed to mix with families’ competence, as explained by the father: “Well, I’d say that if school is giving information, well…it’s true that he has received a few, on recycling and things like that…I don’t find that uninteresting. (Silence) Because I do not wait from school that… that it interferes with the way that one teaches them things” (Specialised educator, father of Alexandre and Marine, 10 and 6 years). So the delegation is low, but the participation is high, by means of the comments and conversations on school activities: “Yes, I remember that with your classmates you went to visit a recycling plant” says the same father.

Figure 1. Home page of a sensitization campaign ‘Take the power and win your IPod shuffle’ in 2007 and 2008.
But the father of Alexandre shows in a way his opposition to the agents of transmission as schools and television because he believes that even if the information is “not uninteresting” and the topic, important, there is a tendency to blame the child and to “utilize” him as he says. The message is thus rather unwelcome. This is not a denial of the competence of the school or the media but a distrust of the resources that they use. His children are protected in some way (“it is not their role to assume that”) and the price of such protection is, paradoxically, a denial of the validity of the messages that his son tries to forward. The same appears when it comes to a close topic (a modification of a habit is also at stake): smoking. “What I am reproaching, it’s the attempt to make the children feel guilty, to utilise them to attempt to make the parents feel guilty. Well, I’m smoking and ... well, one informs children about the dangers of it, I know the dangers, but this is my difficulty and a challenge for me to address. He [his son] may insist that I do, it’s true that he can make me think about it, but he will not make me change. Now it is true that if I stop smoking, I will also be thinking to them to support myself in my choice.” (Specialised educator, father of Alexandre and Marine, 10 and 6 years).

This comparison between stopping smoking and changing some energy-related practices is quite relevant as it shows the limits of the participation process in this family: the father has to agree with all the values conveyed by the message (he likes to save money but is not convinced on the necessity of protecting the environment: “I must say it’s not a major concern. I won’t lie.”), he must be ready to apply it (“I begin to think a little about it but sometimes, the lights stay on the whole night. I can not say that we are very careful.”); furthermore, he has to agree with the method to deliver the message, which is not his case (“What I am reproaching, it’s the attempt to make the children feel guilty, to utilise them to attempt to make the parents feel guilty”).

Summing up for this family, if we admit that the participation includes a coordination dimension led by the parents, so they reinforce what they appreciate from the other agents and minimize other messages, then it can be said that Alexandre’s family has a mediation style; the protective attitude of the father (nothing is said about the mother) contributes to give the elder son little agency power.

**Stronger child’s agency**

To the contrary, Mélissa (10 years) takes care of herself and of her two younger brothers (7 and 2), “she is a small mother, she is a second small mother, she does what I am saying” her mother says. Her mother is housewife and her father is a mason. “You are asking more for your autonomy now to do your things and sit in your sleeping room to listen at music” her mother continues. Mélissa and her mother talk a lot about housekeeping in an economical way (“she knows that I am doing my laundry during the night, she knows all of that, I have explained her why: because it is less expensive”). Mélissa applies the messages for herself (“well, what I am doing if I am cold, I take either a shawl or a sweater”) and forwards them to her brothers, and sometimes to her father too, by asking him to completely close the door and thus to go outside when he smokes.

**Cooperation (both high participation and high diffusion)**

This mode of coordination is mainly found in Gaël’s family, which is characterised by both a high participation and a high diffusion. The sons (9 and 6 years) report that the information received (by them or by their parents) is shared within the family. They underline the high concern of their parents in environmental matters. Furthermore, the parents are involved in school organisation, hence their high score on participation.

As the mother tells it: “And the school also had this training (on waste sorting), I think last year, or maybe 2 years ago, and then with the parents, we found that waste management in the classroom was important but not always well organized, because the kids and the teacher sorted the waste, the paper and everything, and then the cleaning ladies put everything in one bag ... So together we tried to organize it! So we made big blue barrels for plastics, another one for paper and so on, with drawings to make it clear and well-sorted. So the parents’ committee was really involved to have the chain of recycling followed, otherwise it was not really worth the trouble, because they were sorting on one side and then on the other side, everything was mixed! (…) They are really well informed from all sides, and in addition, they love nature and respect it.” (Nurse, mother of Gaël, 9, and Quentin, 6)

In this family, both sons (9 and 6 years) participate to sorting household’s waste and have heard about it at school and on TV news, a carpool to school is implemented with another family, during the summer the children went camping with an organisation in a forest, the mother encourages them to watch at scientific programmes for children (as quoted above in the media section)… The parents (or the mother) have thus a high coordination between several actors, whom they probably carefully choose and to whom they recognise broad educational competences (high diffusion). As a consequence, the mother can say: “They are really well informed from all sides”: this seems to be the key to ease participation and diffusion by a convergence of information. Goldblatt (2003) and Gram-Hanssen et al. (2007) have shown that this convergence is one of the necessary conditions for bringing about change in energy-related practices.

When it comes to child’s agency, it seems that in this family, the boys are educated to develop their agentive power but as the elder son is younger (9 years) than the other interviewed children, the comparison is made difficult. In our sample, there is no family with both a cooperation style and an elder child with a weak agency.

**Acceptance of knowledge, energy-saving practices and coordination styles**

As found by Gram-Hanssen et al. (2007) in their study on house energy labels, “people are not empty recipients of the new information given by the energy-performance label. They rather are actors that interpret or reject new information on the basis of their previous knowledge and of the norms of their social network.” (p.2886). They also show that “the openness to environmental information is depending on the possibility for the house owner to hearing it, which also relates to an agency feeling” (p.2884). The same holds true here: every family member must feel that s/he can make a difference and change some practice when she/he reports to the other family members what she/he heard from another source. To the contrary, children who are “under control” (as said by Laurent’s mother) or seen
power for changing energy-related practices.

This variable addition (child's agency) is especially necessary when it comes to change parents' practices (to be careful for switching the lights off at the end of the evening, to sort the waste and so on). This means that parents accept to be somewhat "educated" by their child, as shown earlier with Mélissa asking her father to close the door, in Cédric's family on waste sorting or with Mya: "sometimes, she reminds me to sort well the waste. She is aware that there are problems on this matter, but she is not very very cautious." (Mother of Mya, 11, Grand Duchy of Luxembourg). Child's agency may be different according to the trust given by the parents to the external agent backing it child's agency up: usually, parents give a higher weight to school than to TV.

Types of coordination between families and external agents of socialisation: summary

The interviews show that the views of parents vary: some are somewhat reluctant to environmental demands received at school by their child, others are supportive, still other families try to stay neutral and a few families have 'greener' practices than the school. There are thus diverse appropriations of school knowledge, media discourse and institutional sensitisation campaigns.

If the family has values and knowledge on ecology in general and on energy consumption in particular and if these values and knowledge are already consistent with daily practice, the message on energy savings from other agents seems to be more accepted. When this is not the case, the message is evacuated or set aside. Furthermore, when the family develops an attitude of cooperation or mediation (Kellerhals and Montandon, 1991) with external agents issuing environmental messages, these messages strengthen family practices that become integrated by all family members if children have sufficient agentive power or if new routines are enforced.

Concluding comments on the coordination typology

At the end of the eighties, when Kellerhals and Montandon realised their survey (that they later published in 1991), there was probably less divergent if not contradictory information and advice on education. This historical context may have affected their typology, which is maybe not well adapted to take that into account. The proposition made in this research is to admit that the participation includes a coordination dimension led by the parents, so they reinforce what they appreciate from the other agents and minimize other messages (this precision was illustrated by Alexandrèn's family). Still with this family, this coordination results in tuning out environmental information and minimising any environmental concern while maintaining many energy-saving practices that are money-saving.

For the diffusion dimension, two propositions are made in this research: the first one is to consider the child as another potential agent who may 'socialise' his or her parents about environmentally-friendlier practices. The second proposition is to include a third variable to describe the child's agentive power for changing energy-related practices.

Policy implications

ADULTS AND SENSITISATION CAMPAIGNS

For adults, information through sensitisation campaigns is one of the most used policy instruments to influence the energy end-consumer. In this conventional view, the end-consumer is seen as an individual and rational actor. Information however results in an "increase in attitudes or knowledge (...) but [there is] no clear evidence that this results in reductions of energy use" (Abrahamse et al., 2005). For example, for Belgian households, Bartiaux (2008, p.1176) has shown that neither environmental concern nor knowledge on global warming have a significant influence on electricity consumption when household income and size are also introduced in the model.

CHILDREN AND SENSITISATION CAMPAIGNS

Children also certainly increase their knowledge on environment and energy through external agents of environmental education, primary the school and the media. And at the same time they also learn of their agentive power, both on themselves and in the family, to change or not energy related practices. This ability to act as an agent of change and the associated power feeling (or, on the contrary, an inability to act and a feeling of helplessness) seem to be always part of these sensitisation activities, whether recognised or not.9

Furthermore, children also learn socialised ways of linking their environmental knowledge or concern with their energy-consuming practices: contradictions, laughs or impersonal "one tries" or "one should try" are numerous in the parents' interviews. These two aspects – agency or helplessness, and socialised ways of linking environmental concern with energy-consuming practices – should be taken into account when developing sensitisation campaigns towards children.

"They are really well informed from all sides" was saying Gaël's mother, whose family practices are the 'greenest' among the sample. This family actively cooperates with the other agents of socialisation by recognising a broad educative role to them and by accompanying and commenting their messages and practices. A potential policy implication would be to develop policy instruments (for example by way of subsidies, recommendation to teachers, specialised coordination offices or school benchmarking Internet tools, see Jensen, 2007) whose aims would be to organise this cooperation between different socialisation agents, or to further encourage it, in order to practically increase children's ability to act as agent of change. These types of cooperation would relieve children from doing often alone this coordination between their parents, their school and the media, each child in his or her family, with more or less success or failure and with a higher or lesser child's empowerment as a consequence.

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9. Soon or later, the agentive power of these children may still change when they become teenagers. And it remains to be seen what type of adults the children will become; in particular on energy-saving issues, this question holds true for the children who appear to have a limited agency because in their family, there are many routinised energy-saving practices (as it is the case for Laurent and Alexandre for example).
References


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