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Zilda Aparecida Pereira Del Prette¹ | Almir Del Prette²

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¹ PhD in Psychology (USP).
Professor at the Federal University of São Carlos.
São Carlos – SP, Brazil.
E-mail: zdprette@ufscar.br

² PhD in Psychology (USP).
Professor at the Federal University of São Carlos.
São Carlos – SP, Brazil.
E-mail: adprette@ufscar.br

ABSTRACT

This paper is derived from a lecture by the authors, and synthetically presents some of the main points of the theoretical field of social skills and social competence, highlighting the main concepts, a portfolio of social skills and an analysis of two illustrative narratives. The text subsequently analyses the values and commitments that supported the dissemination and acceptance of this theoretical, practical and empirical field, defending their importance for the continued social and academic consolidation of this field. Three commitments stand out: with the values of coexistence and ethics in interpersonal relationships, with the knowledge produced in this field, and with solutions of social/interpersonal problems by producing scientific evidence-based alternatives.

Keywords: social competence, social skills, ethics, coexistence values, research, professional practices.

RESUMO

Este artigo, derivado de uma palestra dos autores, apresenta inicialmente, de forma bastante sintética, alguns dos principais pontos do campo teórico das habilidades sociais e competência social, destacando os conceitos principais, um portfólio de habilidades sociais e uma análise de duas narrativas ilustrativas. A base conceitual é em seguida aplicada à análise dos valores e compromissos que sustentaram a disseminação e aceitação social desse campo teórico, prático e empírico, defendendo-se sua importância para a consolidação acadêmica e social desse campo. São destacados três compromissos: com os valores de convivência e ética nas relações interpessoais, com o conhecimento produzido nesse campo e com a solução de problemas sociais/interpessoais via produção de alternativas baseada em evidências científicas.

Palavras-Chave: Competência social, habilidades sociais, ética, valores de convivência, pesquisa, práticas profissionais.

This article constitutes a summarized and adapted version of the opening lecture of the 8th International Seminar on Social Skills (8th Seminário Internacional de Habilidades Social - SIHS), given by the authors at the University of Taubaté in 2022. The content addressed at the time was maintained, with some additions necessary for its understanding in this version. Additionally, excerpts from the opening situation of an event were extracted, such as thanks and mentions to people and institutions. The language used in the conference was also changed, seeking to meet the journal's standards.

The eighth SIHS referred to here took place 20 years after its first edition in 2002. It is an event that has been bringing together researchers from Brazil and abroad, consolidating this empirical theoretical field in Psychology in our country. Considering the theoretical progress achieved by the field of social skills in recent decades in our country, it is pertinent to reaffirm its conceptual bases as well as the values and commitments that can be associated with this advance and which should continue to guide the consolidation of this field. Thus, the themes discussed can then be grouped into the following items: (1) concept of social skills; (2) presentation of a soft skills portfolio; (3) concept of social competence; (4) analysis of current and historical interactive episodes, illustrating classes of relevant social skills in everyday life; (5) values and commitments that were at the base of previous achievements and which should be maintained in consolidating the field of social skills.



THE CONCEPT OF SOCIAL SKILLS

Social skills and social competence are the main concepts of this empirical theoretical field, called social skills by Argyle (1967/1994). The first term, social skills, refers to interpersonal performances between two or more people who have certain characteristics in terms of content and objectives (function). The speech content and the objectives of each participant characterize what McFall (1982) called a social task and which can be culturally identified by answering the question: What are these people doing in this interaction? When the social tasks of two or more participants in an interaction complement each other, the tendency is to evaluate the interactive process positively. For example, participant A needs an object that participant B has and is willing to lend. Tasks in which resources facilitate interactions of their participants can generate a positive final result for them in other situations and contribute to maintaining cordial relationships. Regardless of the results of the interaction for the participants (win-win, win-lose and lose-lose), the analysis of the interactive performance should focus on the types of behaviors presented, whether socially approved and valued in the social context or disapproved and potentially punished by the social environment. Only the former are considered social skills.

The term “social skills” therefore applies to those social behaviors (meaning actions and reactions among interacting people) that are valued, approved, and expected in a specific subculture, or in the broader culture. These behaviors have a high probability of positive results in interactions, and are therefore indispensable for socially competent performance in social interactions (DEL PRETTE; DEL PRETTE, 2017). For example, people criticize in different ways, constructive or imposing and aggressive. Refusal of requests can also be done in a cordial or aggressive manner. Only the former would be considered as social skills. When it comes to criticism between partners and friends, they usually occur in private, seeking a solution to the problem and avoiding the dissemination of undesirable events beyond those involved.

Social skills are necessary in both situations of coping and solving interpersonal problems, as well as in approximation, or “prosocial” situations such as making friends, greeting, thanking, making requests, praising, expressing empathy, or solidarity. It is therefore possible to identify a broad set of interactive actions that are classified as social skills.



SOFT SKILLS PORTFOLIO: A PRELIMINARY ANALYSIS

Researchers in this theoretical, practical and empirical field have sought to identify and differentiate the relevant subsets for individuals by content and function characteristics, and organize them into classification systems which are called portfolios.

Initial attempts were to list broad classes of soft skills, such as teaching, public speaking, or giving a speech. These are collective activities which each involve at least one speaker and several listeners, with the latter in the condition of learners or those interested in the topic to be addressed. Success in “teaching a class”, for example, may depend a lot on the proper use of several subclasses of social skills such as properly and clearly exposing the contents, asking and answering questions, directing a question from one student to another to answer, mediating feedback and praise, forming small discussion groups, etc. Even if some subclasses are common to several subclasses or more frequent in a certain general class of social skills, this mobility is advantageous to the system as a whole.

Argyle (1967/1994) was one of the main creators of the field of social skills and he himself initiated a portfolio essay for the interactive activities required in the teaching process. Later, in the period of emptying psychiatric hospitals in the United States and Canada, some researchers started a minimum portfolio of skills required to live in the community (GOLDSTEIN; SPRAFKIN; GERSHAW 1976) and others were designed for educating children and adolescents (DOWD; TIERNEY, 2005). Considering the main classes of behaviors accepted as social skills, such as assertiveness, empathy and others, there are currently many proposals for classifying these behaviors.

Portfolios are useful guides to assess and promote soft skills. Based on the most relevant social tasks for people’s daily lives, a set of classes and subclasses of social skills can be identified and defined in a portfolio of the repertoire of social behaviors which are indispensable for community life. A list of social skills classes from a portfolio that has guided many social skills programs in our midst (DEL PRETTE; DEL PRETTE, 2017) is shown below, along with examples of some of its subclasses.



- ✓ *Communication* (initiating and sustaining conversation, asking and answering questions, asking for and giving feedback, praising and acknowledging praise, giving feedback etc.);
- ✓ *Civility* (greeting and/or responding to greetings, asking “please”, thanking, apologizing and other forms of politeness that are normative in the culture);
- ✓ *Making and maintaining friendship* (initiating a conversation, presenting free information, listening/giving personal confidences of a certain intimacy, showing kindness, keeping in touch, without being invasive, expressing feelings, praising, inviting/accepting an invitation etc.);
- ✓ *Expressing empathy* (taking perspective, expressing understanding, demonstrating willingness to help, sharing joy in the other’s achievement, etc.);
- ✓ *Demonstrating assertiveness* (defending their own rights and the rights of others; questioning, opining, disagreeing, making and refusing requests; expressing anger, displeasure and asking for behavior change, handling criticism, talking to people in authority etc.);
- ✓ *Expressing solidarity* (identifying the needs of others, offering help, expressing support, engaging in constructive social activities, cooperating, expressing compassion, consoling etc.);
- ✓ *Managing interpersonal conflicts and resolving problems* (calming down by exercising self-control, recognizing, naming and defining the problem, identifying behaviors associated with the problem, developing and proposing alternative solutions, choosing, implementing and evaluating alternatives etc.);
- ✓ *Expressing affection and intimacy in dating and sex* (showing affection to each other, asking and answering personal questions, giving free information, showing interest in the other’s well-being, dealing with intimate and sexual relationships, setting boundaries when necessary etc.);
- ✓ *Coordinating groups* (organizing activities, distributing tasks, encouraging everyone’s participation, mediating interactions, exposing goals, giving feedback, praising, paraphrasing, summarizing, holding people responsible for performances and tasks, explaining and asking for explanations etc.);
- ✓ *Speaking in public* (monitoring and encouraging audience interest, asking/answering questions, handling audiovisual materials, reporting experiences etc.).



Some observations about this portfolio are pertinent. The first classes of this portfolio are more elementary, composed of items with the same function, but the last ones are more complex, as they require articulation between several of the previous classes and subclasses. For example, coordinating a group requires civility, conversation, problem-solving, assertiveness, and many other skills. All classes involve subclasses that can be defined and exemplified.

An important point is that social skills are learned and therefore can be taught! Assertiveness has been referred to as one of the most difficult by people, which is natural because by definition, it involves some risk of an undesirable reaction from the other. This is the case when you refuse a request, make a criticism or express anger, displeasure, when you question, opine, or disagree, etc.

All classes and subclasses of social skills are associated with specific verbal content, but also with components which go beyond “what is said”. It is about the way we speak, how we express ourselves, meaning our expressiveness or body and paralinguistic communication (DEL PRETTE; DEL PRETTE, 2017): the characteristics and quality of speech (speed, tone of voice, pauses), our facial expressions (mainly eye contact and smiling), and our body expression (gestures, posture, proximity, etc.). These aspects are crucial for the effectiveness of interactive performance and for differentiating classes and subclasses of social skills. For example, compare how expressive it would be in a show of empathy and in a situation of disagreeing or criticizing. Tone of voice, touch, and proximity can be more important in empathy than oral communication and even omitting speech!

It is also possible to create more specific and restricted portfolios for different social development stages, for example, relevant social skills in childhood, adolescence or old age, and also for different social roles (DEL PRETTE; DEL PRETTE, 2017), such as those required in marital, parent-child, teacher-student, doctor-patient or caregivers and health professionals in general, trade, sales, tourism, managers and supervisors in a corporate environment. In summary, all activities that deal with people depend on general and specific social skills for the success of the professional activity.



WHAT IS SOCIAL COMPETENCE?

Social competence is a broader and more complex concept than social skills, whose analysis includes the types of interactive performances, but also the results of the interaction. Regarding the performance type, only those who respect the Golden Rule of “doing what we would like others to do to us” are considered socially competent, a rule present in different cultures since ancient times, such as Hebrew, Indian, Roman, etc. This statement historically represented an advance in relation to the retaliatory perspective of “an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth”, even in challenging situations of defending rights and self-esteem, disagreement, expressing anger and displeasure, etc. Therefore, regarding performance, social competence requires social skills, meaning socially approved behaviors. However, although potentially producing positive results for the individual, performing social skills is not enough to characterize social competence in an interactive task. A typical situation occurs in bullying situations: the perpetrators of bullying do not always have deficits in social skills, but lack fundamental requirements of social competence, and the same can occur among witnesses of bullying, whose reactions end up contributing to the maintenance of these practices (Comodo, 2016).

Social competence includes additional criteria and requirements, along with coherence between thinking, feeling and acting. It is a broader concept, integrating and centralizing the other concepts in this area, and in addition to the aforementioned performance characteristics, also includes evaluating the results of the interaction; not only the short-term ones, but also the likely ones in the medium and long-term; and not only for the individual, but also for the other and for the social group.

Short-term results are associated with achieving the goals of the interaction and in such a way as to maintain or increase the self-concept and self-esteem of those involved. For example, when someone criticizes, they expect the other person to accept this criticism and change their performance (we are talking about constructive criticism); when you ask for something, you expect to get what you ask for. Whether in the case of criticism, disagreement or expression of anger/displeasure, the interactive performance must maintain or even improve the self-concept and self-esteem of the other and of oneself.



In terms of likely results in the medium and long-term, socially competent performance is one that even in interactions involving confrontation, contributes to a win-win relationship, of mutual respect, maintaining or expanding interpersonal rights, all of which characterize the ethical dimension of social competence. This means ensuring that everyone has the right to refuse, disagree, express opinion and even anger, which is a natural consequence of universal human rights, but without neglecting the duty to respect those same rights of others and without disregarding the impact of their performance on the social group.

ANALYSIS OF EMBLEMATIC CASES UNDER THE FRAMEWORK OF SOCIAL SKILLS

Next, two emblematic cases are presented below that illustrate the practice of classes of social skills which have been recognized as among the most important for the quality of interpersonal relationships: self-control, empathy and assertiveness. For this, it is important to understand the meaning of the concepts of empathy and assertiveness, present in both cases and associated with self-control. They are covered here, but the range of social skill classes is much broader (for example, DEL PRETTE; DEL PRETTE, 2017).

Empathy is a fundamentally important skill with a strong hereditary basis, but one that can be learned and improved through education. It is defined (DEL PRETTE; DEL PRETTE, 2001) as the ability to feel and understand what the other feels or thinks and to communicate this understanding and feeling. It is very interesting that this skill, unlike the others, is part of the repertoire of several species such as dolphins, gorillas, chimpanzees, dogs, and cats, with reports of empathetic episodes which go beyond groups of the same species. It is interesting to clarify that this social skill class does not only occur in a situation of helping others, but also in fraternization situations for overcoming an illness, satisfaction for acquiring a job, recognition for entering a university, etc.

Assertiveness was initially studied by Wolpe (1958). It is a skill that on the one hand is opposed to aggressiveness, and on the other hand, to passivity. In other words, people with this ability stand up for their rights and those of others. As a clinical correlate, Wolpe described that assertive individuals present with less anxiety when compared to aggressive or passive ones. Assertiveness, or more precisely assertive social skills, have been defined (DEL PRETTE; DEL PRETTE, 2005, p. 175)



as social behaviors required in situations that involve some risk of an undesirable reaction by the interlocutor, therefore characterizing risk coping skills.

The two chosen cases are presented below. The first is a well-known historical passage, and the second is a passage from the authors' personal experience, which we report as "the good Samaritan" and "the good Bahian", respectively.

The first narrative is based on the books identified as the New Testament, whose emphasis is on the genesis and initial expansion of the Christian religion, as communicated from the perspective of four evangelists. There are many passages from the gospels and other religious books that pose challenges to different contemporary scientific disciplines. They can also be analyzed by sociopsychological disciplines such as anthropology, sociology, history and psychology. This narrative is attributed to Jesus, and is recorded in Luke, Cap. XV, Vers. 25 to 37.

This narrative apparently had its main motivation to clarify one of the listeners, a doctor of the law, who asked Jesus: "Who is my neighbor"? However, as in other encounters with the disciples and with a wide variety of listeners, Jesus, as a notable educator, questioned habitual behavior, proposing new action models, even though this term was not part of the culture of the time. Jesus' response became known as the Parable of the Good Samaritan and can be summarized as follows.

A man who was traveling from Jerusalem to Jericho ran into some robbers who stripped him of his possessions, covered him with wounds and left him in terrible condition... It so happened that a priest who was passing by saw the wounded man and strayed to the other side of the road.... Also a Levite who was going the same way, seeing the wounded man, continued on his journey without stopping. Shortly afterwards, a Samaritan, in the same place, seeing the wounded man, was touched with compassion and approached to help him, performing the first dressings. Then he put the wounded man on one of his horses and went to a nearby inn. He paid for the accommodation, made recommendations and also committed to pay any other expenses upon his return.

It is reasonable to assume that all the characters' behaviors are repeated with other actors and with small variations in the face of similar situational demands, regardless of place and time. Appealing to literary license, the second narrative, probably only known to the protagonists, will be referred to here as "The Good Baiano". It was recorded in memoriam by one of the protagonists, as follows.



A couple was traveling by car on the BR-101, Salvador (BA), bound for João Pessoa (PB). Still in the State of Bahia, in the vicinity of Feira de Santana, a stone collided with the windshield of the car due to the friction of a truck on the asphalt, shattering it. After a brief stop on the side of the road, they found that nothing else had happened except for the windshield, so the couple decided to enter the city to repair the problem. However, they soon realized that the shop was closed due to a local holiday. They saw that some passers-by jokingly made negative signs, but a young man of about 35 years old parked his car alongside the couple's, instructing them to follow him. After a short journey, they stopped at a small house and the Bahian interrupted a friend's rest so that he, the owner of the small shop, could do the repair. During the work, the Bahian man praised his friend's help and calmed the couple down by saying that they could continue their trip, fulfilling their commitments. Once the repairs were complete, the atmosphere was friendly in their farewells.

Many centuries separate the two narratives. However, they have several situational aspects in common: travel, accidents, observers, generous provisions and appropriate referrals to difficulties. The two narratives were chosen for a psychosocial analysis because they unequivocally exhibit the same classes of social skills which are highly required in the experiences of helping situations. It can be assumed that the characters' behaviors are repeated with other actors, according to similar situational demands, regardless of place and time.

There are five characters involved in the events in the first narrative: the victim and the robbers, about whom little is known, a priest and a Levite who observed the wounded man but did nothing, and the Samaritan, taken as a model by Jesus. Considering the social group to which they belonged, the priest and the Levite would be expected to attend to the injured person. However, they just changed the side of the road they were on, showing that they didn't want any involvement with the situation. Such behaviors, which can be named as avoiding and escaping, are common, and most of us use these strategies. In situations that require participant help interventions, such as the narrated cases, those who are willing to act need some social skills, especially those required for this engagement.

The three social skills mentioned above were essential in both cases: self-control, empathy and assertiveness. We can learn by analyzing these situations. The exercise of observing and analyzing the characters' behaviors can bring important elements for more meaningful learning. Great educators such as Pestalozzi (INCONTRI, 2018) and Freire (1967) used real situations to confront students with problem situations.



The Samaritan's and the Bahian's behavior could involve risks in both narratives, hence the importance of self-control: observing the situation, inferring events, assessing victims and then actively participating in solving the problem. It can be inferred that the two protagonists showed self-control skills. In the case of the Bahian man, the request that the couple accompany him may have been crucial for him to draw up his help plan. On the other hand, by directing the wounded man to lodging, the Samaritan ensured the success of his providence. Both were very empathetic, making correct readings of the situation and certainly managed to put themselves in the shoes of those in need, assuming the question "what if that had happened to me?"

There is one aspect which must additionally be mentioned. At the time of the narrative, the Samaritan was a people despised by the other Jews. Jesus' own disciples were surprised to see him once talking to a Samaritan woman. The prevailing norm was that one should not enter into conversations "with these people". Coincidentally, about 20 centuries later, Northeastern Brazilians in general, and Bahians in particular, were victims of prejudice on the part of other Brazilians, mainly those from the Southeast and South of the country. The good Baiano, like the Good Samaritan, broke from prejudiced practices and left a lesson and examples to be followed: Prejudice or previous conceptions can be naturalized and with that justified for several generations resulting in great and irreparable harm.

VALUES AND COMMITMENTS IN THE FIELD OF SOCIAL SKILLS

Understanding the conceptual basis of the field of social skills is essential to assume the values and commitments that are indispensable for consolidating and disseminating this field, which has contributed so much to respecting and expanding interpersonal rights, to healthy coexistence and to people's quality of life. What would those commitments be? Next, three of them are highlighted, understood as the most relevant.



COMMITMENT TO COEXISTENCE VALUES AND ETHICS IN INTERPERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS

This is an issue associated with the very concept of social competence and the quality of interpersonal relationships. Certainly, much of the acceptance and social relevance of the field of social skills is based on its connection to coexistence values which should guide actions and interpersonal relationships in society.

The social competence (SC) criteria contemplate both the results for oneself (instrumental dimension of SC) and the results for the other and for the social group (ethical dimension of SC). In addition, they apply to both immediate results (i.e. achieving the goals of the interaction) and likely results in the medium and long-term (maintaining the quality and likelihood of the relationship, mutual respect and balanced exchanges, interpersonal rights). Immediate results are associated with the instrumental dimension of social competence (being successful), but cannot be separated from medium and long-term results associated with the ethical dimension, meaning to not only consider what is good for the person, but also for the other participant(s) in the interaction and to the social group and culture where the interaction takes place.

Certainly not all of these criteria are covered in the same social interaction. However, it can be said that the more of them are achieved, the more socially competent the performance can be considered. And since people can present socially competent performances in a situation and not in others, it is generally more correct to speak of socially competent performances (depending on the situation, the interlocutors, the type of demand) than socially competent people.

The concept of social competence is at the center of other concepts in the field of social skills and adds components and requirements for socially competent performance (DEL PRETTE; DEL PRETTE, 1017, 2021). In addition to components that characterize socially competent performance, social skills are also indispensable instrumental requirements. However, they are not enough to characterize social competence. Socially competent performance is also characterized by sensitivity and adherence to coexistence values, meaning commitment to interaction results that combine what is good for the person, for the other and for the culture. Some essential values for social competence can be highlighted: respect for human rights, justice,



freedom, dignity, compassion, reciprocity, and many others. Therefore, these authors emphasize that people need to practice ethical self-management of their interpersonal performance when interacting with others.

In addition to social skills and values, several requirements must be put into practice to achieve the criteria of socially competent performance (DEL PRETTE; DEL PRETTE, 2017). One of them is knowledge of the norms and rules of the environment, or the behaviors which are expected and valued in a given environment or context for different roles and interpersonal demands. This knowledge enables good “reading” of the social environment and choosing the most appropriate and potentially most effective response for different situations. In addition, self-knowledge is essential, meaning a refined discrimination of one’s own resources, interpersonal difficulties, values, anxiety management capabilities, anger, fear, and impulsiveness!!! Finally, it is essential to practice self-monitoring throughout the interaction (DIAS; CASALI; DEL PRETTE; DEL PRETTE, 2019) in terms of attention and observation of the ongoing behaviors, the immediate impact on the other and the likely results in the short, medium and long-term of the ongoing interaction. Self-monitoring is also the process of self-control and regulating the interaction direction to ensure social competence results.

In addition to adopting this conceptual basis that highlights the ethical issue, the commitment of professionals in the field of social skills to the values of coexistence and ethics in interpersonal relationships is supported by a more general issue about the role of social competence as a factor of social-cultural change. Even acknowledging that, social skills by its very definition are determined by current cultural norms and rules, and so the concept of social competence points to a transformative perspective. When a group of people in a certain cultural niche present socially competent performances according to instrumental and ethical criteria, they establish new interactive standards in that environment. These standards generate aggregate products that are much greater than the sum of individual performances (GLENN, 2004), which can change norms and rules of coexistence, and in turn characterize new cultural practices.



Commitment to values and ethics in interpersonal relationships can be carried out through programs centered on the concept of social competence, which promote social skills in strict articulation with adherence and sensitivity to coexistence values and other requirements of social competence (SLI PRETTE; DEL PRETTE, 2017, 2021). When applied and amplified in cultural niches such as work, school, family, leisure, etc., such programs can encourage new cultural practices of coexistence, expanding and consolidating the ethical dimension of social competence even more.

COMMITMENT TO KNOWLEDGE OF THE FIELD OF SOCIAL SKILLS

This second commitment can be approached from some questions for reflection by professionals and researchers who deal with people, in particular those specialized in social skills. Among these questions, we can highlight:

- ✓ Are the professionals up to date with the knowledge that has been produced in the field of social skills?
- ✓ Are researchers effectively disseminating the knowledge they produce to society?
- ✓ How has this knowledge been assimilated?
- ✓ What can be done to expand the dissemination of this knowledge?

It is understood that it is essential to seek knowledge produced in Brazil and abroad on social skills and interpersonal relationships to support professional practices with people with quality knowledge. Most presenters at this event are committed to scientific knowledge production and have sought to disseminate this knowledge through scientific articles, as well as courses, lectures and other activities.

Many have made the knowledge produced by their research groups available on their website pages with free access for download. As an example, the interested reader can search the web (www.rihs.ufscar.br) for materials produced by social skills researchers from different parts of Brazil.

It is also possible to highlight an important initiative by researchers in social skills who produced several dissemination materials, research articles, theoretical reflection and referrals regarding this moment of the COVID-19 pandemic, in addition to guidance booklets and lectures and dissemination studies that illustrate this commitment. Many of these materials are being presented at this event.



COMMITMENT TO SOLVING SOCIAL PROBLEMS

Alongside the problems associated with or resulting from the pandemic, many chronic social problems have been compromising healthy coexistence between people, interpersonal relationships and quality of life in general. The commitment to solving these problems, or forwarding alternative solutions, must be (on the one hand) associated with the aforementioned values, and on the other, with producing and consuming scientifically-based knowledge.

This means selecting and valuing evidence on the effectiveness of strategies, programs and actions in the field of social skills and social competence for forwarding these solutions. It may seem obvious to speak of scientific knowledge, but as we live in dark times of denial of science and scientific knowledge by a reasonably large social segment, it is important to reaffirm this commitment in our field of knowledge.

It can certainly be asked: what could be addressed to solve such crucial and wide-ranging problems that we are experiencing based on the field of social skills, if many of these problems are largely determined by macrostructural factors which go beyond the reach of the tools of our field? Violence can be taken as one example, which is intensified every day and is expressed in frightening statistics of homicides and aggressions associated with ethnic, gender and socioeconomic discrimination. However, it is important to remember that it is expressed - and often begins - in a disguised way in relationships between people, in the values that guide these relationships, in micro-aggressions of all kinds, generally ignored, but which materialize in everyday life in disrespect for differences and human and interpersonal rights that ultimately should guarantee people's life, subjectivity, dignity and fulfillment.

On one hand, it is known that these problems are largely determined by adverse social conditions and the lack of preventive and protective public policies for minority and vulnerable groups. However, one cannot ignore the level of everyday, interpersonal relationships, and currently those that occur in the virtual environment as an expression of the problem, but also as a condition which generates and amplifies conflicts. The complexity of social problems disallows thinking of isolated solutions from a single knowledge area and imposes the need to integrate



different knowledge levels and sectors.

Thus, even in recognizing the limits of a field of knowledge, any path towards reducing these problems can be hailed as better than none, as long as it is supported by a solid knowledge base which supports expanding these actions and their integration with other knowledge. This means a reaction against immobility which paralyzes the search for solutions, and can make these problems even more serious.

But what can you do from the perspective of social competence? As already pointed out, the social competence of individuals is culturally determined, meaning that it depends on prevailing values in society, education, regulations and public policies. However, as already emphasized, beyond dreams or idealism, the collective action of socially competent people can be realized through effective interventions and constitute a tool of cultural change to act on these determinants.

Although social competence is admittedly determined by social constraints, it also has the potential to determine cultural practices that need to be deconstructed and reconstructed. Changing these practices depends on changes in individual behaviors which, when amplified to group and intergroup relations, can generate aggregated products in terms of values of solidarity, democratization of access to cultural and consumer goods, respect for human and interpersonal rights, health and well-being, with special attention to vulnerable, marginalized and discriminated groups. Hence the importance of promoting social competence, values and new standards of coexistence, especially in those niches which are more prone to new practices and can be reproduced in new generations of people sensitive to all of these problems, for example, family and school.

Considering the construction of new cultural practices at school and forming new generations with social coexistence values, the innovative experience of continuing teacher education through an online distance learning program can be exemplified. A training process aimed at educating the new generations in performance standards and coexistence values, understanding that the school is essential to expand the structural conditions for this. As a scientific investigation (DEL PRETTE; DEL PRETTE, in press), the impact of the program on the



teacher's personal and pedagogical social competence was experimentally verified to act as a model and as a qualified mediator in educational social interactions with students (and certainly with their children). Moreover, positive effects on the socio-emotional development of students were verified both in terms of improved social skills and reduced indicators of behavior problems. In addition to effectiveness, the adherence of teachers to the program was verified, indicating the need for interventions of this type to be met today and the potential of the online format for this.

Thus, two books were published, available in printed and digital formats (DEL PRETTE; DEL PRETTE, 2022b; 2022c), aiming to expand the access of schools and teachers to the course content. It is understood that programs of this type can expand the school's protective and preventive function with the new generations in relation to many of the problems mentioned above, fostering new cultural practices in the school niche guided by the values of coexistence, which can extend to the students' family.

This was just one example. Certainly, there is still much to be done in the areas of mental health, family, work and other education sectors, such as special education, sports, leisure, etc. Some of the research groups from Brazil present at this event and active in the theme of social skills have sought to contribute to the solution of different social problems, for example, dating violence, the distribution of roles in the family, the exercise of interpersonal rights, respect for sexual diversity and many others, which move towards solutions.

CONCLUSION

Regrettably, we are currently experiencing an escalation of ideas refractory to the positions made explicit by analyzing the concept of social competence. It all (apparently) started with restrictions by several governments on migration processes. Some countries, such as the United States, under Trump's government, and Hungary under the tutelage of Orban, remained obstinately opposed to receiving migratory flows. In weighing the loss of the US presidential election, Trump encouraged his supporters to storm the capital. Undemocratic actions can also be seen in other countries, for example in Brazil. The dissemination of these policies certainly creates difficulties for expressing social competence, especially considering a population that has already been suffering



discrimination from both the federal government and in other public spaces.

The values defended herein for the field of social skills and articulated to the concept of social competence imply professional and scientific practices committed to respect for diversity and the rights of minority groups as an indispensable condition for the quality of human coexistence. Therefore, it opposes separatist ideologies of supremacy of certain groups to the detriment of others and dehumanization of certain segments, which support freedom repression practices and otherness, converted into fascist policies that oppose groups in false dichotomies (STANLEY, 2018).

Finally, it is important to highlight that such commitments can mean facing immobility, requiring both individual and collective social competence in the fight for rights and for a peaceful and harmonious coexistence among people in general. In this sense, the poem “It is necessary to act” by BRECHT (1898-1956) is particularly inspiring:

*First they took the blacks
But I didn't care about that
I was not black
Then they took some workers
But I didn't care about that
I wasn't a worker either.
Then they arrested the poor
But I didn't care about that
Because I'm not poor
Then they grabbed some unemployed people
But since I have my job
I didn't care either
Now they're taking me
But it's too late.
Since I didn't care about anyone
Nobody cares about me*



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