



## **Social skills: Assertiveness, teamwork and self-control/emotional expressiveness in early childhood education**

### **Habilidades sociais: Assertividade, trabalho em equipe e autocontrole/expressividade emocional na educação infantil**

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#### **ABSTRACT**

The present research aimed to identify the degree of knowledge and practice of social skills, assertiveness, teamwork, and self-control/emotional expressiveness in children who participate in the "Full-Time Project" at CEM Valdir Gonçalves de Lima, in the municipality of Votuporanga-SP. The work is characterized as exploratory of a quantitative-qualitative nature, through pre-post test and field diary in the proposed playful activities to identify the children's knowledge about the chosen skills. The study demonstrated that the interviewees already understood the social skills in question, since they already had a certain degree of knowledge in the pre-test, with no significant evolution in the post-test, however, even having knowledge about the subject, they are not able to apply it in the school and family routine. In this way, the objectives were achieved through the creation of bonds, showing practical ways of using social skills, making the researched learn about the proposed theme in a playful and fun way.

**Keywords:** Children, Social skills, Group work, Feelings.

#### **INTRODUCTION AND LITERATURE REVIEW**

The term "social skills", according to Del Prette & Del Prette (2005), can be conceptualized as a set of behaviors emitted in the face of the demands of an interpersonal situation, as long as they maximize gains and reduce losses for social interactions. It applies to

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the different classes of social behaviors in an individual's repertoire, which contribute to their social competence, favoring a healthy and productive relationship with other people.

Still, according to the authors, competent performance has a high probability of obtaining immediate reinforcing consequences in the social environment. The specific characteristics of a social performance that make it indicative of a social skill depend on factors that can influence both the topography (form) and the functionality (effectiveness) of the social performance, as well as the decision to cope or to escape/avoid the interpersonal situation.

These factors include the physical context in which people behave in classrooms, cafeterias, movie theaters, etc., the antecedent and consequent event for certain social behaviors, and the explicit and implicit rules that signal the behaviors valued, accepted, or forbidden therein.

According to empirical studies carried out with children (Del Prette and Del Prette, 2005) social skills were organized into seven classes, defining the essential components of each of them:

1. Self-control and emotional expressiveness (tolerating frustrations, expressing positive and negative emotions);
2. Civility (greeting people, saying thank you);
3. Empathy (listening and showing interest in the other, expressing understanding for the other's feeling or experience);
4. Assertiveness (defending one's rights, resisting peer pressure);
5. Making friends (asking and answering questions, initiating and maintaining conversation);
6. Interpersonal problem solving (identify and evaluate possible solution alternatives);
7. Academic social skills (following oral rules or instructions, participating in discussions).

Based on the social skills mentioned above, childhood is characterized as a decisive phase for learning and improving social skills. Although the construction of a socially skilled repertoire occurs through interactions between family, friends and the community, at the same time, there are failures in this learning process, presenting deficits in social skills (Gomide, 2003).

Developmental Psychology has highlighted the importance of social interactions in the process of learning and development of the human being, since childhood it is necessary to build an increasingly elaborate repertoire of social skills, recognized as indispensable resources for



their personal performance. Deficits in social skills can compromise later phases of the life cycle, such as difficulties in initiating and maintaining relationships, poorer quality of life, and different types of psychological disorders (Del Prette & Del Prette, 2001), including behavioral problems (Cia, Pamplin, and Del Prette, 2006).

Thus, behavioral problems can be seen as behavioral excesses or deficits that hinder the child's access to new reinforcement contingencies relevant to learning. The higher the frequency of behavioral problems presented by children, the lower the repertoire of Social Skills and their academic performance (Down & Barham, 2009; Cia, Pamplin, & Del Prette, 2006; D'Avila-Bacarji, Marturano, & Elias, 2005; Del Prette & Del Prette, 2005).

In this sense, some authors consider deficits in the repertoire of social skills as risk factors for academic achievement and socio-emotional development (Del Prette & Del Prette, 2005; Gresham, 2004) that may worsen in adolescence and adulthood. The risk may be even higher in children who have comorbidities such as poor school performance and behavioral problems, which justifies considering these children as a more vulnerable group.

Living together requires the child to perform skills; Such development is linked to responsibility, cooperation and independence in the execution of tasks.

Children with a difficult temperament (high reactivity and sensitivity) who establish insecure attachment with their caregivers will be more likely to follow a trajectory of behavioral inhibition and shyness. Presence and absence have different consequences. With the lack of social skills, the externalized problems are more frequent, in which the presence of antisocial behaviors, oppositional and challenging behaviors, among them irritability, physical and/or verbal aggression, provocations and rebellions, among others, is verified. It is worth mentioning that there is a high probability of the person becoming vulnerable, dependent and immature, given that growth in childhood interferes with adolescence and adulthood (Prette & Prette, 2005).

On the other hand, the problems you have internalized are more identifiable, including depression, excessive worry, sadness, insecurity and lack of interest in academic activities.

These difficulties are usually due to a poor repertoire of social skills, especially in terms of empathy, expression of feelings, and problem-solving (Maia & Lobo, 2013). To become socially competent, the individual needs to know how to do, want to do, and be able to do, that is, seek solutions to conflicts, believe in their actions, and have self-control to deal with their emotions. According to Maia & Lobo (2013), these three aspects are considered essential for a satisfactory coexistence.



The school environment plays a crucial role in the development of social skills in children, as it is in this environment that they spend most of their time interacting with their peers and teachers. The school offers a unique space for children to learn how to relate, resolve conflicts and cooperate with others, essential skills for building a harmonious social life. In addition, pedagogical and extracurricular activities can contribute to the improvement of communication, empathy and decision-making, promoting the integral development of students.

Importantly, the quality of interactions in the school environment has a direct impact on the development of children's social skills. A welcoming, inclusive, and respectful environment facilitates the creation of positive and meaningful bonds between students, allowing them to feel safe to express their opinions and emotions. Teachers and staff must be prepared to mediate conflicts and promote activities that stimulate cooperation, leadership and social responsibility, thus forming citizens who are aware and able to face the challenges of society.

Del Prette and Del Prette propose the implementation of social skills training programs in the school context, which involve playful and educational activities, with the aim of facilitating the learning and practice of these skills. In addition, the authors highlight the role of the teacher as a mediator and facilitator of this process, and it is important that educators are also prepared to develop and improve their own social skills.

The assessment and monitoring of children's social skills development are also key aspects highlighted by Del Prette and Del Prette. Through assessment and observation instruments, educators can identify the specific needs of each student and thus adapt pedagogical strategies to stimulate the progress of these skills. Early intervention and continuous follow-up are crucial to prevent difficulties in interpersonal relationships and promote the social inclusion of all students.

It is important to remember that the development of social skills is intrinsically related to children's emotional well-being and quality of life. A school environment that favors the acquisition of these skills contributes not only to academic success, but also to the formation of individuals who are more resilient, self-confident, and able to face future challenges.

The development of social skills in children varies according to their age and the context in which they are inserted. From kindergarten to elementary school, it is possible to observe different behaviors that reflect the evolution of social skills. The school influences this development by providing an environment where children can interact with peers and adults, face challenges, and learn to cope with diversity.



Therefore, this research is necessary to identify the social skills developed by the children who are part of the "Full-Time Project" of CEM Valdir Gonçalves de Lima.

## OBJECTIVES

### PRIMARY OBJECTIVE

**OBJECTIVE:** To identify the degree of knowledge and practice of social skills, assertiveness, teamwork and self-control/emotional expressiveness in children who participate in the "Full-Time Project" at CEM Valdir Gonçalves de Lima, in the municipality of Votuporanga-SP.

### SECONDARY OBJECTIVES

- Encourage teamwork.
- Name and understand feelings.
- Reflect on the importance of sincerity.
- Problem-solving.
- Evaluate the knowledge acquired by the children after the orientations offered in the playful activities.

## METHOD

The methodology used in this research is characterized as exploratory of quantitative and qualitative nature, with the objective of facilitating the pursuit of the proposed objectives. To this end, the research will be carried out in three stages:

**First stage:** carried out at the center campus of the University Center of Votuporanga – UNIFEV and includes the bibliographic survey on the theme "Empathic Social Skills in childhood" for the construction of the conceptual theoretical framework.

**Second stage:** It was carried out at the school "Prof<sup>o</sup> Valdir Gonçalves de Lima" and characterized as field research. The Informed Consent Form (ICF) was given to the parents and/or guardians and the Informed Consent Form (TALE) to the children, along with an explanatory folder about the research. Subsequently, after receiving the signatures, data were collected through the pre-test, which contained seven multiple-choice questions. Then, playful activities, dynamics and games were developed to guide on the theme Social Skills, in which observations and field diary were carried out. After the three meetings, the questionnaire with the same seven questions was reapplied.



**Third stage:** Analysis and interpretation of the data was carried out at the central campus of the University Center of Votuporanga – UNIFEV, building the final report.

## PARTICIPANTS

The research participants were:

- 50 students who attend the "Full-Time" project in the afternoon. Enrolled at CEM Prof. Valdir Gonçalves de Lima.

## LOCATION

- The first and third stages were held at the University Center of Votuporanga – UNIFEV, located at Rua Pernambuco, 4196, Centro, Votuporanga-SP;
- The second stage was held at CEM Prof. Valdir Gonçalves de Lima, located at Rua Inglaterra, 2800, Parque das Nações, Votuporanga – SP.

## PROCEDURES

- **1st meeting: Presentation of the Research for Children**

In this meeting, the project was presented to the children with the delivery of pamphlets, with explanatory data regarding the objectives and development of the project, clarifying to the parents the dynamics that was developed with their children. Together with him, the Informed Consent Form (ICF) and the Informed Consent Form (TALE), so that they could sign and return them the following week on a scheduled date, where the terms were collected and the documents were verified.

- **2nd meeting: Application of the Pre-Test and Approach of the Researched**

In this meeting, the pre-test (appendix 1) was applied, which seeks to analyze the children's knowledge about their social skills and also started to create a bond with them.

Name of the dynamic: "friendship dice"

Description: The children formed a circle, and the conductors of the dynamics guided them about the dynamics. To start the dynamics, the dice were given to one of them; This child introduced himself by saying his name and age and then rolled the dice, which had 6 types of questions referring to his tastes, mentioned below.

- What's your favorite sport?
- What do you like to eat the most?



- What do you like to do in your free time?
- What do you least like to do?
- What is your favorite subject in school?
- What do you like most about school?

At the end, the child passed the dice to his classmate, until everyone had participated.

Objectives: This dynamic aimed at self-knowledge, knowledge and a greater approximation between colleagues, in addition to allowing the integration of children among themselves, and with the project organizers.

- **3rd meeting: Realization of the dynamic "Pandora's box"**

On this day, the activity called "Pandora's box" was carried out, which began with the accommodation of the children in a circle and the choice of an academic to hold a box, which was named in the future during the theater that was presented by the academics. In this theatre was told the story of Pandora, a young woman approached by a God, with the duty of guarding a mysterious box, without being able to open it. The young woman, not holding back, opens the box and reveals the feelings of the whole world.

After the theater, the box was named and a student was chosen, of their own free will, to draw one of the papers contained in the box, with ten feelings described, including love, sadness, fear, anger, loneliness, envy, jealousy, gratitude, joy and surprise, continuing the gymkhana.

The chosen student read the feeling drawn and demonstrated through gestures the representation of the feeling, told in which situation this feeling was aroused and identified what should be done in this situation. This activity was carried out with several students and later other children were chosen to perform mimes about other feelings drawn. The meeting ended with a brief explanation from an academic on the topic and the importance of naming one's own feelings.

Objectives:

- Identify feelings
- Name feelings
- Identify situations and associated actions



- **4th meeting: Realization of the dynamics "working in teams" and Realization of the dynamics "Speaking the truth" and application of the post-tests**

On this day, the activity "working in teams" was carried out, where the students organized the children in pairs without affinities, with the help of the teacher responsible for the Project. Forms containing instructions and explaining the activity were handed out. Each pair made a drawing together, encouraging teamwork. At the end of the activity, the objective of the activity was discussed, and the following questions were asked:

- "What was the biggest difficulty you encountered in accomplishing the task?"
- "What did you feel before the realization? And during?"
- "Which challenge was greater: finding the solution to the common work or carrying out the activity jointly?"

It was explained that group work is based on some values such as: respect, collaboration, compliance with the decision of the majority and some behaviors such as: waiting, listening to the opinion of colleagues and encouraging them.

Objectives:

- Develop respect
- Cooperate
- Exhibiting/giving opinion
- Share
- Troubleshoot
- Wait your turn
- Observe/pay attention

Then, the dynamic "Speaking the truth" was carried out with the children to awaken the ability of assertiveness. The activity was carried out by means of a printed form containing images of expressions and feelings, which should have or should not be coherent with the sentences adjacent to the emotion expressed.

A form was given to each of them containing a picture, which represented an expression/reaction of some certain feeling, where there was a phrase corresponding or not to the image presented. After the dynamics, the forms were collected to be counted.



### Objectives:

- Identify (in)coherence between thinking, feeling and acting
- Reflect on the importance of sincerity
- Paying attention, observing, and cooperating
- Identify feelings and nonverbal expressions

Then, at the end of the day's activity, the post-test was applied, which contained the same seven questions as the pre-test.

### CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF RISKS AND BENEFITS

Risks: They were minimal, with few disagreements among the participants during the "Teamwork" dynamic.

### Benefits:

- Respect the difference
- Learn to work in a team
- Self-control
- Assertiveness

### RESULTS

The research was carried out by applying a pre-test and post-test with 39 participants. The mean age of the respondents, between the 1st and 5th year of elementary school, was 8 years.

Regarding the gender of the participants, the survey showed that 51.28% were girls and 48.72% were boys. The pre-test and post-test were composed of 7 similar questions to know the attitudes of the respondents. The pre-test was applied in the 1st meeting, while the post-test was applied in the last meeting

- **Question 1:** "If your friend is having difficulty with schoolwork, do you:" A) offer help; B) wait for him to ask for help; C) doesn't help

In the first question, the prevalent answer in the pre- and post-test was alternative A, "offers help", and 89.74% were correct in the pre-test, and in the post-test, 82.05% chose the correct alternative.

- **Question 2:** "If your guardian says you can't eat candy before dinner, you:" A) eat the hidden candy; B) wait for dinner; C) insists and cries



In the second question, the predominant answer in the pre- and post-test was alternative B, "Wait for dinner", as expected by the researchers, revealing a percentage of 89.74% in both tests, finding that there was no variation in the results.

- **Question 3:** "If your friend said something that made you upset, you:" A) Do the same thing; B) Says nothing; C) Tries to talk and solve

In the third question, the predominant answer in the pre- and post-test was alternative C, "Try to talk and solve", as expected by the researchers, revealing a percentage of 79.48% in the pre-test and 82.05% in the post-test in the correct alternative.

- **Question 4:** "If your teacher corrects your activity wrongly, you:" A) Accept it and are sad; B) Ask why; C) Is rude to the teacher.

In the fourth question, the predominant answer in the pre- and post-test was alternative B, "Ask why", as expected by the researchers, with a percentage of 69.23% of correct answers, and there was an expected decrease (4.4%) between the two tests in alternative C "Is rude to the teacher", which demonstrates effectiveness in social skills.

- **Question 5:** "If your friend gets a toy that you really wanted, you:" A) Are you happy for him; B) Tries to sneak it up; C) Gets sad and angry.

In the fifth question, the predominant answer in the pre- and post-test was alternative A, "Be happy for the person", as expected by the researchers, with a percentage of 82.05% of correct answers in the pre-test and 92.30% in the post-test.

- **Question 6:** "When you are playing as a team, you want to:" A) Win the game; B) Be the best player; C) Have fun.

In the sixth question, the predominant answer in the pre- and post-test was alternative C, "Have fun", as expected by the researchers, with a percentage of correct answers of 76.92% in the pre-test and 84.61% in the post-test, demonstrating effectiveness in social skills.

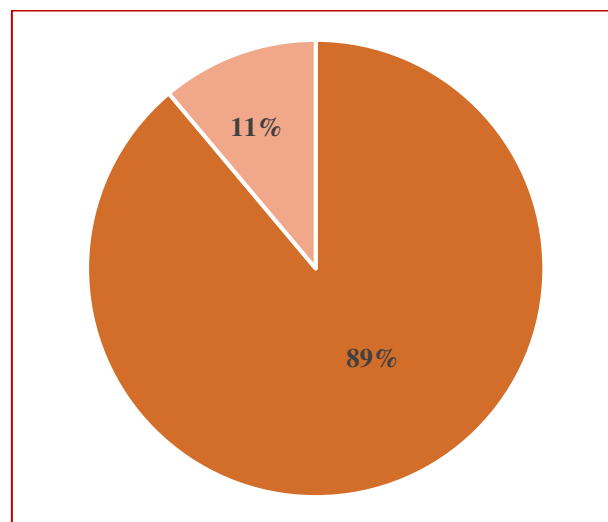
- **Question 7:** "If you lend your pen to your colleague and he doesn't give it back, you:" A) Fight with him; B) Cries and is sad; C) No longer lends.

In the seventh question, the predominant answer in the pre- and post-test was alternative C, "It doesn't lend anymore", as expected by the researchers, with a percentage of correct answers of 74.35% in the pre-test and 79.48% in the post-test.

To conclude the analysis of the first stage, in the case of the pre-test, the authors' expectations were met by demonstrating a high level of assertiveness of the children. However, it was noted that some of the responses were motivated by fear of consequences and the influence of friends, not by the student's own will. However, in the post-test, after creating proximity between the interviewees and the researchers, it was observed that the students felt more comfortable and asked the answers they really thought were correct.

Continuing with the analysis, we move on to the first dynamic, called "Pandora's Box". In this activity, there were 4 papers with the name of each feeling inside a box, where the respondents drew one of them to answer the questions on the theme, however, due to the number of children present, the 4 papers of each feeling were not drawn. In the end, the authors observed a high level of knowledge about the feelings of the respondents, however, the feelings "anger", "sadness", "envy" and "jealousy" had only 50% of correct answers.

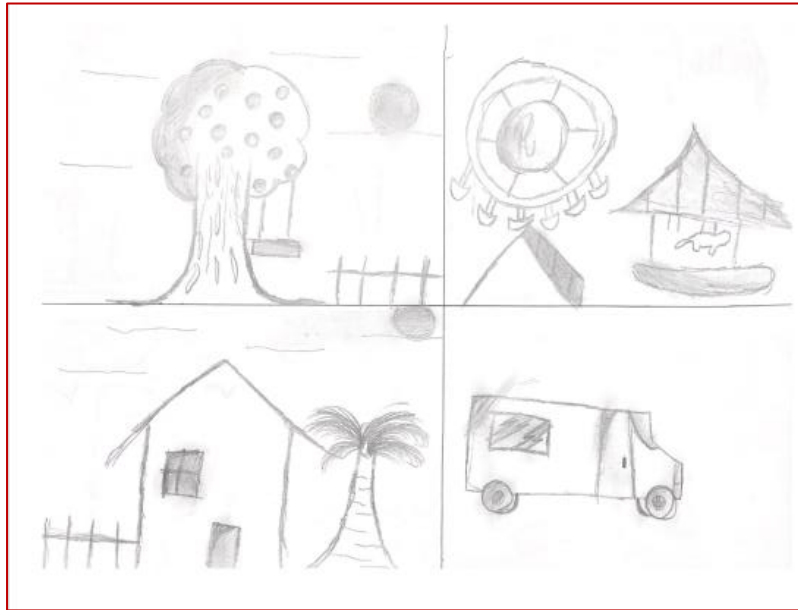
Then, in the next meeting, the activity on assertiveness was carried out, called "Speaking the truth", which consisted of the application of a playful test to identify the coherence between the text and the illustrated image, in order to identify the presence of this social skill in the children. The results can be found in the chart below:

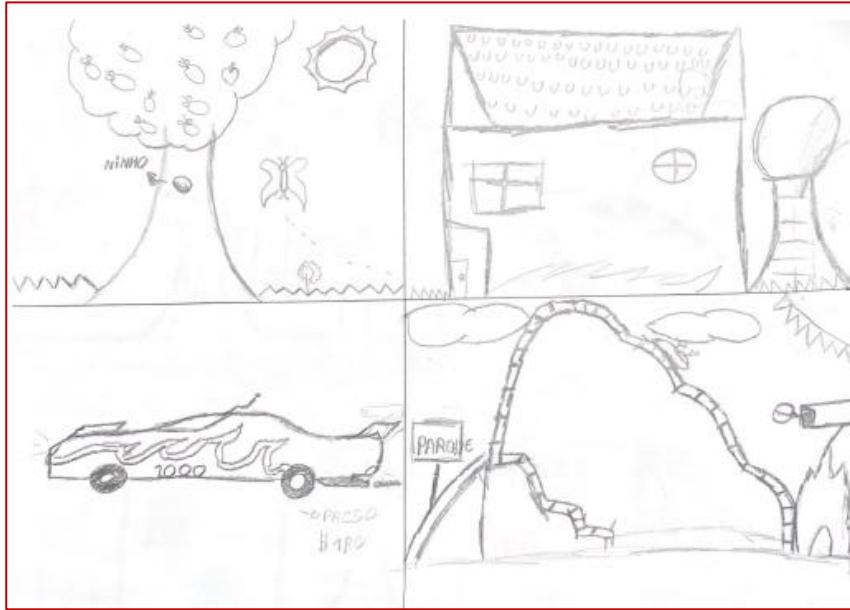


89% of the children were assertive and 11% were not assertive

According to the data presented, it is observed that the interviewees have the social skills analyzed, making the test result satisfactory.

Finally, in the last activity carried out, called "teamwork", whose social skill has the same name, it was suggested for the researchers to form pairs and build four drawings together. Some of the drawings made by the children are as follows:





Of the pairs randomly formed with the help of the teacher, it was observed that only three pairs had disagreements during the execution of the activity. The rest of the pairs (15) had a partnership to carry out the activity.

## FINAL THOUGHTS

The research showed that the interviewees already had an understanding of the social skills worked, since they already had a certain degree of knowledge in the pre-test, with no significant evolution in the post-test.

In relation to the social skill "teamwork", the respondents were more interested in developing this proposed task. It was found that when everyone participated in the same activity, there was self-control of the participants, whereas when the activity was individual and required waiting for the others, it generated restlessness, which can be justified by the fatigue due to the permanence of the research participants full-time in school.



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