

# Socioemotional Competencies and Behaviour Management at School: An Exploratory Socio-Educational Intervention

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## Abstract

Socioemotional competencies are based on self-knowledge, self-regulation, social awareness, relational skills and responsible decision-making, presenting a close relationship with the efficient management of behaviours in the classroom. In collaboration with 3 schools in the interior of Portugal, an exploratory socio-educational intervention project was developed over a period of 3 months, with the purpose of promoting the socioemotional competencies of 41 primary school children, as a basis for building classroom behaviour management strategies that would facilitate the teachers' educational action. The results showed that each activity works on more than one socioemotional skill. The data allowed to outline 6 efficient strategies to manage classroom behaviour. This exploratory project, besides contributing to enrich the educational project of these schools, proved to be a production of knowledge capable of contributing to fill the gap in terms of guidelines for socioemotional education in Portugal based on field evidence.

**Keywords:** Sociomotional Competencies, Behaviour Management, Primary Education, Socio-Educational Intervention, Educational Science

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## INTRODUCTION

In Portugal, the promotion of socioemotional competencies began in the late 1980, in school and community settings, having gained visibility with the publication, in 1997, of the Programme for the Promotion of Social Competencies by the Ministry of Education. In broad terms, only in the middle of the 2010 decade did we see a consistent political focus on this issue, namely under the 2014 Support Programme for Health Promotion and Education, authored by the Directorate General of Education, which highlights the importance of socioemotional factors for health promotion and school success. In this vein, the 2015 National School Health Programme (updated in 2020), authored by the Directorate General of Health in collaboration with the Directorate General of Education, allows to deepen the work leveraged in the previous year around the socioemotional competencies in the school environment and their transfer to the community and social space.

Currently, the National Strategy for Citizenship Education (Ministry of Education, 2018) frames socioemotional competencies as a cross-cutting area in line with the skills defined in the Profile of Students Leaving Compulsory Schooling (Ministry of Education, 2021) being articulated

with the essential learning objectives and practices defined for each subject and for each year of schooling.

Based on these documents, in the first 4 years of Portuguese education (the 1st cycle of basic education), the promotion of socioemotional competencies is observed through health promotion and education actions developed in coordination with the curriculum, namely around the promotion of healthy lifestyles and the prevention of risk behaviours, but in a haphazard way when compared to the consistency needed to produce significant effects (Álvares, 2022).

In this sense, it is important to highlight that socio-emotional competencies are part of the wealth of skills that allow us to understand (Attanasio, Blundell, Conti, & Mason, 2020), manage and express different social and emotional aspects that occur throughout life, so as to enable the performance of activities such as learning, establishing relationships, solving daily problems and adapting to the complex demands of human development (López-Mondéjar & Pastor, 2017; Ohl, Fox, & Mitchell, 2013). In turn, social and emotional learning has to do with the process through which people develop a range of skills, attitudes and values crucial to the acquisition of social and emotional competencies (Parhomenko, 2014). Therefore, this learning is framed within social and emotional education which aims to support people in developing social and emotional competencies in their various dimensions, e.g., social, academic and physical, all closely related (Elias et al., 1997).

In this line of thought, socioemotional competencies can be dissected into 5 major areas, all of them interconnected, in order to facilitate the development of intervention programs in CASEL 2013:

1. *Self-knowledge* - abilities that allow understanding one's own emotions, thoughts and values, and how these aspects influence our behaviour in different daily situations;
2. *Self-regulation* - abilities that allow managing one's emotions, thoughts and behaviours efficiently in different situations;
3. *Social awareness* - abilities to understand other people's perspectives, promoting empathy and inclusion;
4. *Relational competencies* - abilities that allow establishing and maintaining healthy relationships, as well as interacting with diverse people and groups in different contexts;
5. *Responsible decision making* - abilities that allow constructive and solidary decisions regarding oneself and social interactions in different life situations.

Based on these ideas, social and emotional competencies form the stage on which classroom and school community environments are built that promote personal and school success (Waters & Charles Higgins, 2021). In this sense, social and emotional competencies emerge as facilitators of the construction of relationships in the school environment, of the regulation of behaviours in the classroom and in the interaction with the school community, and of the promotion of participation in school life and in general (Bondy, Ross, Gallingane, & Hambacher, 2007). Therefore, it is important to highlight that the management of behaviours in the classroom space, although facilitated by socioemotional education, proves to be largely efficient when combined with a diversified range of mediation strategies of social relations (e.g., conflict mediation) and of physical spaces (e.g., organisation of tables and chairs in the classroom) (Gandía-Carbonell, Losilla, & Vígner, 2022; Moll, 1997)

Based on these considerations, a socioemotional intervention programme was developed in 3 Portuguese schools with 3 primary school classes, with the purpose of promoting the socioemotional competencies of the children in these classes and to contribute to the construction of learning environments in the classroom conducive to the success of the teaching-learning process. The following sections report on the scope of this intervention.

## Description of the Intervention Project

In 2022, within an educational project that consisted in the teaching of Curricular Enrichment Activities (CEA), it was noticed that teachers reported challenges in managing classroom behaviours (e.g., children damaging their classmates' material in every class and constant conflicts between classmates). Based on these concerns, a socio-educational intervention was developed based on work around social and emotional competencies as a means to promote the personal and school success of the children (Boyden, Dercon, & Singh, 2015), as well as a means to deepen strategies around behaviour management in the classroom space with the purpose of establishing procedures and building synergies for the teachers of these schools to appropriate such strategies and use them in their daily teaching as facilitators of the teaching-learning process and as tools to promote the well-being of the children.

Based on this idea, the diagnosis phase included the creation of a pedagogical team for socioemotional education: 1 educologist, 1 teacher from each school and 1 psychologist (for all schools). The team met weekly to discuss issues surrounding the children in the context of socio-emotional skills and behaviour management, ideas for structuring the project and procedures for its implementation in the long term and in a logic of continuous improvement. At the end of 4 weeks, the backbone of the project was outlined. From a broad perspective, after this phase of diagnosis and agreement on the contents of the project, we moved on to its implementation. This article reports on this process, which served as a basis to leverage action-research practices with the teachers of these schools, in order to promote the involvement of the whole educational community (e.g., family, operational assistants and teachers) in the implementation and continuous improvement of this project (e.g., on going evaluation using informal interviews and ex post evaluation in terms of the effects of the programme using brief focused group discussions).

The general objective, specific objectives, goals and activities carried out, as well as an overview of the project are explained below.

### *General structure of the project and people involved*

The project involved 6 classes from 3 schools in the interior of Portugal. In total, 41 children (37 Portuguese, 2 Brazilian, 1 Chilean and 1 Spanish) between 6 and 10 years old were integrated in the project, being, in terms of sex, 21 female and 20 male. One session per week was held with each class lasting about 2 hours over a period of about 3 months.

### *General objective*

1. Promote the socioemotional competencies of primary school children as a motto to build behaviour management strategies in the classroom space that facilitate the teaching-learning process.

### *Specific objectives*

- 1.1 Promote children's self-knowledge and self-regulation;
- 1.2 Promote children's social awareness, relational skills and responsible decision-making;
- 1.3. Develop behaviour management strategies in classroom space.

### *Goals*

- 1.1.1 To have evidence that children reveal knowledge and apply it in everyday life around how they react in different situations and strategies to manage emotions at those times;
- 1.2.1 To have evidence that children reveal empathic and inclusive attitudes towards other people within the construction of healthy relationships based on solidary decision making;
- 1.3.1. Consolidate with the classes a series of behaviour management strategies in the classroom space in order to contribute to the teachers' daily teaching activities.

### *Activities*

#### Activity A: Around the Campfire

The classroom is arranged in such a way that there is a large space in the middle of the classroom without tables and chairs. The children arrive and, after greeting them, they are asked to

form a circle on the floor of the room (where the teacher also has a place). It is explained that there are three rules for everyone to follow: respect the teacher and classmates (e.g., no hitting or insulting), ask the teacher if you need to leave the room or get out of the activity (e.g. going to the toilet) and whenever you need to talk to a classmate or move around a bit you have to do it in a way that does not interrupt the activity (e.g., talking quietly to a classmate). It is then explained that we are going to do a series of activities together over a number of weeks and it's purpose. Then, including the teacher, each child, besides giving their name and age, mentions an activity they like to do and an activity they don't like to do. As they talk, notes are taken. At the end there is a discussion about which activities the majority like to do and which the majority do not like to do, highlighting the common ground between the class. The focus is on validating the emotions in different everyday situations, both pleasant and unpleasant, discussing different ways of managing these moments, both to make the most of pleasant situations and to overcome unpleasant ones. Behaviour management is part of the processes which are carried out, for example, in reinforcing respect for the other person's opinion, in establishing coherent and adequate consequences for behaviour which is considered negative, and in managing micro-conflicts within each group.

### **Activity B: Us through other people's eyes**

The classroom is arranged so that the chairs are in a U shape. All the children's names are written on the whiteboard. As soon as the children come in, they are asked to sit on the chairs in groups of 4. They are told that they have to say one positive quality for each classmate (including themselves) and that the group has to come to an agreement. At the end, each child has to say how they feel about the qualities written on the whiteboard about them. This is done child by child. The focus is on validating the positive qualities that each child presents and reinforcing them within the class, contributing to developing empathy by putting themselves in the other's place, building an inclusive environment by strengthening the class-community, and promoting healthy relationships and supportive decision-making through group work. Behaviour management is part of the processes which are carried out, for example, in reinforcing respect for the other person's opinion, in establishing consistent and appropriate consequences for behaviour which is considered negative and in managing micro-conflicts within each group.

### **Activity C: The scale of problems**

The classroom is organised so that the chairs are in a U shape. Five challenging daily situations are written on the board (e.g., losing one's wallet, death of a pet and getting sick with fever) and a scale of problems with three levels - small, medium and big problems. Once the children have entered the room, they are asked to sit in the chairs in groups of 4. It is explained that we are going to do an activity in which each group has to place each of those problems on one of the three levels of the scale and that the group will have to come to an agreement. The groups have 10 to 15 minutes to complete this task. Next, each group indicates in which level they place each problem, and their decision is written on the board. Then, the problems are allocated to the level according to the majority decision of the groups. In case of a tie, the problem stays on both levels. At the end, each group is asked, through a spokesperson, to say why they agree or disagree with the result of the scale. The focus is on working to build healthy relationships and supportive decision making through collaborative problem solving, as well as developing a sense of inclusion through listening to all voices in the class. Behaviour management is part of the processes which are carried out, for example, in reinforcing respect for the other person's opinion, in establishing coherent and appropriate consequences for behaviour which is considered as negative, and in managing micro-conflicts within each group.

### **Activity D: Debating is how we understand each other!**

The classroom is organised so that the chairs are in a U shape. The first activity helped to find out what most people in the class like (e.g., football or animals). Based on this knowledge, the

names of football players or animals (or other situations) are written on the whiteboard according to the number of groups that can be established in the class. Once the children have entered, they are asked to sit in their chairs in groups of 4. They are told that we are going to have a debate and that they will have to find 2 positive arguments, in favour of the player or animal assigned to their group (the assignment is done randomly by removing a piece of paper from a bag), as to why this player or animal is better than the other players or animals and 2 negative arguments, against the other players or animals, as to why they are not better than their player or animal. It is important to point out that it is not worth saying the opposite (e.g., my player scores many goals and the others do not). The children who feel they do not have the knowledge to carry out the activity, stand next to the teacher, helping to assess the quality of the interventions of each group, according to the following criteria: respect for the other group, not interrupting their interventions; presenting well-structured arguments; and collaborative work, in this sense that the whole group contributes to the debate. The groups are given 10 to 15 minutes to structure their arguments. The rules of the debate are explained (beginning and end of the speeches and how to speak). The debate starts with the group with the first name on the board from right to left. Each group states its positive arguments. Then the second and third group (and others, if any) say their negative arguments about the player or animal from the first group to speak. Then, the first group to speak tries to counter-argue all of them. And so on until all the groups have exposed their negative arguments and had a chance to counter-argue them against their assigned player or animal. At the end, the teacher and the children who were left to evaluate the interventions (if there are such children) provide some comments on the discussion in the form of sandwich feedback (Prochazka, Ovcari, & Durinik, 2020) - strengths, areas for improvement and an overall positive appraisal. The focus is on testing the skills of self-awareness and self-regulation of emotions (e.g., waiting for another group to finish when you totally disagree with what they say), as well as working on inclusion (e.g., all people and groups have a voice in the debate and their opinions count), building healthy relationships and decision-making through collaborative work (e.g., developing arguments together, deciding which ones best apply to the activity and which ones do not). Behaviour management is embedded within the processes which are carried out, for example, in reinforcing respect for the other person's opinion, in establishing consistent and appropriate consequences for behaviour which is deemed negative, and in managing micro-conflicts within each group.

### **Activity E: Drawing emotions**

The classroom is organised so that the chairs are in a U shape. Draw a line in the middle of the whiteboard with a smiling face on one side and a sad face on the other side. Then draw a large square or rectangle on each side. Once the children have entered, they are asked to sit on the chairs. We explain that we are going to do a drawing activity and how we are going to do it. Each child takes a piece of paper out of a bag to randomly select whether they will be on the happy or sad side. In this manner the class is divided as equally as possible into two large groups. The children rearrange themselves in their places according to their side of the drawing. Then the child on the right hand draws one or two objects (e.g., trees, people and cars) on the board with the aim of constructing a picture, either happy or sad (according to the side of the board), so that all the classmates contribute to the picture making sense as a single drawing. The children go to the board in alternating order, starting with the child on the right hand, then the child on the left hand (from the other group) and continue alternating until everyone has drawn. At the end, each group will have to make a story about the drawing of the other group, but transforming it into the reverse of the original idea (the happy drawing gives rise to a sad story and vice-versa). The groups will have about 15 minutes to develop their story. At the end, they present it to the class and the other group makes a comment. The focus is on working on self-knowledge and self-regulation through the process of transforming real or imagined situations into something different, allowing the identification of different emotions, different ways of reacting to different situations and multiple strategies for overcoming them, both those considered positive and those considered negative. Behaviour management is part of the processes which are carried out, for example, in reinforcing

respect for the other person's opinion, establishing consistent and appropriate consequences for negative behaviour and managing micro-conflicts within each group.

### **Activity F: Farewell**

The classroom is arranged in a U shape. Explain to the class that this is the last session and why. They are then asked to get together in small groups to do some activity they like and each group is assigned to a separate part of the room (it is important to maintain some sort of proximity without the other groups paying attention to the moment). When it is time to talk to the groups, they are asked to say what they liked best and least about the activities and what they would have liked to have done in addition. We listen to what they have to say and then comment on each person in the group based on the sandwich feedback (Prochazka et al., 2020), specifically, positive reinforcement of the qualities of each child, indicating some aspect that they can seek to improve and finishing with an overall positive assessment of the role of that child within the activities. At the end, each child in the group is asked to choose a way to say goodbye (e.g., hug, greeting or other situation). The teacher says goodbye to each child. The same actions are carried out with all the groups. Before leaving the classroom, an email is written on the board and it is indicated that they can talk through this channel whenever they wish. Afterwards, a group hug is held and the lesson ends. The focus is on working on self-awareness and self-regulation through the management of emotions when confronted with a situation of saying good-bye and closing the activities, on inclusion, as everyone sees their participation and experience in the activities validated by comments and actions, and on the development of healthy relationships and supportive decision-making through dialogue and inter-group support (between the children) at the moment of saying good-bye. Behaviour management is part of the processes which are carried out, for example, in the reinforcement of respect for the other person's opinion, in the establishment of coherent and adequate consequences for behaviour which is considered negative and in the management of micro-conflicts within each group.

#### *Reward Space*

If the activity runs smoothly and without conflicts, the children have the rest of the time of the session as a moment of leisure, where they can do any activity they like. The focus is on rewarding and positively reinforcing the actions considered positive that the class has developed throughout the session.

#### *Mediation space*

If there are conflicts during the activity, the activity is terminated before it ends, if the conflict is intense, or, if the conflict is latent, after the end of the activity, the conflicts are discussed within the wider group and consensual solutions are sought, based on the contributions of different people in the class. The focus is on working all the areas of socioemotional skills through democratic work around the daily conflicts existing in the school community that translate into conflicts within the classroom space, posing challenges to the development of socioemotional skills and behaviour management in the classroom environment.

#### *PERT Analysis*

The PERT (Programme Evaluation and Review Technique) analysis makes it possible to delve into the network of interdependence and causality relationships in the structure of a sequence of actions (Hartley & Wortham, 1966). As such, this analysis proved particularly useful for understanding the scope of the actions to be carried out in the project. Figure 1 illustrates the PERT analysis designed by the pedagogical team.

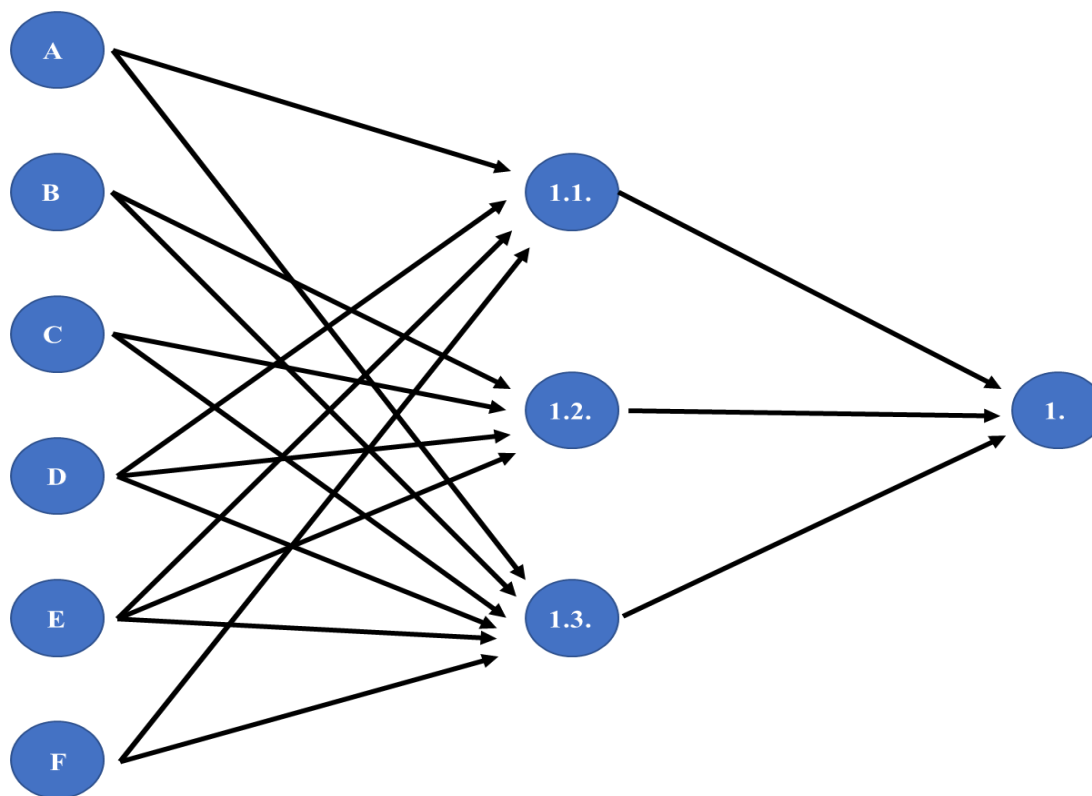


Figure 1. PERT analysis

From the PERT analysis, it is important to note that there is a balanced focus on the convergence between the different activities and two specific objectives, namely for specific objectives 1.1. and 1.2. However, for specific objective 1.3, all six activities concurred, highlighting the importance of socio-emotional education for behaviour management in the classroom. It is also important to highlight that all activities contribute, in a wide perspective and in a natural way, to the general objective 1.

## METHOD

One of the central aspects of this project has to do with its specificity in the field of socio-educational intervention, namely, it is based on a social and educational aspect, as well as a psychological and existential one, in so far as it focuses on the development of people and educational communities based on a pragmatic cultural and methodological dimension (Ward, 2020). In this line, the assessment of needs passed through informal dialogue between teachers of the schools, from which it was possible to formally build a team focused on reflection around the problems to be faced and the way to address them in order to solve them. Therefore, we proceeded to the planning of what are the central aspects of a project of this nature, namely, the delineation of objectives and goals, activities and their guidelines, as well as thinking about the time, sequence and resources of the project, and its evaluation with the aim of building a basis for a robust socio-educational intervention to integrate the educational project of each school in the long term. Having said this, it is important to mention that the on going evaluation was carried out through informal interviews with the children and teachers involved in the project, the evaluation of the effectiveness and efficiency was based on these interviews and on participant observation, and the evaluation of the effects and impacts has been integrated in the form of participant observation by the teachers around what are the educational experiences in the classroom environment and in everyday school life, and there is also a dialogue with the families to broaden the understanding around the extension of the effects to the social and family context.

Along these lines, it is important to highlight that the critical reflection carried out around this project is based on work with an ethnographic dimension (Ward, 2020), namely, it values people's

meanings and interpretations, proposing to describe and analyse the practices of a community and its groups in order to interpret and understand them, with the data collected reflecting part of people's daily lives and supporting reflection on the particular dynamics of a given context. In this sense, this ethnographic dimension was based on participant observation as an effort to penetrate people's mental attitude, with the aim of building the necessary conditions to understand the structures of meaning that inform and shape the observed behaviour. From a broad perspective, participant observation implies a personal and direct immersion in the social activity of someone or a group being observed until a deep level of understanding is reached. In addition to this aspect, field notes played a key role in the systematic and dense record of the observed attitudes and the dynamics developed. To a large extent, the descriptions had a reflexive-interpretive nature, namely, it involved situating within the contexts, building significant field notes of the observed daily life, and transforming them into scientific endeavours. In order to support this work, we used the informal interview as a research technique complementary to the field notes, where we sought to clarify the ideas of the field notes and provoke insights from the in loco dialogue with people (Ward, 2020). Despite its informality, there was a close record of people's discourse based on writing down the main ideas of the dialogue, trying to preserve some of their words. Broadly speaking, these interviews constituted conversations and exchanges of ideas about what was lived which promoted complex interactive processes that were important for the construction of this knowledge about the project and its effects.

Based on this rationale, content analysis proved to be central to leverage interpretative inferences from field notes and records of informal interviews, contributing to dissociate the data into categories and subcategories, taking into account the conditions of their production with a view to their understanding (Ward, 2020). In a comprehensive way, content analysis was started by a floating reading, namely by reading the data corpus. Next, data categorisation was performed, namely, a process by which data were transformed and aggregated into units of analysis that allowed for a description of the relevant characteristics of their content, referring it to the theoretical framework. Therefore, the results were supported by all the previous analysis and categorisation work, where interpreting was a process of rational justification of the relationships between complex phenomena through analytical induction, namely, by the progressive construction of understandings in a close relationship between observation and theorisation, and it was from this sequence of investigative actions that the process of knowledge construction emerged.

Finally, it should be noted that the ethical procedures inherent to working in institutions and with people were taken into account, namely, the collection of informed consent from school directors, education professionals, families and children.

## FINDING AND DISCUSSION

The results of this intervention project cover two main spheres: what was achieved in terms of socio-emotional competencies and what was achieved in terms of contributions to behaviour management in the classroom.

### Socioemotional Competencies

The children were able to demonstrate the development of a series of attitudes and skills closely linked to socioemotional competencies. Regarding self-knowledge:

*I know that I have a lot of strength, that I am brutamontes [a person who uses a lot of force during their daily actions, e.g., closing a door with a lot of force or hugging with a lot of force], my classmates also say it. But I use force for good. The other day, my brother threw something under the sofa and I held the sofa for him to pick it up (Pedro, Class 1, School B, Informal Interview, November 22nd, 2022)*

As highlighted in Pedro's speech, the fact that he recognises the effect of his actions on other people, namely that others feel uncomfortable when Pedro is rough, allows these attitudes perceived



as negative by peers to be redirected to the field of the positive, acquiring a new meaning. With regard to self-regulation:

*Luís was showing a series of attitudes that challenged the structure of the sessions, e.g., interrupting me with jokes and talking loudly to colleagues in a joking tone. However, after talking in group and individually about the importance of respecting what the other tells us in terms of listening to him so that we may then be heard, it enabled Luís to self-regulate these behaviours, in particular, I began to observe that he would impulsively initiate such attitudes, but within a second would readjust his behaviour. In a more evident way, I observed that he moved his arm and opened his mouth slightly, but immediately readjusted this action to, for example, wait for the colleague to finish the sentence or for me to finish the instructions of a given activity.*

*(Class 3, School C, Field Note, December 9th, 2022)*

As I try to highlight in this field note, children's self-regulation is promoted in the classroom context within the relationship that is being established between teacher and child, and among children, namely in the context of a transparent dialogue about the expectations around the behaviours to be carried out (e.g., listen to be heard) and their rationale (e.g., we would feel upset if someone kept interrupting us without letting us finish our idea). Regarding social awareness:

*Agnes: Teacher, I have been thinking about what you asked me. Can I write it on the board?  
Teacher: I'm glad you've been thinking about what we talked about yesterday. Of course you can write it on the board!*

*Sentence written on the board: Both groups respected the rules, but group T [referring to the sad drawing] had a more complete story than group F [referring to the happy drawing and Agnes's group].*

*Agnes had been very upset the day before because her group was not drawing a story that made sense to her. As such, she criticised group T in terms of the drawing being too crowded and that this made it impossible to understand their story, and that her group was compartmentalising the story in order to understand it better. However, in the class discussion each member of her group told short stories while the other group told a cohesive story with a logical sequence, having followed the instructions of the activity. Agnes resisted accepting this observation of the whole class, including from her group. I invited her to think which group followed the two fundamental rules of the activity: a) a non-compartmentalised story, where b) each person would draw one or two elements. In the following session, Agnes, on her own initiative, came to tell me what I mentioned above*

*(Class 5, School B, Field Note, January 17th, 2022)*

As I try to highlight in this field note, many children, although resisting to welcome the opinions of their peers, when invited to reflect for a few days on the subject, were able to become aware of their actions and other people's actions, in order to intentionally readjust their position, evidencing an awareness throughout other people's ideas. With regard to relational skills:

*Yago is from another country. ... That's very good because we learn about his country, he can teach us new things. (...) We can use the translator to understand what he says. That's how teacher Teresa does in class.*

*(Camila, Class 4, School A, Informal Interview, November 2nd, 2022)*

The child highlighted, shows that the classes welcomed and integrated children of other nationalities/cultures. The work done around getting to know the other and discussing relationships brought out the positive and enriching aspects of cultural diversity. As such, these conversations allowed a significant awareness of the relationship with people from different cultures, namely, around concrete examples to the reality of the class about interactions of mutual cultural and human

enrichment (e.g., they remembered the moment when Yago explained how to cook the snack that he brought to school, allowing the other children to recreate the recipe at home and share that experience the following week). With regard to responsible decision-making:

*Gabriel: Teacher, I brought the broom and the dustpan! They made it all dirty!*

*Teacher: Thank you Gabriel, I am very glad you are helping me organize the room!*

*Gabriel, noticing that I was organising the classroom by myself because I had noticed the floor was dirty with papers and glue, went on his own initiative to ask the school staff member to give him a dustpan and a broom to help me clean up. Gabriel showed genuine concern to help me, and highlighted his dissatisfaction with the behaviour of his classmates who 'left without leaving everything organised and clean, as we should always do'*

*(Class 3, School C, Field Note, January 9th, 2023)*

As I try to highlight in this field note, the children, over time, with the maturing of the relationships and with the deepening of the awareness of the importance of supporting the other and in making decisions with a view to the continuous improvement of their living spaces, took solidarity initiatives, both towards teachers and classmates.

From a wide perspective, the work around the socioemotional skills was developed, on one hand, within the activities carried out from the debate around key problems in their daily life and interests, and, on the other hand, through a focus on a pedagogical approach around each interaction carried out with the children, in order to take advantage of each moment to positively reinforce the behaviours and skills we were working on in the context of socioemotional education. It is also important to point out that the spaces for leisure and mediation allowed the creation of moments focused on the management of latent conflicts in the classroom (e.g., disagreements between children) and on the deepening of the relationship with the children (e.g, conversations around their interests, such as music, films and sports), in order to establish a relationship based on the understanding of fundamental values (e.g., empathising with a colleague who is sad), on the practice of socioemotional behaviours considered healthy (e.g., listening to a colleague without interrupting him/her) and on the construction of a common life space (e.g., accepting differences as an enriching aspect of life).

### **Behaviour Management in The Classroom**

The work developed with the children allowed the development of habits of co and self-regulation of behaviour in the classroom space. The strategies extracted from this project are presented below.

#### *Negotiating the Rules*

The first contact with the children proved to be crucial to establish the starting point of the relationship child-teacher (individual focus) and class-teacher (collective focus). In a broad perspective, stating a series of fundamental rules of the relationship between classmates and with the teacher helped to reinforce the focus between the expectations of the teacher and the actions carried out by the children:

*Today was the first day of the sessions. I arrived 10 minutes early. They open the room and it is empty. It was the perfect opportunity to organise the room and prepare the materials. The children arrive and are surprised to see me. I greet them with a warm 'Hello, I'm M., your new teacher'. Immediately afterwards, a number of children surround me, wrapping their arms around my waist in what becomes an avalanche of questions about me (e.g. 'Where do you come from?' and 'How old are you?' and 'What is your favourite animal?'). I say that I will answer all the questions as soon as we can sit in a circle on the floor. All the children, with some agitation, start to build a circle on the floor. After sitting with them, I explain what we are going to do over the next few weeks and highlight the fundamental rules of our lessons: respect for all people (e.g., no insulting, loud talking or hitting), clear*

*communication of their needs (e.g., going to the toilet and time to calm down) and the particular contours of the context where they are - the school, more particularly, in a classroom doing an activity (e.g., if there is movement and dialogue it has to be in a regulated way that does not disturb the activities).*

*(Class 1, School B, Field Note, November 25th, 2022)*

*Throughout the week I noticed that the rules I established revealed their relevance and usefulness as social contracts of relationships, namely, when the established rules were disrespected, the reference to the initial agreement made the overwhelming majority of the children aware of the negative consequences that their actions were having on other people, as well as recognising that regulating their behaviour would be more appropriate (e.g., calling a classmate names that are perceived as negative - action taken by the child; enunciating the non-fulfilment of the rule about respect between classmates, reinforcing the negative feelings that we feel when, in the past, we have experienced similar situations - action taken by the teacher; the child understands what is being said and recognises that he is hurting the other person, readjusting his behaviour - child's response to the teacher's action).*

*(Class 3, School B, Plot Note, December 12th, 2022)*

As I try to highlight through these field notes, children reveal themselves capable of understanding the establishment of rules and recognising the dimension of their actions through dialogue, as well as through the use of the previously established social contract. In a broad perspective, the overwhelming majority of the children reveal themselves capable of self regulating their behaviour through the use of this contract. In the following, we focus on strategies that prove to be particularly useful when this initial reinforcement does not produce effects considered to be positive.

#### *Building a meaningful relationship*

The relationship between a child and a teacher, as well as between children, in addition to being an educational relationship, is a human relationship, continually filled with tensions, as well as opportunities to learn. In this sense, the deepening of the human relationship emerges as crucial to fostering respect and trust as pillars of efficient behaviour management in the classroom environment:

*In today's session, the activity went smoothly and articulately. Conflicts were non-existent. As such, part of the session was dedicated to the space of leisure (the reward for doing an activity without disruptive moments). In this space, the children, in a natural way, were developing activities of their interest (e.g., drawing, listening to music or studying). From this distribution, I spent some time with the different groups, asking them about their interests (e.g., 'That music is good! What do you like best about that style?' and 'The drawing is looking very nice. I really like the colours you are using! Can you tell me the story of your drawing?') and also 'I see you are talking about series. I love the new season of the Vampire Family and you?')*

*(Class 2, School A, Field Note, November 28th, 2022).*

All these moments promoted the deepening of human relationships that are established in an educational process. From a broad perspective, the overwhelming majority of the children, after some sessions of this type, revealed that they listened more attentively to the activity guidelines, as well as respecting with less contestation the suggestions to regulate their behaviour that were given to them. I strongly believe that, not in isolation, but as a whole, all the strategies culminated in this type of interaction based on respect and recognition of the other. In other words, this proved to be a strategy within a holistic thinking towards behaviour management in the classroom space.

*The importance of looking children in the eyes*

Children are smaller in stature than teachers. As such, the difficulty in looking into the eyes of the child is increased. However, an effort to do so has a positive effect on behaviour management in the classroom:

*Joanna accused Agnes of taking a pencil from her pencil case and the following interaction ensued:*

*Teacher (in the centre of the circle): Agnes! Let's talk about what happened, I understand that you are very upset with Joanna, but to help you I need you to tell me what happened.*

*Agnes: I don't want to, I don't want to, I don't want to talk to her! (clearly agitated and upset).*

*Teacher: (in front of Agnes, at her level and looking into her eyes): Agnes, I want to help you. You don't have to talk to Joanna, you can talk to me. If I understand what happened I will be able to help you, no one wanted to accuse you of anything. Joanna has explained her part and now I need you to explain yours. I'm not against you, I just want to help you. Deal?*

*Agnes (calming down her arm movements and changing her closed facial expression): Deal, I'll talk. ... I saw the pencil on the floor and I went to put it in Joanna's bag. And she said I stole it. And that's not what happened.*

*Teacher (on the same level as Agnes): I believe you, Agnes. Is it true that Joanna's pencil is in her bag?*

*Agnes: Yes, she said I stole it and I didn't steal it.*

*Teacher: (at the same level as Agnes, but turning his face to Joanna). Please check if the pencil is in your bag.*

*Joanna went to her bag and found the pencil at the bottom of the bag.*

*Teacher (progressively standing up and addressing the class): Class! Remember that before you get upset with a classmate, you should talk about what happened as calmly as you can. As you can see, Joanna and Agnes had a fight because they didn't talk about what each other did. Instead they started shouting and accusing each other. Agnes and Joanna! Did you understand what happened? Joanna was very upset with Agnes because she saw her putting her pencil in her bag and thought Agnes was stealing it. But Agnes was giving it back to Joanna. It's very important to talk calmly, because nobody likes to be robbed and nobody likes to be accused. What do you think about what happened Joanna?*

*Joanna: I didn't mean it badly, I saw her holding the pencil and I was very upset.*

*Teacher: And you Agnes, what do you think?*

*Agnes: I was just returning the pencil, I would never steal anything from Joanna, she is my best friend.*

*Teacher: Class! Does anyone want to add anything?*

*Several children say no.*

*Teacher: Joanna and Agnes! Can you draw together again?*

*Joanna: Yes, teacher!*

*Agnes: Yes, teacher!*

*Teacher: In that case, let's get back to work!*

*(Class 4, School C, Field Note, January 27th, 2023)*

Throughout the different sessions, I noticed that looking into the captured their attention and made it easier for them to hear clearly what was being said, as well as to physically experience that you were attentive to their needs.

*The conflict: Near or far from the teacher?*

Conflict evokes unpleasant ideas and experiences. As such, in the classroom, conflict arises away from the centre of attention (the front of the room, where the whiteboard and the teacher are located), and is moved to the back of the room, in an attempt to preserve stability at the front of the room, where the educational action takes place with greater focus. However, although this way of solving the conflict allows the work at the front of the room to run in a reasonably articulated way, it ends up referring the conflict to a 'dark zone' of the room, where the disruption happens on the premise of not disturbing the educational work at the front (Bondy et al., 2007). In this sense, seeking to break with this approach fosters the permanent resolution of the conflict and the integration of the children involved in the conflict within the educational work:

*The children created a game in which they put a series of football stickers on the ground and with the impact of their hands hitting near the tower of stickers, they sought to knock down the greatest amount of stickers. Alexander was the biggest fan of this game. As such, in the first sessions, he was permanently playing. Making noise while addressing the guidelines for the session activity and during the discussion. As a way of resolving the situation, I asked Alexander to sit in a chair next to me. At times when Alexander tried to interrupt what I was saying, I asked him to respect the class rules and to let his classmates finish speaking in order to speak. As soon as the opportunity arose, I asked Alexander to help me with the activity and to pay attention to two criteria in the discussion: respecting the colleague's turn to speak, not interrupting them, and the quality of the answer given by the other colleagues, namely if they were left without a counterargument or if they presented a coherent answer. Alexander focused on this task and I was positively reinforcing what he wrote on the sheet of paper I gave him: 'That comment is very interesting Alexander, keep focusing on the quality of the arguments. You are doing a good job!'. Alexander, in this session, did not play again'.*

*(Class 6, School C, Ground Note, December 19th, 2022)*

*At today's session, Alexander came to the chair next to me to sit down. I asked: 'Do you want to sit there today, Alexander? To which he replied: 'May I? And I said: 'Yes, you may Alexander'. While I explain today's activity, you can sit there, but afterwards you must also collaborate. To which Alexander answered me: 'Yes!' 'But you have to follow the rules like last time because when you do that you get ideas that help the group a lot. And that is very important!', I told him. 'I'll do it teacher!', Alexander answered me. Throughout the session, Alexander contributed to the group. Although it was still necessary to suggest some readjustments to Alexander's behaviour, his contribution to the and involvement in the activities increased significantly.*

*(Class 4, School C, Field Note, January 16th, 2023)*

From these exchanges, it is noted that bringing the conflict closer to the teacher contributes to fostering a positive solution around the disruptions inherent to working with children. Nevertheless, this strategy, as already mentioned, must necessarily contribute to deepen the work carried out with the use of the other strategies outlined here.

*Applying Coherent Consequences and knowing how to reward*

All our actions have consequences, sometimes positive and other times negative. In this section, we will focus on how to manage negative actions by applying coherent consequences, as well as rewards appropriate to the situation:

*Andrew was agitated during the explanation of the guidelines of the activity. As I understand it, Andrew wanted to sit next to Alexander, but as Alexander had arrived later in the session, so they were separated. I asked Andrew to wait until I finished talking to make the exchange. However, Andrew remained agitated, making sudden movements that caused noise. At this point I turned to Andrew and, at the level of his eyes, told him: 'Andrew! I just asked you to wait until everyone has understood the activity before exchanging seats. The noise you are making with your hands is delaying the whole class because, as your colleagues can't hear me, I have to stop talking. As we have already spoken twice and this is the third warning, let's agree on the following: If you stay calm for 5 minutes, and I'll count them on my watch, you can then go near Alexander, otherwise you will remain in this seat until the end of the activity. Agreed, Andrew?' 'uuhhuhh, ok,' he answered me. 'Good Andrew, I'll start counting the time now!', I said. Andrew remained calm, but with a closed face. Nevertheless he allowed me to approach the guidelines without interruptions. After 2 minutes, I reinforced that Andrew was doing very well and that there were only 3 minutes left for him to go to Alexander's side. When there was 1 minute left, I again reinforced Andrew's positive behaviour - his calmness - and told him that there was 1 minute left to go to Alexander's side. At the end of the 5 minutes, I told Andrew that he could go to Alexander's side and asked him to keep calm during the activity.*

*(Class 2, School A, Plot Note, January 19th, 2023)*

As I sought to highlight in the passage above, the consequences to be applied by given action are rooted in the very context of the action. In this particular case, the challenge of managing his emotions led to Andrew becoming agitated and ended up constraining the start of the activity, so it was coherent to allow him an opportunity to use his emotional management skills. As such, setting a period to highlight a particular behaviour, allows the child to mark out the task and position himself in relation to it, supporting his decision making in relation to the objective to be achieved - in this case, sitting next to Alexander by remaining calm. In this line, the positive reinforcement throughout the time - in this case at 2 and 4 minutes - on the one hand allowed me to show that, although I was talking about the activity's guidelines, I was aware of what we had agreed upon, basically the need he had, and on the other hand, it promoted his calmness by highlighting the approach to the moment of reward (at 2 and 4 minutes). That said, given the fulfilment of the agreement, the reward had to coincide with the child's need - in this case, to sit next to another classmate. If the agreement was not fulfilled (e.g., continuation of the agitated state of the child), the coherent consequence to apply would have to do with remaining in the same seat or near the teacher for a shorter period (e.g., 2 minutes), progressively giving the child the opportunity to self-regulate in a more appropriate time.

#### *Structuring the moments of farewell*

This section is aimed at educational professionals who have to work with people for a limited period (e.g., 3 months, 6 months or 12 months), and at teachers who face the challenge of saying goodbye to a class (e.g., transition from one cycle to another). In this sense, enunciating that there will be a change in the relationships between teacher and child, and among children contributes to nurturing social and emotional competencies:

*Teacher: Class! Today is our last session. Next you will be back in class with your teachers. So today we are going to think about our activities and what we have learnt. Deal?*

*Many children vocalised their displeasure at it being a farewell moment with expressions such as 'Ohhh!' and 'Why?' (Class 6, School C, Field Note, January 23rd, 2023)*

*Teacher: What did you enjoy doing most about these weeks?*

*Paul: I really enjoyed being in a circle talking and drawing.*

*Teacher: I'm glad you enjoyed those activities, I thought they were great too! And what could we have done better?*

*Paul: Sometimes there was noise and that didn't let us concentrate.*

*Teacher: I understand what you are saying, it is very difficult to be focused on doing something while there is noise around, but when we make the effort and succeed we feel great, like you did. So, congratulations!*

*Paul: Thank you, teacher.*

*Teacher: Is there any other activity you would have liked to do?*

*Paul: I liked everything, but we could have gone outside more often.*

*Teacher: I agree with you Paul, when it is sunnier and if the class continues to respect the rules, I think your teachers will reward you with more time outside. ... Now we have to say goodbye, how would you like to do it? A greeting? A hug? Or something else?*

*Paul: A hug, teacher!*

*Teacher: Good, come here!*

*Paul and I hugged, and then he went back to play time. Then I talked a bit with Barbara.*

*(Paulo, Class 2, School B, Informal Interview, January 25th, 2023)*

From the highlighted exchanges, it is important to understand the importance of clearly enunciating the farewell and allowing emotions about this moment to surface. In this sense, when speaking individually or in groups, it is essential, in addition to reflecting on the activities, to mark the moment of farewell through a demonstration of affection (e.g., a greeting or a hug), promoting a positive relationship with the whole spectrum of emotions and feelings (e.g., sadness and happiness, affection and longing). Having said that, I also consider important the demonstration of availability to maintain contact, for example, through the facilitation of an e-mail contact.

On a final note, the present reflections sought to highlight in a comprehensive and reasoned way some behaviour management strategies in the classroom space.

## CONCLUSION

From a broad perspective, the project discussed here allowed leveraging educational moments promoting socioemotional competencies, namely, complex ways of integrating and applying them in the school and daily life context. In this line, the fostering of these socioemotional skills proved to be a door to the promotion of emotionally safe and welcoming learning environments through the exploration of classroom behaviour management strategies contextualised to children and classes, and situated in their school and social reality.

Regarding the continuous improvement of this project, it is important to mention that the monitoring, support and evaluation of its transposition into a project extended in time and inserted in the educational programme of the school would be of an added value. Structured activities involving the family, as well as a focus on spaces outside the classroom (e.g., playgrounds and canteen) would have proved to be important opportunities to foster socioemotional competencies.

Therefore, in a holistic and interdisciplinary view, this project presented itself as a challenging reality with multiple outcomes, responding to the psychological, sociological and historical imperatives of the children and the communities located in that place - the school -, which progressively updated themselves through a personal and socially constructed history.

In a comprehensive way, this project supported children and teachers, giving meaning to the teachers' action, and expressing the socioemotional limits of the children, containing in itself a fragilization of the time lived and the space inhabited. Therefore, this project, within the diversity of the people involved, produced results situated in time and space which, if reinforced in a holistic way in the educational project of the school, are likely to deepen in several dimensions related to socioemotional competencies with positive effects for the management of behaviour in the classroom environment.

In short, as in any project, the multidimensional and interdisciplinary place of human experience and daily life allows those involved (e.g., teachers and children) to develop their social roles as producers (e.g., facilitators of socio-human change) and products (e.g., of the socio-educational system in place) of the socio-human universe and, more specifically, of the school world in which they live daily.

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