

Social skills and behavior analysis: Historical proximity and new issues*

Habilidades sociais e análise do comportamento: Proximidade histórica e atualidades

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Abstract: This paper focuses on issues that have been relatively neglected or scarcely emphasized in available literature regarding the interface between the areas of Social Skills and Behavior Analysis: (a) the contribution of the functional perspective of behavior analysis in the definition of social skills and in social competence criteria; (b) the understanding of social skills and social competence as resulting from the ontogenetic, phylogenetic and cultural selection of social behavioral patterns; and (c) the implications and potential contribution of social skills programs in the planning of cultural practices committed to survival and to quality of life in the complex contemporary society.

Keywords: social skills, social competence, behavior analysis, cultural practices, ethics.

Resumo: Este ensaio focaliza questões que têm sido relativamente negligenciadas ou pouco enfatizadas na literatura disponível sobre a interface entre habilidades sociais e análise do comportamento: (a) a contribuição da perspectiva funcional da análise do comportamento na definição de habilidades sociais e nos critérios de competência social; (b) a compreensão das habilidades sociais e da competência social enquanto produtos da seleção ontogenética, filogenética e cultural de padrões de comportamento social; e (c) as implicações e a contribuição potencial dos programas de habilidades sociais no planejamento de práticas culturais comprometidas com a sobrevivência e com a qualidade de vida na complexa sociedade contemporânea.

Palavras-chave: habilidades sociais, competência social, análise do comportamento, práticas culturais, ética.

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The contribution of different approaches to the constitution of the theoretical and practical field of social skills (SS) brought about its multifaceted characteristic, in which cognitive and behavioral approaches prevail. For some scholars (McFall, 1982; Hargie, Saunders & Dickson, 1994; Trower, 1995), this field lacks for an integrative theory that not only reviews the various different explanatory constructs, but, above all, integrates them in a systematic manner, in order to better coordinate the phenomena that are reported, such as social skills, social interaction and interpersonal communication. Until this occurs, one has to analyze, define and delineate the different approaches to this field of study and application of psychological knowledge.

The relations between the behavioral analytic approach (BA) and the social skills training field (SST) shape a historical interface, related to the production and application of knowledge concerning social behavior. By understanding that one can not be reduced to the other, it is important to consider, on the one hand, that BA is a philosophical, scientific and applied approach that goes beyond the realm of social behavior; and, on the other hand, that SST is focused on a specific behavior, the social one, but is constituted by different theoretical approaches, in addition to the operant formulations. The knowledge and resources produced through both fields are of interest to psychological practice in different contexts (such as therapy, education, health, labor). According to O'Donohue and Krasner (1995), "the social skills approach is one of the major developments in the history of the behavioral model" (p. 4), significantly contributing to the development of behavioral therapy, and regarded as an adjunct to and even an effective alternative to psychotherapy. By reporting Phillips (1985), these authors value the SST movement, since it situates change and development in a social matrix, highlighting the interactive nature of exchanges between the individual and the environment, as with all behavioral research and conceptualization.

Generally, publications that deal with social skills from the BA perspective are restricted to the description and evaluation of intervention programs, highlighting their learning principles and operant techniques (Maag, 2006; McIntyre, Gresham, DiGennaro & Reed, 2007), but without

carefully examining the conceptual background of social skills and the assumptions underlying social skills programs. Among publications dealing with theoretical issues, some focused on a cognitive or social cognitive perspective (Caballo, Irurtia & Salazar, 2009; RíosPérez, 2000; Oláz, 2009; Saldanha, Del Prette & Del Prette, 2002), and others on a behavioral approach to social skills (Bolsoni-Silva, 2001; Del Prette & Del Prette, 2009; Gresham, 2009;) with some focusing specifically the assertiveness (Marchezini-Cunha, 2004) and empathy (Garcia-Serpa, Meyer & Del Prette, 2006, Vettorazzi et al., 2005), from a BA perspective

The studies mentioned here do not exhaust the possibilities of analysis, but expose the complexity of the SST field, in which one can identify at least three dilemmas. The first refers to the supposition that social skills are adaptive social behaviors, as opposed to the notion that, in addition, in most cases, social skills should also be considered as resources to alter social environments. In this sense, it is important to highlight, for example, the role assertiveness and group conduction skills play in the leadership of social movements (Del Prette & Del Prette, 2003). The second dilemma counters the use of the term *social skills*, as a phenomenon - like, for example, domestic violence -, to the concept of social skills as an analytic category that guides both research and practice in the particular field of SST. The third dilemma is between SST as a method or intervention technique, adaptable to the theoretical perspective of the professional, in opposition to an eclectic vision that allows one to gather procedures derived from different theoretical frameworks.

Not intending to convey any form of referral or justification in favor of one or another alternative described for the previously mentioned dilemmas, this essay focuses on issues that have been relatively neglected or have scarcely been emphasized in available studies on the interface between SST and BA such as: (a) the contribution of the functional and contextualist perspective of BA to the definition of social skills and social competence criteria; (b) the understanding of social skills and social competence in the ontogenetic, phylogenetic and cultural selection processes of social behavior patterns; and (c) the resulting implications of (a) and (b) in considering the potential contribution of SST

programs in devising cultural practices committed to survival and quality of life in the complex contemporary society.

A functional, contextualist definition of social skills and social competence

Argyle (1967/1994), one of the pioneers in the investigation of social skills, originally conceptualized social skills analogously with the motor skills involved in the man-machine interaction, nevertheless acknowledging their differences. Concerning the relationship between people, the term *interaction* became complemented by *social*, in that it stands apart from any other exchange process between the individual and the environment. A second difference was related to behavioral variability, which would be greater in the interaction between people, as compared to any motor performance, like driving a vehicle, walking, running or drawing and so on. In order to explain the process of interaction between people, Argyle (1967/1994) resorted to BA notions and concepts, like the principles of reinforcement and punishment for example, and to others that were based on a cognitivist approach, such as social perception, social role, affiliation and categorization.

Many different authors presented, after and at times concurrently to Argyle's formulations, different definitions regarding social skills, and this has been a controversial issue. Some authors (e.g. Cox & Schopler, 1991/1995) have placed in the realm of social skills almost everything that occurs during the interaction between two or more people. Other analyses have drawn attention to certain peculiarities, such as the large number of definitions (Caballo, 2003; Merrell & Gimpel, 1998) and the absence of features and terms common to such definitions (Caballo, 2003; Hargie, Saunders & Dickson, 1994; Merrell & Gimpel, 1998), as well as the differences in their emphasis in the function or topography of social response (Kelly, 1982; Linehan, 1984). All of these matters reflect, on the one hand, the complexity of the social skills phenomenon in itself and, on the other, the diversity of the theoretical approaches in this field, many times focusing on different aspects of this overall complexity.

While considering the general class of social skills, it is important to acknowledge that, as the

concept of behavior, it is a construct, inferred from the functional relations between the responses of two or more people in interaction, where the responses of one may be antecedent or consequent to the other's, in a dynamic and alternated fashion through the interactive process. A social behavior is only classified as a social skill when it contributes in some way to the social competence in a social interaction task (Del Prette & Del Prette 2001a), which led Trower (1995) to consider social skills as "the building blocks of social competence" (p. 57). In other words, it means that the availability of a social skills repertoire is a necessary but not sufficient condition for social competence, and that both terms cannot be taken as synonyms, though each of their definitions inevitably refers to the other's definition.

Social competence is an evaluative attribute of a behavior or a series of successful behaviors - as determined by the criteria of functionality - in a social interaction (Elliott & Gresham 2008; Gresham, 2009). Considering the specificity and conditions of the current interactive task (McFall, 1982), as well as the contingencies present in the social environment where the social interaction takes place, three criteria have been emphasized for the evaluation of social competence (Del Prette & Del Prette, 2001a): (a) goal achievement, in terms of specific consequences of the "social task", including positive reinforcement (for example, request a favor and obtain it) and negative reinforcement, in the sense of removing or avoiding aversive stimulation (such as, expressing dissatisfaction with the other's behavior, and by doing so, interrupting him or her behavior); (b) social approval of the verbal community (generally related to topography and occasion of the performance); (c) maintenance or improvement in the quality of the relationship (e.g. mutual respect and enjoyment of companionship). Del Prette and Del Prette (1996, 2001a, 2005) included additional criteria in the characterization of social competence, as the "behavior which produces the best effect in terms of balancing reinforcers and ensuring basic human rights" (Del Prette, 1982, p. 9), thus emphasizing the importance of maximizing positive exchanges between the interlocutors and medium and long term results of social competence.

Taken together, the criteria for social competence articulate two dimensions of its functionality – instrumental and ethical/moral – which, in turn, are related, respectively, to the immediate and delayed consequences of the social interaction episode, as well as to the consequences for the individual and for his/her interlocutor or social group. In the instrumental dimension, only that performance that produces immediate reinforcing consequences for the individual is considered socially competent; these consequences are related to goal achievement in the social interaction task and to social appraisal, generally linked to positive emotional correlates (e.g. satisfaction with the results and feelings of self-worth), which also contribute to the acquisition and maintenance of a socially competent performance. The ethical/moral dimension is associated to the choice or deliberation among the immediate, medium and long-term consequences (Dittrich, 2010), which should also be considered in terms of consequences that affect oneself or others, thus implying ethical self-management (Skinner, 1968/1972) of the social behavior. The medium and long-term consequences include maintenance or improvement in the quality of the relationship as well as guaranteeing a balance between the positive reinforcement exchanges (positive reciprocity), bringing about what can be referred to as “win-win” relationships, which are based on respect for interpersonal human rights (Del Prette & Del Prette, 2001a; 2005). These criteria simultaneously contemplate individual and collective interests in social interactions, taking into account the other’s needs and the interdependence of interpersonal relations, as factors of a healthy and effective relationship in the long run. In short, by being underlying to the criteria of social competence, social skills constitute a general class of behaviors that are very likely to produce reinforcing consequences, for the individual and for the other people in the social group. Taking the referred criteria into account, coercive and aggressive behaviors would not figure among behaviors that are considered socially competent, even when these were to produce immediate positive consequences for the individual.

One should consider that not all social competence criteria are equally and simultaneously at-

tained by a social task and that, therefore, the evaluation of competence is not simply “black and white” descriptive, since the competence may be greater or smaller, depending on the quantity and diversity of the obtained consequence criteria. It is widely acknowledged that the immediate consequences of assertiveness may not be positive (like when someone refuses a request and does not receive the interlocutor’s approval) but, in the long run, assertive people are perceived as being authentic, honest, direct and able to establish healthy and solid relationships, especially when assertiveness is accompanied by empathy (Falcone, 2001). Such criteria may also operate under concurrent schedules, leading to a choice of a less competent performance, which is not caused by a deficient assertive skills repertoire, but by a more enhanced evaluation of the consequences that are likely to occur in the long run. This is the case, of the employee who exempts a boss’ rudeness, therefore avoiding the immediate aversive consequences (e.g. making the relationship even worse); or when a person who, by discriminating the fragile condition of the other and choosing not to make the other person feel even more uneasy, does not present an assertive response (such as disagreeing and refusing something).

Besides the emotional correlates and the medium and long-term consequences included in the evaluation criteria, the attribution of social competence also requires correspondence between overt and covert behaviors (e.g., saying what one thinks and feels), for example, “sincerely” complimenting or “honestly” expressing displeasure with the other’s behavior. According to Skinner (1953/1974) it is desirable to place verbal behaviors under under the appropriate control of inner and external stimulation. This means that an individual’s observable behaviors should be in accordance with what he/she says to himself/herself, with his/her personal rules of conduct and also with the rules present in the group in which this individual is inserted. Taking into account that both audible and subvocal speech (“thinking” and other cognitive processes) are maintained and molded by their effect on the verbal community, however, the correspondence between saying and doing is not always obtained (Catania, 1999, p. 280-281; Glenn, 1983) and, in the case of social interaction, it entails im-

plications both for the person and the person's relationships with others.

Generally, the correspondence between saying and doing occurs most easily when the individual's personal rules are the same as those of the verbal community. However, sometimes, the verbal community delivers positive consequences to the overt behaviors, which do not correspond to the covert ones or to the factual occurrences, such as lying or fantasizing. When social norms are altered and become more flexible, concealed behaviors that are no longer adaptive (under the control of self-imposed rules that deviate from those of the verbal community) may lead to problems for the individual in his/her relationships with others.

A complaint about a person, concerning discrepancy between his/her public and private behaviors, is of great importance for psychological treatments (see, for example, Beckert, 2002) and is also an object of study in the field of social skills. Along an experiential SST program (as proposed by Del Prette & Del Prette, 2001a, 2005), it is possible to establish conditions for the occurrence and strengthening of correspondence between what he/she says to oneself and what he/she says or does (Del Prette & Del Prette, 2001a, 2005).

Phylogenetic selection and social skills

One of the basic principles of radical behaviorism is the understanding that behavior is the product of three processes of variation and selection: phylogenetic, ontogenetic and cultural (Skinner, 1981/2007). The importance of variability for the learning process and, hence, for the selection of adaptive behavior, also applies to social skills, since certain standards of interpersonal relationships have a critical role in the maintenance and transition of social practices.

Phylogenetic selection provided human beings with a set of anatomic, physiological and behavioral characteristics that favor the acquisition and improvement of social behaviors that were important for the survival of the species (Del Prette & Del Prette, 2001b). Many of the selected phylogenetic capabilities were also indispensable to the evolution of social skills. Based on the analysis of Glenn (2004), the following capabilities regarding social skills can be highlighted: (a) the improvement of

vocal musculature, that permitted the acquisition of vocal behavior as well as its evolution to increasingly complex levels, which were fundamental for the evolution of social behavior and many different cultural practices; (b) the flexibility of the facial muscles, refining the facial expressiveness and thereby the need to discriminate the stimuli originated from the expressiveness of the other in the social interaction; (c) the human tendency to sociability establishing conditions for social learning processes; (d) the sensibility to consequences delivered by others, expanding the possibilities for learning in the social relationships and, hence, to have our behaviors socially selected; (e) the capacity to produce "free operant behaviors", which create the variability needed for selection based on consequences, especially for social behaviors.

Evolutionary biology (Del Prette & Del Prette, 2002) informs that certain standards of social behaviors have been perfected throughout the course of the species' phylogenetic evolution. Trower (1995) relates the occurrence of atavic behavioral standards to various different psychological disorders, and they may really suggest adaptive difficulties. For instance, the change from the impulsive standards for attacking or running away to the standards of negotiating, which require control over such impulsiveness: systematic standards of avoidance/escape and aggressiveness, which in many situations are not adaptive anymore, become considered extemporaneous, therefore being included in the list of the so-called symptoms of psychological disorders. The evolutionary changes in the standards of social behaviors, however, cannot be examined independently from the economic and cultural conditions related to the survival of the human species. Such contingencies (focus of the next session) are decisive to the maintenance or change in the standards of effective or ineffective social behaviors throughout the history of the human species¹.

1 Tourinho (2009) presents an enlightening analysis of the social, economic and cultural contingencies that determine changes in the collectivistic standards of interpersonal relations, from that characteristic of the feudal economy of the Middle Ages, to the individualist standards of contemporary societies.

Ontogenetic selection and social skills

The ontogenetic selection is definitively the most visible process in the development of social skills and expresses a premise that has been widely confirmed by the empirical research: social skills are learned and altered across the lifetime due to the variability and selection processes produced by the environmental contingencies. On the other hand, depending on the contingencies a person is exposed to, he/she may develop either an elaborate repertoire of behaviors, which are effective in the production of reinforcers, or a deficient repertoire, that is, a repertoire that fails in its frequency, fluency or proficiency.

The ontogenetic selection of social skills may occur through the natural contingencies of the environment the individual is inserted in, as well as through contingencies that are structured upon therapeutic or educational programs. In the clinical setting of behavioral therapy, Zamignani and Jonas (2007) emphasize variability as being an objective as well as an important condition for the learning of more adaptive behaviors. In an educational setting, this variability can be promoted in SST programs and curricula specifically aimed at social skills and at the reduction of competing behaviors (Del Prette & Del Prette, 2005). In both cases, the promotion of variability as an objective and the exposure to contingencies as a procedure or strategy are decisive for social skills learning and improving of social skills. On the other hand, complex environments, which produce highly different consequences for very similar behaviors, can strengthen this variability.

When the individual's learning conditions, along his/her previous history of interaction with the environment, do not guarantee a sufficient repertoire of social skills, both clinical intervention and structured educational programs are useful alternatives, in many cases complementarily. Such programs aim to overcome behavioral deficits (associated or not to psychological disorders or problems), to improve the available social skills and to promote the acquisition and generalization of new skills. In the natural environment or in structured contexts, the acquisition and improvement of social skills occurs through different learning processes, such as: shaping by differential reinforcement, rule-

following procedures (instruction) and imitation in consequence of observation (Del Prette & Del Prette, 2001a, 2005; Gresham, 2009).

Experiential SST programs² (A. Del Prette & Del Prette, 2001a; 2004; s.d.; Z. Del Prette & Del Prette, 2005), which can be used in the clinical setting and in the context of education, community and work, emphasize the promotion of social skills repertoire variability and the individual's sensibility to environment contingencies in the ontogenetic selection of functional behaviors required to deal with the interactive demands and contexts of one's life. Even though the denomination of these programs traditionally includes the term *training*, usually understood as the standardization or automation of performances, the term does not adequately describe the goals and philosophy of experiential SST programs. They aim for both self-knowledge and self-monitoring as the bases of any social competent performance. Self-knowledge is understood as the capacity the individual has to describe and discriminate his/her own performance and its associated contingencies and self-monitoring as the dynamic process of evaluating and changing own behavior when in interaction with others (Del Prette & Del Prette, 2001a). These processes broaden the range of response choices and require ethical self-management of own behavior.

Cultural Selection: The contribution of social skills to new cultural practices

All human acquisitions are also associated to the immersion in an environment that is essentially social and favored the emergence of culture as well as cultural practices. The effectiveness or ineffectiveness of certain social relationships practices may determine whether or not they will be adopted by the members of the group and, therefore, selected by that group. These conceptions can also be specifically applied to social skills.

A preliminary issue, which is pertinent in the analysis of the cultural nature of social skills, is the relation between the functionality and topography

2 In Del Prette and Del Prette (2010), the main characteristics of experiential SST programs are detailed; they allow one to question the adequacy of the term training in the sense that is hereby referred to.

of certain social behavior standards. In the operant perspective, functionality is the basic criterion to define a behavior as a class of responses. However, in the SST field, the structure is also considered, since the attainment of social competence criteria may depend on the small variations in the topography of a certain response without necessarily implying insert it in another class. The act of greeting, also known as greeting ritual, is one illustration. This kind of universal behavior gains importance in a friendly approach and recognition amongst people of the same verbal community or from others. People who are strange to a community need to master the topographic characteristics of the social behaviors from that culture, as a sort of rite of passage, in order to be successful in their interactions; otherwise, they may find it difficult to establish effective social bonds. Topographical variations in responses from a same class, presented by different subgroups of the same culture, may also form standards associated to demographic factors, such as age, gender, religion, social class, and so on. Teenagers, for instance, demonstrate a greeting ritual that is quite different from that which is demonstrated by adults and, when these two strata interact, generally, the members of each group strive to “mimic” each other’s gestures, movements and postures, in order to produce consequences determined by the contingencies in force.

While considering the different moments and cultural settings, one can observe that the current contingencies indicate desirable standards (more likely to produce reinforcing consequences), as well as those deemed irrelevant (which do not produce consequences) and reproachable (aversive consequences) for different moments and settings. This is the basis of the acknowledged situational and cultural nature of social skills (Del Prette & Del Prette, 1999, 2001b).

The establishment and management of these standards are generally controlled by different social agencies (such as education, family, religion and even psychotherapy), through specific cultural practices (e.g. school and education amidst a family), as well as written (laws and literature) and non-written codes (transmitted orally or inferred through the observation of the contingencies in force). In the context of the transmission of

interpersonal relationship standards, the cultural practices that characterize the educational process (formal or informal) and the relationship within a family (parents, sons and daughters, married couples) also involve social behaviors of individuals in social interactions and are characterized by complex networks of interdependence³, making it self-evident that social skills are of great importance in such settings. Such practices differ in the extent to which they assist their members in solving problems and obtaining consequences that favor the survival of the group; if they are found effective, they tend to be disseminated to other members of the same culture and to their descendants (Skinner, 1990). However, anachronistic or even inhuman practices may remain for a long time when they generate positive consequences to the groups that are in power, characterizing the “ceremonial” cultural processes, as opposed to the “technological” cultural processes (Glenn, 1986).

Considering that a culture is never monolithic, that is, that it includes different subcultures, certain behaviors that are accepted and expected in some subgroups may be disapproved of in other subcultures and vice-versa. Hence the importance of a repertoire of alternative social behaviors (variability), based on the selection of less ceremonial and more technological practices that can gradually be disseminated and adopted by new groups. That is the reason why programs like SST, which aim to promote this repertoire, are so important.

In many cases, the change in cultural practices (particularly those that are ceremonial) could be facilitated by increasing the visibility of the functional and ethical value of alternative practices in a similar context. The instrumental and ethical/moral dimensions, integrated in the social competence criteria, point towards new standards of interpersonal relations (Del Prette & Del Prette, 2001a). Once they become functional, improving individuals’ quality of life and favoring the survival of the species, relationship standards based on these cri-

3 This interdependence and other aspects of the social structure have been examined from the perspective of intertwined contingencies and meta-contingencies, which are characteristic of cultural practices (Glenn, 2004; Todorov, Martone & Moreira, 2005; Andery, Micheletto & Sérgio, 2005).

teria could be established as new cultural practices in family relations, in education, collective labor, leisure, etc. It is not a matter of naively simplifying the complexity of changes in society, nor is this an attempt to establish SST as a panacea, but to recognize that the resources in this field can contribute in this change. Social skills programs at school, for example, have proven to be an effective strategy to reduce aggressiveness and conflict and to establish more harmonious relationships (Goldstein, Sprafkin, Gershaw & Klein, 1980). These programs have been applied to social-political projects, based on social and emotional skills, such as the CASEL - Collaboration for the Advancement of Social and Emotional Learning -, an organization founded in 1994 at the Department of Psychology of the University of Illinois, in the United States.⁴

In a similar sense, Carrara, Silva and Verdu (2006, 2009) highlight inclusive education and social skills among practices compatible with an ethical perspective applied to social behavior and that have been confirmed as a cultural benefit (p. 346), regarding Skinner's view. This referral is also coherent with Abib's proposal (2007) concerning cultural sensibility education, directed at the establishment of social peace and the emotional development of human beings. This author proposes the development of practices that favor the survival of individuals and, simultaneously the survival of social groups and cultures on planet earth. Abib's proposition would aim to "on the one hand, counter the ethics of selfishness and its perverted individualistic ways and, on the other, to construct an ethics of justice" (p. 72), creating harmony between the commitment to survival and the commitment to "doing good", that is, directed toward "what is good for the individual, for the other and for the different cultures" (p. 73).

Interpersonal relationships, based on the ethical/moral dimension of social competence criteria, may generate reinforcing consequences for individual behaviors and may also generate medium and long-term reinforcing cultural consequences, affecting the social group in terms of quality of life, social peace and survival of the group. In terms of their objectives and cultural implications, as well

as in terms of the procedures that are used, SST programs figure among the social projects focused on individual protection and health, like "life skills" for instance, advocated by the World Health Organization (WHO, 1997; Murta, 2005). One can affirm, therefore, that SST programs present a potential, which has not been completely explored yet, of contribution to the attainment of broader social proposals, in the fields of education, health and community life.

A brief conclusion

The relations between behavior analysis and the theoretical and practical field of social skills have frequently been referred to in terms of the use of techniques and procedures derived from the operant principles in SST or, inversely, the use of the SST "technique" in behavioral therapy. It is understood, however, that this comprehension is limited and limiting. The scope of the interface between these two areas includes other possibilities, especially those related to the conceptual and philosophical framework of behavior analysis, which has been insufficiently explored in the comprehension and production of knowledge concerning the phenomenon known as social skills. In this essay, an attempt was made to present some of these contributions. However it does not mean that the analysis has been exhausted or that they are restricted to the ones selected here.

This essay highlighted the contributions of BA for analyzing and understanding social skills and social competence concepts. It was particularly emphasized the BA functional and contextualized perspective, as a resource to identify and to describe the relations between the social behaviors and the contingencies that control such behaviors and the social interactions in general. The variation and selection mechanisms - phylogenetic, ontogenetic, and cultural - were applied to the comprehension of the evolution and learning of social skills amidst human relations, highlighting the potential of educational or therapeutic SST programs in the establishment of new cultural practices, in settings that involve family, work, teaching and learning, leisure, etc.

It is understood that the demands for new interpersonal relations, which aim to overcome the disastrous consequences of the conflicts that seem

4 Visit <http://www.casel.org>.

to be generalized in contemporary society, as well as to grasp relations based on respect for rights and on more harmonious human coexistence, can be reached through SST programs. Thus, these programs could be aligned with the efforts made to construct new cultural realities, which favor the social and emotional development and desirable prosocial feelings and behaviors, such as friendship, empathy and solidarity, as well as an increasing sensibility to values that are important for the survival of the species and for everyone's quality of life.

The interface between behavior analysis and the field of social skills has historically been recognized as a relevant and promising focal point for the production and application of psychological knowledge, and continues to feature intriguing issues for empirical investigation and conceptual elaboration. In a recent study (Del Prette & Del Prette, 2009), some possible associations between the taxonomy of verbal behavior and social skills classes were explored, suggesting some convergences and issues worthy of research. Additionally, it can be suggested, for example, that the conceptual and empiric exploration of social skills is a higher-order class of responses (in the sense proposed by Catania, 1999), since it includes a variety of subclasses of social responses (social skills), with similar functional characteristics (Del Prette & Del Prette, 2001a, 2009). This analysis, however, should consider the contingencies for such a broad repertoire in comparison to the situational character of social skills. In a different direction, it may be very interesting to analyze the repertoire of relational frames (Catania, 1999; Hayes, 1989) resulting from the enhanced variability and sensitivity to contingencies in SST programs.

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