

Studies on Social Skills and Social Competence in Brazil: A History in Construction



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Abstract The studies developed by the authors in this area, since its beginning in the 1980s, articulate three axes of academic production: conceptual, methodological, and empirical (research and practice). They were simultaneously addressed to answer relevant questions to any person at a first contact with the area. Examples of frequent questions derived from an initial contact were such as: what social skills are, which their fields are, which their processes and their scopes are, what characterizes a Social Skills Training, and how it links to cultural issues of social living. Answers to these and other questions allowed to identify theoretical and conceptual issues associated with different aspects and practices in vogue in the historic moment in question. Considering the first mentioned axe, one can note the conceptual development presented in the literature and, particularly, in our last book (Del Prette and Del Prette, *Habilidades Sociais e Competência Social: Manual teórico-prático [Social Skills and Social Competence: a theoretical-practical handbook]*, 2017). which systematizes the key concepts of the area, proposing the centrality of the notion of social competence, as well as its requirements and criteria for orienting evaluation and intervention. The methodological axe is the development of inventories, resources, and assessment procedures (for children, adolescents, adults, and the elderly in different social roles), associated with the studies of characterization of the nonclinical and clinical populations and implications for practice and research. The empirical axe is the development and improvement of the experiential method for programs for the promotion of social skills and social competence, together with studies of the effectiveness of these programs with diverse clienteles and contexts and related to different problems and goals of health and quality of life. The advancement of the area derived from these issues (research, conceptual, and practical) counted on the collaboration of researchers from Brazil and abroad, as well as involving undergraduate and graduate students. The systematization of the conceptual basis and the development of instruments and procedures for the evaluation and promotion of social skills were important to

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guide empirical research and to improve the intervention programs. The empirical researches also generated remaining issues for the improvement of instruments and for the conceptual reworking. Our contribution in the field of social skills is being recognized in other countries by validation of the instruments (especially in Argentina and Portugal) and the increase of citations to our studies published in Brazil and abroad. The academic production on the theme has been generating what can be called “the social skills movement in Brazil.” One can measure this movement by the involvement of professionals and lay public in events and books about social skills. Due to its relevance to health and quality of life, outside the academic environment, this production is being used by the practitioners, especially with families, schools, organizations, and clinical care. Thus, it characterizes processes of dissemination that make this knowledge accessible to the greatest number of people. We expect that the available knowledge is even more widespread and constantly leading to new conceptual issues and research applied to different sectors of interpersonal relations.

During the 1970s, when encountering the term *social skills* or *social skills training* or their corresponding acronyms, *SS* and *SST*, scholars of Psychology in Brazil, with rare exceptions, initially remained confused, without knowing exactly what were and whether they were analytical or descriptive categories. In the first case, it was understood as a term related to the behavior (descriptive) of someone in an interaction, and in the second, as a process of teaching a behavior. During this period, we worked with the theme of the assertive behavior (Del Prette 1978; Del Prette and Del Prette 1983) and behavioral training (Del Prette 1982, 1985a, b).

Even after the publication of the first essay on the practical theoretical field of Social Skills in Brazil (see Del Prette and Del Prette 1996), the terms Social Skills and Social Skills Training, or their corresponding abbreviations, *SS* and *SST*, although with exceptions, were unknown to psychology scholars. The students did not know exactly what they were referring to, nor whether they were descriptive or analytical categories. In the first case, they understood *SS* as a term that related (descriptive) behavior of someone in an interaction and, in the second, *SST* as a process of teaching behavior. By that time, we worked with Assertive Behavior (Del Prette 1978) and Behavioral Training (Del Prette 1982, 1985a, b; Del Prette and Del Prette 1983).

Only from the decade of 1990, the authors begun focusing on and disseminating the knowledge related to these acronyms (Del Prette and Del Prette 1996, 1997, 1998; Del Prette et al. 1992, 1998). In 1999, we published in Brazil the first book regarding the conceptual framework. With this publication, we aimed to present the history and the basis of the field of *SS*. Furthermore, in 1999 the first article about a program of *SST* was published abroad (Del Prette and Del Prette 1999).

Currently, it is possible to refer to an “*SS* movement” in Brazil. We borrowed the term “movement” from Sociology (Bobbio et al. 1986; Doimo 1995). It can also be particularized in Psychology in our country, as collective behaviors related to a process of proposal and identification of a field of study not adopted yet or just referred to. Applying the criteria of accession, visibility, and permanence in time,

appropriate to the concept of movement in the analysis of the SS field in Brazil, we believe that the temporal permanence does not occur without accession (interest) to the theme that, on the other hand, are both being kept by the visibility, at least in terms of scientific production.

We refer to the accession based on a growing number of researchers and postgraduate students involved in this area, including external to Psychology. The visibility and permanence are related to the increasing amount of publications in this area and the presence of the theme in scientific events and media sectors, in the last 20 years of production and application of knowledge in Brazil.

This term, *social movements*, in the case of knowledge is based on the premise that if knowledge does not produce change in behavior, it works as mere incompetence and, of course, it ceases to have immediate practical usefulness of change. In the opposite sense, it becomes necessary to verify what direction of behavior it produces. In the case of SS, the behavior change, or more specifically its acquisition, has served, in a first moment, inside academy and, after that, in the community. In academy, questions about SS and SST led us, as teachers, to provide increasingly detailed responses, as they were followed by other issues, such as its definition, functionality, and origins. At present, a significant number of people benefit from the programs of SST, such as businesses, schools, governmental offices, and associations.

At the end of the 1970s, we observed, in the supervision of the trainees, both in clinical and educational areas, that, with some exceptions, our supervised students presented difficulties in the relationship with the people they met, whether they were adults, adolescents, or children. The difficulties were related to the collection and verification of client's tasks, request for compliance with the established timetable, and communication regarding the closing of the service session, among others. Noting that instructions and feedback did not have the desired effects, we began conducting Assertive Training programs with students (voluntary participation), which was in vogue in the USA at that time. Although this procedure proved to be relevant and potentially effective (see Del Prette 1978), it did not yet address all the skill classes required in care, for example, empathy. Concomitantly, we found that, in clinical, educational, or community interventions, many interpersonal difficulties of the clientele were at the root of the problems reported or emerged in the diagnostic configuration. All these questions led us to the search for new strategies and, among the alternatives found, the theoretical-practical field of social skills, originating in England (Argyle 1967/1994, 1984; Argyle et al. 1974), looked promising. With our involvement in this field, we have noted the need to deepen conceptual and practical issues in this area in our country and the urgency to develop procedures and resources for evaluation and intervention.

Our current research group at UFSCar (www.rihs.ufscar.br), founded nearly 25 years ago, was not only an outcome but also an initiator of this movement in Brazil. It has been acting in its consolidation and dissemination in our country. This venture has focused especially on three axes of academic production. The first is the conceptual elaboration sent mainly through books and, particularly in the last *Habilidades Sociais e Competência Social: Manual teórico-prático (Social Skills*



Fig. 1 Focus of studies that characterize the field of production and application of psychological knowledge of social skills in Brazil (source: Authors)

and Social Competence: a theoretical-practical handbook; Del Prette and Del Prette 2017a). The second is the development of instruments and evaluation procedures, associated with the characterization of social skills studies in different populations and contexts. The third axe is the improvement of methods, resources, and intervention programs, with an emphasis on experiential method that we have developed and disseminated in the country. Enacted to these three axes, we have invested in the training of researchers for the improvement and expansion of the production of knowledge in the area as well as in the training of professionals for the dissemination of the practice of SST, always in the perspective of the concept and criteria of social competence (SC). Figure 1 illustrates, schematically, the main sources of production and implementation of knowledge in the field of social skills in Brazil.

The Conceptual Elaboration of Social Skills

The first theoretical article about social skills published in Brazil (Del Prette and Del Prette 1996) presented briefly the field in its main concepts and application alternatives for the different problems and populations, somehow foreshadowing its expansion in the following years. Two important aspects can be identified in this

publication. The first was the name given to the body of knowledge produced in this theme: theoretical–practical field of SS. With this, the term *social skills* came to be used both to refer to the theoretical–practical field, as to the classes and subclasses of SS applied to this field, explaining the two uses that were already made, but without sufficient clarity, generating some confusion in the communication. This appointment allowed, immediately, to list the concepts (now) in the field, including facilitating the analysis of existing controversies, especially regarding the concepts of SS and SC. For these, we adopted the position of McFall (1982), to distinguish them from one another, since first written, following a chain of researchers and experts in the area. This position was important, both in its theoretical and practical implications. In conceptual terms, it allowed discussing and refining the relationships between concepts and classes of SS inherent to the field (such as self-monitoring, communication, civility, assertive or coping and exercise of rights/citizenship, and emphatic and work skills). In practical terms, it allowed defining more clearly what is being assessed and what objectives are, in fact, sought and achieved in different interventions.

Among the basic concepts of the area, the most recent (Del Prette and Del Prette 2017a) holds the previous developments and points for future studies and theoretical–practical implications. The conceptual structure that we have adopted is schematically presented in Fig. 2.

As it can be seen in this scheme, the concept of SC is taken as central. It is guided by criteria that characterize its two effectiveness dimensions, instrumental and ethical. For the evaluation of SC, there are five associated criteria (Del Prette and Del Prette 1999, 2001a, 2005a). The first is achieving a goal (immediate results obtained by individual in interaction). The second is maintaining/improving self-esteem (emotional indicators of personal satisfaction). The third is maintaining/improving the relationship quality (fewer immediate consequences, in the medium or long term, in terms of the probability of maintaining or improving a relationship between



Fig. 2 Schematic of relations among concepts of the practical theoretical field of Social Skills (based on Del Prette and Del Prette 2017a)

the interlocutors). The fourth is balancing power among interlocutors (positive reciprocity of trades, whether of behaviors, either concrete or symbolic products among the interlocutors). Finally, the fifth criterion is respecting/standing for interpersonal rights (results in terms of maintaining or expanding socially established rights for the interlocutors). Although partially overlapping, these criteria can be seen in a growing continuum from instrumental up to the ethical dimension.

The upper and lower parts of the diagram delimit the essential context for the evaluation of the performance and attribution of SC. On the left, there are background contexts: above, interpersonal tasks in which the individual is faced in his or her relationship with other persons; below, cultural practices that define the performance standards which are approved, disqualified, or tolerated by the social environment. On the right, there are as possible contexts resulting from socially competent performance (SCP): above, the outcomes for the SCP of two or more people in interpersonal tasks and, below, the possibility of new cultural practices, when such performances are widely disseminated.

The socially competent performance (SCP) is supposed to depend on four important requirements. The first consists in a good SS repertoire, guided by the variability. A second requirement is self-monitoring associated with analysis of the contingencies during the performance in progress. Moreover, it is also required the knowledge of the context and the rules and social standards, along with the own behavioral resources, deficits, and patterns of psychosocial functioning. Finally, a fourth requirement is the values of coexistence to which the individual adheres and which, in principle, should be consistent with the dimensions of SC, especially the ethical dimension. With this background, we define the main concepts of this scheme, as follows:

- *Interpersonal task*. Based on the concept of the social task of McFall (1982), we define an interpersonal task as “a segment of interaction identified in a culture, in response to the question about people interacting: What are they doing? One can understand every social interaction as a sequence of behavioral exchanges, where people involved plays one or more social tasks” (Del Prette and Del Prette 2017a, p. 68). Unlike McFall, we consider that both participants of an interaction have social tasks that may or may not be complementary and even opposite or conflictive. For example, in an interaction someone might want to sell something to another, while this second person has not any intention of buying something.
- *Social skills*. It is defined as “a *descriptive* construct (1) of the social behaviors valued in a particular culture with a high probability of favorable results for the individual, group and community, that may contribute to a socially responsible performance in interpersonal tasks” (Del Prette and Del Prette 2017a, p. 24). We can understand that both the comprehension and the promotion of SS must be buoyed by the notion of *variability* in the repertoire of the individual, both in terms of diversity of classes of SS (for example, assertive, emphatic, and work) and alternatives for each of the same classes (for example, the different ways of showing affection or assertiveness). Moreover, this should generate choices based on discrimination of demands, and contingencies present in interpersonal tasks. Del Prette and Del Prette (2017a) developed a *portfolio*, with a list of

classes and subclasses of SS relevant and pertinent to different tasks and social roles as well as the stages of development of the people. This portfolio is based on the conception that the classes of SS are subsets that differ in topography as well as in functionality. By considering these differences, one can find that it is simplified to evaluate and to promote the client repertoire. This portfolio is a complementary version of the previous one (Del Prette and Del Prette 2001c), because in the current version there are ten SS classes as well as their subclasses. This modification provides to the reader a wide range of major subclasses of each of the SS. In addition, it presents a second portfolio, with the topographic components related to the functionality of each class (Del Prette and Del Prette, 2017a).

- *Social competence*. It is understood as an “*evaluative construct of (1) the performance of an individual (thoughts, feelings and actions in an interpersonal task) (2) that meets the objectives of the individual and the demands of the situation and culture, (3) producing positive results as instrumental and ethical criteria*” (Del Prette and Del Prette 2017a, p. 37).
- *Self-monitoring* refers to “*a meta cognitive and behavioral skill in which a person observes, describes, interprets and regulates his or her thoughts, feelings and behaviors in social situations*” (Del Prette and Del Prette 2001a, p. 62). This process involves exercise and mastery of a diversity of open and covered behaviors along the interaction, for example, to assess the availability of behavioral repertoire to deal with the situation, select, play, and observe their behavior, inhibit impulsive reactions, predict the impacts of different reactions, and change the performance during the interaction in order to contemplate the criteria of social competence (Del Prette and Del Prette 2017a, p. 54).
- *Knowledge*. As specified in Del Prette and Del Prette (2017a), it is the “*collection of information on the culture: the standards and rules that regulate and define the expected social behaviors, valued, accepted or disqualified for different situations and interpersonal tasks*” (p. 60) and “*on the(se) partner(s): their likely social behaviors, goals, feelings, values of coexistence*” (p. 61).
- *Self-knowledge*. “*It includes not only what is publicly accessible to others, but also what is private, concealed, little or not accessible to colleagues (in case of training group), such as beliefs, knowledge, feelings, expectations, self-rules etc.*” (Del Prette and Del Prette 2017a, p. 61), as content or processes that should be the focus of attention both in group or individual care.
- *Values*. In this context, they are referring to the values of coexistence, while results or consequences of behavioral patterns that combine what is good for the person, for others, and for culture (Dittrich and Abib 2004) and normally associated with the notions of human rights, justice, equality, freedom, dignity, compassion, and so on.

This scheme and set of concepts constitute the basis for evaluating and promoting social skills. It has been built over mainly book publications (Del Prette and Del Prette 1999, 2001a, 2005a, 2017a) by bringing together written chapters with invited contributors to present, for example, social skills under different approaches, such as the Behavioral Analysis (Gresham 2009), the Cognitive Approach (Caballo

et al. 2009), and Social Cognitive Theory (Olaz 2009). In addition, we did some conceptual essays on social skills from the perspective of Behavior Analysis (Del Prette and Del Prette 2010, 2012), the Bioecological Theory of Bronfenbrenner (Romera-Leme et al. 2015b), Social Psychology (Del Prette and Del Prette 2003a) as well as the Evolutionary Biology and Culture (Del Prette and Del Prette 2001b, 2014). These texts are the reference material that has guided the production of knowledge about evaluation and promotion of social skills, as summarized below.

Evaluation and Characterization of Social Skills

Throughout our involvement with the field of SS, we have been producing and improving tools, procedures, and resources for assessing SS in children, adolescents, and adults. On the basis of this investment was the research for evidence-based practices (Del Prette and Del Prette 2017a) and the understanding that such practices depended, on the one hand, on adjusting interventions to the needs identified in different clienteles and, on the other hand, on the need to understand variables related to the learning and development of social skills throughout the life span. In addition, evaluation was seen, from the earliest intervention studies, as the basis for assigning effectiveness or ineffectiveness to resources and programs, seeking to improve them.

One can find at our website (<http://www.rihs.ufscar.br/avaliacao-de-hs-2/>) a brief presentation of the instruments produced or adapted by our research group, with evidence of validity and reliability, and manuals and standards available for use in different contexts, recommended by the Federal Council of Psychology. They are briefly described in following.

The first instrument published in Brazil for self-assessment of SS was the Social Skills Inventory (*Inventário de Habilidades Sociais*, IHS-Del-Prette; Del Prette and Del Prette 2001), originally validated for the university population from 18 to 25 years. The way how this instrument was accepted and used in Brazilian studies showed that it filled a gap and has contributed significantly to the scientific production in our environment, as identified later (Del Prette and Del Prette 2013a). The factorial structure and norms of this instrument was extended for population from 18 to 59 years and the new manual was just published (Del Prette and Del Prette 2018). A version intended for elderly people over 60 has already been used in research (Braz 2013; Carneiro et al. 2007; Scheufler et al. 2016).

The IHS-Del-Prette is under the process of adaptation to Portugal. The items and the factorial structure of the IHS-Del-Prette served as the basis for an Argentine version (Oláz et al. 2009; Morán et al. 2015). It was also the basis for construction of other instruments in Brazil, with evidence of validity and reliability: the inventory of Social Skills for couples (Villa and Del Prette 2012) and for adolescents (Del Prette and Del Prette 2009), the latter with a brief version available for research (Romera-Leme et al. 2017). Additionally, the IHS-Del-Prette was used for the

construction of a specific inventory of assertive social skills, with preliminary validity tested in a sample of women entered into the labor market (IHA, see Malcher 2015).

We also developed the Multimedia Inventory (Del Prette and Del Prette 2005b) to evaluate SS repertoire of children. This instrument is composed of three versions: self-assessment, assessment by parents, and assessment by teachers. For all versions, one can evaluate SS according to indicators of frequency. In addition, parents and teachers can evaluate difficulty and appropriateness of desirable and undesirable behaviors. Moreover, we developed a similar feature, illustrated in interactive vignettes, in order to assess specific behavioral components of self-monitoring (see Dias 2014).

In the last 10 years, along with other researchers, we finalized the adaptation and Brazilian publication of Social Skills Rating System (SSRS-BR; Gresham and Elliott 2016). In this instrument, there are also three versions: self-evaluation, evaluation by parents, and by teachers. By using SSRS-BR, one can evaluate social skills, such as problem behaviors and academic competence. Considering research with preschoolers, we also performed the validation of *Pre-School and Kindergarten Behavior Scale* (Dias et al. 2011), facilitating the research with preschoolers.

Evaluation resources have been widely publicized in Brazil (for example, in Del Prette and Del Prette 2013a) and abroad (Caballo et al. 2006; Del Prette et al. 2006). Considering the situational nature of SS, it was being perceived the need of specific instruments for certain conditions of social interaction, in addition to the age differences. Thus, instruments were constructed to assess preventive coping skills for consuming alcohol and other drugs (IDHEA-AD; Sá 2013; Sá and Del Prette 2016; Sá et al. 2017), and for caring for elderly relatives (Queluz et al. 2017). Currently, an instrument to assess SS of caregivers of psychiatric patients is under development (Lima n.d.). Considering the specificity of educational SS of teachers and parents (Del Prette and Del Prette 2008a), including university professors, we are developing new instruments, with preliminary evidence of validity and reliability (Del Prette and Del Prette 2013b, c, n.d.). In addition to inventories, we have developed and refined other resources such as questionnaires. In this case, we can mention the *Interpersonal Relations Questionnaire* (QRI), aimed at the evaluation of interactive conditions in the classroom (Del Prette and Del Prette 2013d).

The investment in the construction of instruments, procedures, and evaluation resources enabled studies to characterize the SS repertoire of different clienteles and to establish relationships between social skills and other variables. There were found evidence of positive correlation between SS and (a) personality traits (Bartholomeu et al. 2008; Bueno et al. 2001), (b) quality of life (Carneiro et al. 2007), (c) psychological well-being (Guilland and Monteiro 2010; Romera-Leme et al. 2016), (d) quality of the relationship between parents and their children (Cia et al. 2006, 2007; Cardozo and Soares 2010), (e) academic adaptation and performance at university (Bolsoni-Silva and Loureiro 2016; Gomes and Soares 2013; Soares et al. 2009), (f) academic self-efficacy (de Sá 2006), (g) adaptive coping strategies (Pinto and Barham 2014), (h) interpersonal conflicts (Pinto et al. 2016),

and (i) self-esteem (Ongaratto et al. 2016). On the other hand, studies found negative associations between social skills deficits and indicators of problems, such as: (1) burnout, anxiety, and depression (Pereira-Lima 2014; Pacheco and Rangé 2006), (2) substance abuse (Wagner and Oliveira 2009; Wagner et al. 2010), (3) depression in university students (Bolsoni-Silva and Loureiro 2017), and (4) social anxiety and social phobia (Angélico and Loureiro 2012). In evaluation studies conducted with children and adolescents, results highlighted the role of SS as a facilitator of academic learning and protector from learning problems (Del Prette et al. 2012a; Molina and Del Prette 2006), behavior problems (Bandeira et al. 2006; Dias et al. 2013; Barreto et al. 2011; Casali et al. 2015), and several other indicators of disorders (Campos et al. 2014; Elkis et al. 2016; Rocha et al. 2013; Del Prette et al. 2012b), in addition to relations with social support and well-being (Romera-Leme et al. 2015a) and special educational needs (Angélico and Del Prette 2011; Dascanio et al. 2012; França et al. 2015; Freitas and Del Prette 2014).

In summary, the evaluation studies carried out in Brazil are aligned with the literature from abroad. Moreover, these studies characterize the SS such as facilitators of learning and protective factors against psychological disorders and problems along the vital cycle. There is evidence of the association between good repertoire of SS and positive outcomes. On the other hand, it was found an association between repertoire deficits and negative outcomes. These evidence both signal the importance of including the promotion of SS among the conditions that enable human development and quality of life.

This position is consistent with the characterization of symptoms of mental disorders in general, for example in the case of personality disorders (Del Prette et al. 2013), whose analysis demonstrated the importance of differentiating SS and SC for antisocial and histrionic disorders.

In addition to contributing to the expansion of the nomologic network of relationships between SS skills and different variables of interest for mental health and healthy development, evaluation studies in Brazil also led us to reaffirm or to adjust our conceptual elaboration, particularly the studies contradictory or counterintuitive results between SS and psychological problems or disorders. For instance, contradictory results on SS and drug addiction (Sá 2013; Sá and Del Prette 2014, 2016) have led us to consider more accurately the situational nature of SS and the importance of an instrument with items that are relevant to this condition. For instance, this specificity must be taken into consideration in research and/or practice with parents and educators. In both cases, it is possible that they do not always translate into the specific skills that are required in the relationships with children and students, respectively. Another example is the contradiction that Comodo (2015) found in her results for SS and bullying, which reinforced the previous understanding of the centrality of the SC concept. This author did not verify SS deficits in most of the practitioners, witnesses, and victims of bullying, yet she found it for SC, corroborating the importance of evaluating and promoting also the other requirements of the SC.

Intervention Studies

The knowledge for the promotion of SS and SC has always been at the center of the concerns to the research group, anticipating or following conceptual and methodological issues. For this reason, efforts were directed to design, implement, evaluate, and refine the SST programs, as well as resources and specific procedures.

Considering the characteristics commonly found in the literature, an SST program is usually understood as (Del Prette and Del Prette 2017a) a set of activities that structured learning processes, mediated and conducted by a therapist or facilitator,¹ aiming at: (a) increasing the frequency and/or improve the proficiency of SS already learned, but still in deficit; (b) teaching new significant SS; and (c) reduce or extinguish competing behaviors with such skills. In our research group, considering the centrality of the concept of SC, our understanding of SST programs is expanded to contemplate more explicitly the requirements of SC. Thus, we believe that an SST program, guided by the concept of SC (Del Prette and Del Prette 2017a, p. 80), is “a set of planned activities that structured learning processes, mediated and governed by a therapist or facilitator, aiming not only to the acquisition and/or development of social skills, but also of the other requirements of social competence.”

In SST programs, usual procedures are instructional exercises, dialoged exposure, behavioral rehearsal, and interpersonal tasks. These procedures are presented with evidence-based techniques as feedback, reinforcement, modeling, analysis of contingencies, and use of vicarious models (real or symbolic). Considering SC and its requirements, in our SST programs, we added the experiential method, which is a structured context for the group sessions. We defined it as (Del Prette and Del Prette 2001a, p. 106) “a structured activity [...] that mobilizes feelings, thoughts and performances of the participants and allows the therapist or facilitator to adopt specific procedures for achieving the objectives of the program.”

Over these years, we have developed and disseminated experiences that enable other professionals when planning and running SST programs for adults (Del Prette and Del Prette 2001a), children, and adolescents (Del Prette and Del Prette 2005a) or for both (Del Prette and Del Prette 2017a). More recently, we have invested in brochures and books for parents, college students, and the general public, with practical guidelines and exercises (Benevides and Del Prette 2013; Del Prette and Prette 2017c; Pinheiro et al. 2003) and illustrative features on cards, booklets, and videos (Del Prette and Del Prette 2005b; Comodo et al. 2011; Dias and Del Prette 2015). There are widely documented empirical evidence regarding the effectiveness of this program as well as its resources. These evidence were published in master’s and doctoral dissertations (<http://www.rihs.ufscar.br/teses-e-dissertacoes/>) and articles (<http://www.rihs.ufscar.br/artigos-em-periodicos/>), and some examples

¹We have adopted the term *facilitator* to designate the professional who conducts SST programs once these programs have been carried out in different contexts such as the clinical, educational, work, or community.

were gathered in a collection (see Del Prette and Del Prette 2017b) aimed for professionals with a more detailed description of recently tested effective experiential programs.

With the development of programs and resources for the SST in Brazil, the interventions were diversified. We highlight the interventions directly targeting children and adolescents, such as a triadic model, with customer service exclusively to parents (Freitas 2005; Pinheiro et al. 2006; Rocha et al. 2013) and educators (Lopes 2013; Molina 2007; Rosin-Pinola and Del Prette 2014; Rosin-Pinola et al. 2017), whose effects were expected and measured in the behavior of their children and students. Besides interventions directly or indirectly designed to children and adolescents, there are also empirical evidence of SST programs designed for diverse clienteles such as the elderly (Braz et al. 2011), population with special educational needs (Ferreira and Del Prette 2013; Freitas 2005; Lopes et al. 2013), psychotic patients (Elkis et al. 2016), and nonclinical population looking for work positions (Del Prette and Del Prette 2003b; Pereira-Guizzo et al. 2012; Lopes et al. 2015, 2017). When developing and running SST in Brazil, researchers assessed these results using instruments produced by our group, as verified, for example, in a survey of the use of the IHS-Del-Prette (Del Prette and Del Prette 2013a).

Thus, the studies and interventions in SST programs became to target clienteles from diverse stages of the vital cycle (children, adolescents, adults, and elderly) as well participants with different social roles (parents, caregivers, teachers, and educators in general, couples, executives, etc.). In this context, it was becoming clear that the SST programs could be applied as a *major* intervention or as a *coadjutant*, in therapeutic and educative services from a wide variety of problems, such as recommended in its early days, by the first researchers of the area (Falloon et al. 1982).

In the quest for improvement of SST programs, we went from an initial exploratory stage of interventions to further studies under experimental and quasi-experimental designs, in a perspective of consolidation of evidence-based practices (APA 2006) and toward the dissemination of these programs (Murta 2011). We recognize that this process was supported by two previous conditions. The first one is regarding the evaluation, more specifically the efforts into the development of evaluation instruments. The second is condition is related to the improvement of procedures and techniques as well as audiovisual and multimedia resources for intervention.

We have evaluated the effectiveness of many SST programs by the clinical significance and reliability of change's analysis using the JT Method (Jacobson and Truax 1991). This analysis was particularly useful in cases in which there was no control group or when intervention was designed for individual cases. We defended the JT Method as an important method in the field of social skills (Del Prette and Del Prette 2008b). Moreover, we organized a website in which researchers and professionals can perform this analysis (Villa et al. 2011) and compare their results to classical statistical procedures (Villa et al. 2012).

Considering the visible expansion of publications on SS in Brazil, some researchers were interested in mapping out this production, both in journals and chapters of books and collections. We highlight the analyses of: (a) Murta (2005), about SS

preventive programs; (b) Bolsoni-Silva et al. (2006) about the papers' publication; (c) Freitas (2013) focusing only on the experimental studies in SS; (d) Fumo et al. (2009) on the annual collection of ABPMC publications, entitled "Behavior and Cognition," for the period from 1997 to 2007; and (e) Nilsson et al. (2014), bringing articles of Latin American researchers. All these studies pointed to the increase of publications on SS in Brazil and to the crescent internationalization in terms of partnerships in projects that have been converted into publications. In the case of SS, our main partners were from Portugal, Argentina, and the USA, with which we have published several articles and book chapters. Additionally, publications in English and Spanish languages are another form of internalization and therefore, the dissemination of the produced knowledge about SS.

The Movement of Social Skills in Brazil: Past, Present, and Future²

Somehow our history of academic production is associated with the Brazilian SS movement, both in quantitative terms and in terms of methods and objectives of research and application of this theme. We believe that the Social Skills Training (SST), as a therapeutic method, started late in Brazil, and in other countries of South America. Perhaps one reason for this was the delay in adherence to the process of dehospitalization of psychiatric patients, which was one of the initial focuses of interest in SST programs in Canada and the USA to prepare psychiatric patients for life in community (Brown 1982; Falloon et al. 1982; Goldsmith and McFall 1975; Wallace 1982). At the same time, this type of intervention, coming from England (Argyle 1984; Argyle et al. 1974), began to gain prominence, starting to be part of the alternative services designed for several types of problems (Bellack et al. 1976; Curran 1977).

Thus, while in the decade of 1970, the SST had already been consolidated abroad as "one of the major developments within the history of the behavioral model" (O'Donohue and Krasner 1995, p. 4), in Brazil no study on this theme had been presented in scientific events by that time. Only in 1996, there was the publication of the first theoretical article on social skills in Brazil (Del Prette and Del Prette 1996), and after a short time, the first article on intervention describing a program of SST in group (Del Prette et al. 1999) and the first book (Del Prette and Del Prette 1999).

An important event happened then, in 2002, when it was created a working group (WG) in the National Association of Research and Graduate (ANPEPP www.anpepp.org.br), composed of researchers on SS. Much of the movement of social skills in Brazil is an outcome of the structuring and production of this group, including activities for the formation of new researchers as well as the dissemination of

²This section reproduces and extends part of the chapter written in Portuguese on the movement of social skills in Brazil (Del Prette and Del Prette 2016).

the area in scientific events, such as the International Seminars of Social Skills (I, II, III, IV, V, and VI SIHS, and for 2019 is expected to occur the VII SIHS in São Luis do Maranhão, www.sihis.ufscar.br).

In addition to the consecutive and successful editions of the SIHS, it should be pointed out, yet, as indicators of the “movement” of SS in Brazil, the presence of the theme in other important events around the country. This has led some, for example, the Brazilian Association of Behavioral Psychology and Medicine (ABPMC), to include the keyword social skills in the theme of indexing of papers submitted. Courses, conferences, symposia, roundtables, and panels covering about SS are a constant presence in several events in Brazil.

Focusing on the Brazilian researchers’ publications in journals, in Brazil or abroad, it is possible to highlight the most recent survey, covering the production of the period from 1990 to 2014 (Del Prette et al. n.d.), illustrated in Fig. 3.

This survey contemplates about 25 years and points to the growth of scientific production in SS in Brazil. The publications prior to the pioneer article of 1996 consisted only of ten articles, from which two were empirical and made explicit reference, in the title, to SS and SC, respectively. A gradual increase can be seen up

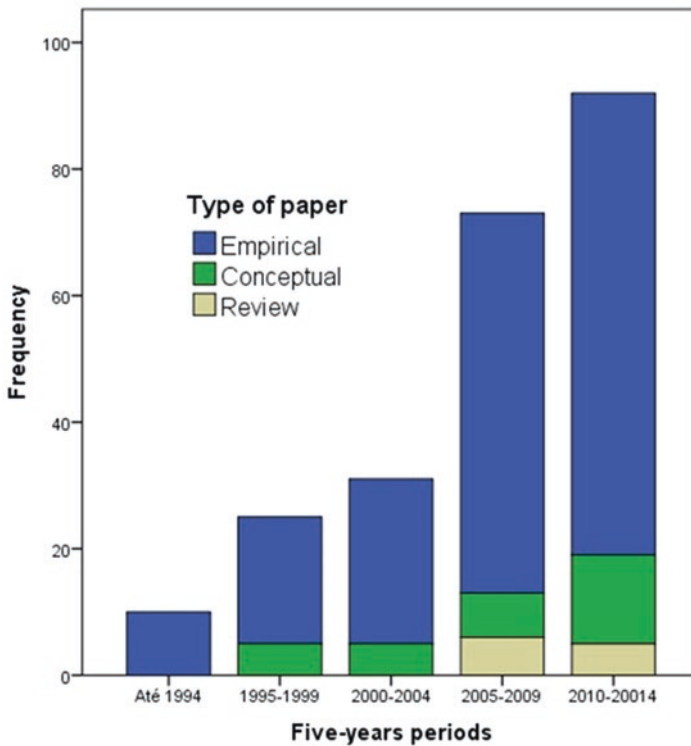


Fig. 3 Distribution of empirical, theoretical, and review articles, produced on SS published until 2014, in 5-year periods (Del Prette et al. n.d.)

to 2004 (65 papers) followed by a significant increase to 231 papers (almost three times more) in the next 10 years and with the appearance of review studies, some of them focused on Brazilian production, suggesting that the SS field already has a history in Brazil. Another important aspect to be emphasized is the qualification of the journals. About 90% of the studies were published in journals B2 level or higher, which are a qualification considered good or very good by the criteria of the development agencies, especially Coordenação de Aperfeiçoamento de Pessoal de Nível Superior (CAPES, Coordination for the Improvement of Higher Education Personnel) and Conselho Nacional de Desenvolvimento Científico e Tecnológico (CNPq, Brazilian National Council for Scientific and Technological Development).

Another interesting aspect observed in the survey was the distribution of the studies according to the research sample and/or the clientele in this area. Figure 4 illustrates this distribution.

There is a reasonably equitable variety of studies with children, teenagers, students, clinical samples of participants, and professionals, as well as couples, parents, and caregivers, in addition to a general category of others or mixed when it came to conceptual tests or methodological studies that did not specify the participants or when there was more than one type of sample.

The axes of knowledge production also appear with differentiated distribution along the five quinquennia covered in the survey. This is illustrated in Fig. 5.

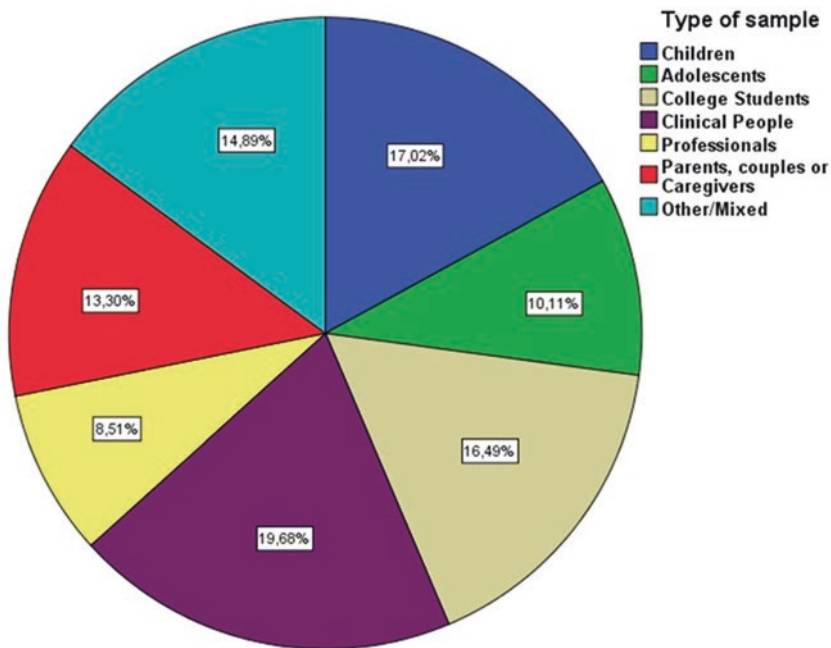


Fig. 4 Distribution of samples and clienteles from the studies on SS in Brazil (Del Prette et al. n.d.)

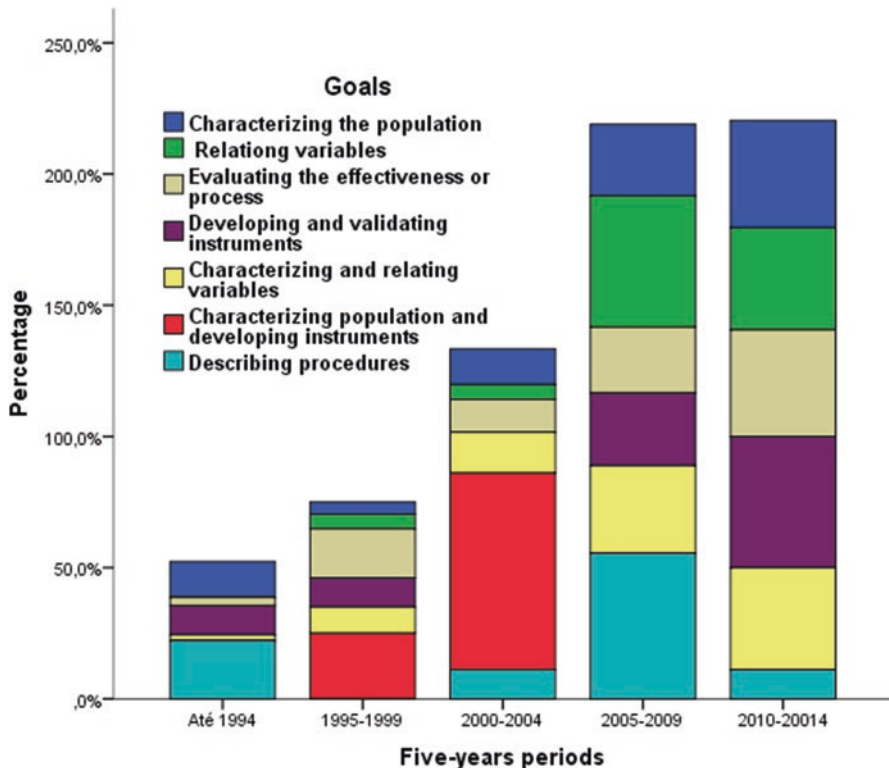


Fig. 5 Distribution to the objectives of the studies, in publications on SS in Brazil (Del Prette et al. n.d.)

There is also a great diversity of aims, approaching, in a fairly equitable way, the scheme presented in Fig. 1. However, specific studies on instrument construction (in red) were reduced, possibly because the instruments started to be used for the investigation of the nomologic network of relations between variables (in green), coupled with the characterization of population segments. One can infer that the instruments have been available in various ways (for example, books and manuals), favoring new types of studies, including those for effectiveness analysis (in mustard color). To ensure the dissemination of SST programs supported by evidence of effectiveness (Del Prette and Del Prette 2017b) is an important investment, as recommended by the American Psychological Association (APA Presidential Task Force on Evidence-Based Practice 2006).

The data from this survey are only briefly mentioned here to highlight the increase in the number of publications, associated with the increase of researchers and determined by qualified vehicles. It is understood that this is an indicator of maturity of the area in Brazil as well as an important basis for its consolidation and development. In addition, it is understood that the future of the SS movement in Brazil depends, also, on the process of formation of human resources for research and practice in this theme.

Regarding the training of researchers, the previous survey has also shown an increasing amount of masters, doctorate, and postdoctorate graduates or in training in this area in recent years. The first masters and PhDs in the SS theme were formed by researchers who, while not having this theme as main object of research, met the expectations of a new generation of students interested in the topic. Some of these advisors have integrated this theme to their foci of research and the new doctors, in their majority, remained in the area, by inserting themselves in postgraduate programs and, in this way, continuing the process of formation of new researchers. In a survey on the Lattes Platform/CNPq (<http://lattes.cnpq.br/>), from 1990 to mid-2015, we found 40 defended doctoral theses and 21 others in progress. At master level, there were 130 completed dissertations and 14 in progress. In addition to these numbers, there has been, in the last 5 years, training of researchers at postdoctoral level, part of them without previous experience with SS, but with interest in it. For these postdoctoral students, their insertion in the SS field was possible by internships along with senior researchers.

Regarding the issue of the SS movement in Brazil and considering the criteria derived from sociology for the identification of this phenomenon—adherence, permanence in time, and visibility, it is possible to draw some conclusions about the “SS movement in Brazil.” Adherence can be seen in the influx of researchers for training and acting in this field, possibly contributing and being fed by scientific production and exposure of this production in scientific events and outreach events outside the academic scope. This interest opens up positive perspectives for the dissemination of the field in contexts such as therapeutic care, education, work, international relations, and tourism. Regarding permanence, the presented indicators, especially the review studies, suggest the development as a history of increasing academic production that seems fundamental for the sustainability of this movement.

Despite these analyses, the issue of permanence in time deserves some considerations, apparently obvious, yet that need to be explained. Certainly, the theoretical–practical SS field is not, today, the same that was drawn up by Argyle and his collaborators in the decade of 1960. New SS classes have been incorporated, such as the relations between representatives from different countries, the interactions mediated by technology and virtual communication, and the other demands of today’s society. Therefore, the permanence in time includes the ability of the area to take into account of new issues that arise in a globalized and in constant change world. As the phenomenon called SS is a dynamic process, inserted in the different cultures, it is possible to predict that different research problems will continue to receive attention from researchers.

All social movement leaves an important landmark that can: (a) be resumed by other movements or (b) obtain continuity in time, with specific proposals. Considering the SS movement, there may be continuity, for example, with the creation of undergraduate courses on this subject, and/or discussion within the university of questions related to pedagogical practice and SS in higher education.

In any case, the future of the SS movement must be a present issue. Researchers in the area express concern about the direction of this movement, in order to protect it from banalization and to ensure quality in research as well as in training in this

area. It is an area of knowledge that is apparently simple and of public domain, but whose simplicity dissolves under a more careful analysis. It is, therefore, up to the new generations to warrant this attentive eye and the productive exploitation of the potential of this area for the resolution of many human problems that necessarily pass by the interpersonal relations.

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