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## **SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL EDUCATION PROGRAM FOR CHILDREN AGED 4 TO 11 – THE BEHAVIOR FAIRY**

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**Abstract:** The study of emotions and the affective formation of individuals expands the understanding of how it is possible for affectivity to be managed in a way that enhances healthy development, based on balanced social interactions. Therefore, it is extremely important for individuals and society that socio-emotional education and care for emotional skills are prioritized in the first years of life. This report aims to add to the literature experiences in working on socio-emotional skills with children and also highlight their benefits. 12 workshops were held in a private school in the interior of São Paulo, with 29 children enrolled in the morning and afternoon sessions. The meetings were structured weekly based on the analysis of group demand and based on enchantment and storytelling, specifically the story “The Behavior Fairy”. It was possible to notice the children’s identification with the characters, due to the humanized aspect of each of them, and that they began to serve as auxiliary egos, making it easier for children to express their emotions and share them with the group, generating empathy and resilience. The work was structured on three levels: workshops with children, Continuing Training for educators and Parental Mentoring. It was concluded that the benefits of working with socio-emotional skills, based on stories and creative games, included becoming an effective strategy for students’ success, providing a significant improvement in academic skills, improving self-control, cooperation, problem solving, self-knowledge and perception and respect for others, as well as reducing conflicts between students and existing bullying. Furthermore, the work carried out favored the maintenance, by the educators, of assertive management of the group as a whole, thus culminating in the development of a Socio-Emotional Education Program.

**Keywords:** Fairy tale; Soft Skills; Socio-

## INTRODUCTION

The Program that this study is entitled to has its genesis in the observation of demands that emerged spontaneously in the clinical psychological practice of one of the authors of this article, Francisco Bárbaro Neto, during the COVID-19 pandemic. Faced with the clinical challenges during this period, the application of new clinical intervention practices began, based on playful resources, with a 6-year-old patient who presented behavioral and emotional difficulties, also observed later in other children. After 4 months, the new techniques used were expanded to other clinical cases and the school context, becoming a method. Both the initial patient and the other children in the first test, totaling 22 participants, were highly responsive to the playful strategy developed, showing significant improvements. Thus, with the expressive results obtained, the data were used by its creator and by a specialized technical team of psychologists, in structuring a broader Socio-Emotional Education Program.

Children, in a clinical context, initially presented symptoms of irritability, anxiety, mood changes, hyperactivity, excessive fears, attention and concentration deficits, behavioral changes, eating disorders, among other specific childhood characteristics, which could be reduced based on work with playful resources - such as creative and psychopedagogical games - and a children’s tale of overcoming and resilience, called “The Behavior Fairy”, with a magical and fantasy narrative, prepared session by session with the initial patient. Children were able to identify with the characters, transforming them into auxiliary egos and benefiting from playfulness to work through their anxieties in a safe and effective way (BÁRBARO NETO; LEMOS DE TOLEDO, 2023).

The short story's narrative is built on consistent epistemological foundations, including fundamental principles of Jungian psychology (Psychological Types and Archetypes), Sociocultural Theory and the Systemic Approach. In this context, the figures of the Fairy and the elves can be used as symbolic representations of the healing and transformation processes (BÁRBARO NETO, 2021).

The choice of playfulness, enchantment and the presence of mystical beings, such as the Fairy and the Elves, comes from the knowledge of the symbolic specificity's characteristic of child development and the benefit that the path of fantasy provides to the educational processes at this stage.

The ability to fantasize allows children to communicate more richly, externalize their anxieties and thoughts, allowing them to transform the real world according to their desires. Through the imaginary, the child's own environment is given new meaning, which begins to present different configuration possibilities, establishing a continuous process of interaction between the real and the fantasy world. (FARIAS; RUBIO, 2012).

Fairy tales are considered the purest and simplest expression of the psychic processes of the collective unconscious, giving them a significantly higher value for scientific investigation, compared to other materials. They represent the archetypes in a simple, complete and concise way, providing the best clues to understand the processes in the collective psyche, through archetypal images. In fairy tales, there is cultural material that allows access to the basic structures of the psyche (FRANZ, 1990).

Fairy tales, therefore, have a structure that mirrors fundamental human characteristics. They play a significant role, because through them, we can analyze the most elementary structures of behavior. However, there is also

a practical reason for its use: by studying fairy tales and myths, we can gain understanding of complex structures, enabling us to discern between what is individual and what is not, in addition to envisioning possible solutions (FRANZ, 2020).

Furthermore, according to studies conducted by Bjorklund and Pellegrini (2002), children aged four to seven spend approximately 10 to 15% of their time playing with objects. This aspect of the game is fundamental as it offers children the opportunity to express their imagination and develop motor and cognitive skills.

For the authors, by creating a block house, for example, children are not only having fun, but they are also improving their problem-solving skills, understanding spatial concepts and developing fine motor coordination. Likewise, by engaging in the creation of colorful drawings, they are exploring their artistic expression and refining finer motor skills.

Furthermore, pretend play in this age group also plays a fundamental role in the development of skills that involve the ability to understand the emotions, intentions and thoughts of others (BERGEN, 2002).

Dramatic play reaches its peak during the preschool years, increasing in frequency and complexity, and declines as the child enters school age, becoming more involved in formal games with known rules and penalties. However, it is notable that many children continue to engage in pretend play well beyond the early years, although the pressure for more academically oriented programs in kindergarten can limit the time devoted to these games, which become a powerful development tool in enriching children's cognitive, emotional and social capabilities, providing lasting benefits throughout their growth (BERGEN, 2002).

Studies show how teaching socio-emotional skills is an effective and one of the most significant strategies today for student success, improving academic results, peer relationships and creating healthier and more successful young people. (CASEL, 2020).

Working with emotions in this context becomes a tool to reduce the negative impact on the future of the next generations, especially when started in the first years of life. (COLAGROSSI; VASSIMON, 2017).

Since human beings are only capable of fully developing their mental, psychological, emotional and memory capabilities when encountering others, great theorists such as Wallon, Vygotsky and Piaget consider that culture, together with biological aspects, structures psychological functioning. and higher functions. (LA TAILLE, 2019).

Considering this panorama, the present study aims to explain the process of creation, testing and development that culminated in the elaboration of the methodology entitled “Socio-Emotional Education Program – Fada do Comportamento”, which follows national and global demands for emotional education, in compliance with the most current themes of focus of the National Common Curricular Base (BNCC) 2017.

Thus, the Program was designed to make the most of the learning potential of the children served, strategically using playful and sensory resources that meet the methodological constructive structure of the story and that give protagonism to the little ones, taking advantage of their creative potential.

Furthermore, educators are understood as main agents in the learning process, considering the postulations in books by authors such as Vygotsky (2007), who says that the adult’s role in the learning process is to identify the child’s capabilities and work their way to achieve them, without exceeding their limits.

Knowing the social and emotional vulnerability also present in the teaching staff, the Program, led by psychology professionals, is concerned with supporting the anxieties of educators and accompanying them by providing close support throughout the process.

## **OBJECTIVE**

This article aims to report the experience of the creation, testing and development process that culminated in the elaboration of the methodology entitled “Socio-emotional Education Program - Fada do Comportamento”, in addition to adding experiences with the work of socio-emotional skills to the literature.

## **METHODOLOGY**

### **INITIAL APPLICATION**

During the first application of the methodology in a school environment, 12 workshops were held in a private school in the interior of São Paulo, with 29 children enrolled in the morning and afternoon periods, 18 females and 11 males. The meetings were structured weekly based on the analysis of the groups’ demand and always based on the premises of enchantment and storytelling, specifically the story “The Behavior Fairy”. The children’s identification with the characters facilitated expression and sharing emotions in everyday life and in a group context, being used as a tool in managing socio-emotional learning.

The work was structured on three levels, with two workshops for each of the themes carried out with the children, namely: “Emotions and Feelings”, “Self-esteem and Self-confidence”, “Recognition of feelings”, “Values and emotional conditions for coping of problems” and “Developing resilience, self-knowledge and self-control”; in addition

to Continuing Training for Educators and Parental Mentoring.

## **INSTRUMENTS**

### **ANAMNESIS SHEETS**

Inventory of the child's behaviors and emotions, filled out by those responsible, at the beginning and another at the end of the program, implemented with observations from the team of educators, through a descriptive report on each of the 29 students.

Technical booklet with the detailed scope of activities to be carried out with groups of children, by specialist psychologists.

### **NARRATIVE FEATURES**

The short story "A Fada do Comportamento", the basis that supports the entire structuring of the Program, makes up the Collection "A Fada do Comportamento e a Equipe Superação", a set of books in which each story retroactively presents the story of resilience and overcoming difficulties. individual difficulties of the 8 elves.

### **THE TALE**

In the story, the character Fairy of Behavior welcomes elves with challenging behaviors and emotional difficulties. Even with challenges, she insists on developing her friends' socio-emotional skills by developing a plan to help them. After months of great care and support, they evolve, becoming more resilient and emotionally intelligent. Her transformative journey, with guidance from the Fairy, is the highlight of the tale, as well as the benefit of receiving external help.

According to the book's author, Francisco Bárbaro Neto (2021), elves are characterized as: the Yellow Goblin is extroverted, optimistic and expressive, but can be inadvertently selfish. Your main emotions are joy and envy.

The Orange Duende is introspective,

realistic and focused on solutions. He may feel intense anxiety and interest.

The Red Goblin is extroverted, responsible and practical, but can be impatient. Your main emotions are anger and satisfaction.

The Pink Duende is extroverted, empathetic and organized, seeking harmony in her interactions. His main emotions are disgust and empathy.

The Purple Duende is introspective, peaceful and creative, facing self-confidence challenges. Your main emotions are fear and relief.

Duende Turquesa is innovative, concerned with collective well-being and sensitive to conflicts. Your main emotions are desire and sadness.

The Green Goblin is extroverted, creative and enthusiastic, but can be arrogant. Their main emotions are contempt and excitement.

The Blue Goblin is shy, reserved and adaptable, facing challenges of understanding and overcoming. Your main emotions are doubt and triumph.

Each elf has unique characteristics that contribute to the narrative of the tale, exploring themes such as self-knowledge, interpersonal relationships and overcoming personal challenges. The construction of each character was based on a careful analysis of Jungian typology, condensing the 16 psychological types theorized by the author, into eight personalities for each elf, with specific colors, mottos and personal tastes.

## **PLAYFUL RESOURCES**

In the initial testing period, the Program had three fun games, also adapted by the book's author, with the colors and characters of the children's story "The Behavior Fairy": Fairy Flags Game, Behavior Fairy Tower and Cubo III of Fairy.

A sticker board called "Incentive Board" was also used with each child, developed by

the technical team to encourage satisfactory behaviors achieved by the child at home, extending the effects of the program to the children's family environment.

### **SENSORY FEATURES**

The Program has kits of creative and sensory materials used since the first workshops held with children. In addition, it has olfactory resources such as an essence created from the research "What does the Enchanted World smell like?", a question asked to 18 children who helped compose the aroma used in the manufacture of the room essence and alcohol gel.

It was by investigating the human olfactory system that neuroscientist James Papez discovered the limbic system responsible for emotions and how sensory resources can enhance the learning of emotional skills. (TIEPPO, 2019).

### **STRUCTURAL FEATURES**

All activities took place in the Fairy Sensory Room, a playful space that integrates thought-provoking and challenging tools, sensory, affective and cognitive elements of human learning, thus ensuring the awakening of curiosity, collaboration and creativity to solve the proposed challenges.

The magical environment and personalized training allowed the educator to stimulate students' cognitive, conative and executive functions in a fun way, in order to improve the absorption of academic content, achieved in a strategic and welcoming way.

The sensory room at school aims to enhance critical thinking, strengthening resilience, non-violent communication and many other skills, enabling students to become conscious and respectful citizens, which, in the Program, is postulated as: "Caregivers of the World".

### **HUMAN RESOURCES**

As human resources for the implementation of the Socio-Emotional Education Program with children, educators and parents, a team was structured consisting of four specialist psychologists, two assistant psychologists and a work supervising psychologist.

The team of educators, hired by the school, involved in the four Continuing Training Workshops, was made up of two educators, a pedagogical coordinator and a director of early childhood education.

The parents involved participated in four online workshops on the characteristics and objectives of the program, as well as discussions regarding non-violent educational practices for the development of Socio-Emotional Intelligence.

### **PROGRAM STRUCTURING**

Focusing on the Continuing Training of educators and lasting four months, the Program has 12 face-to-face Workshops with children and their educators, in order to ensure that they experience, through observation by the technical team of psychologists, the activities developed, which allowed him to recognize the impact of assertive use of the material on his and the children's own emotions and behaviors.

The educators also had contact with structured support materials, called "Self-Development Journey" and also had access to "Behaviour Fairy Help", a question plan designed for the needs of the educator, which ensured proximity to the school and better care in the management of possible mediations and support in specific situations.

The teachers were trained in the methodology, the theoretical contents covered by the books in the Behavior Fairy Collection and the use of psycho-pedagogical games during the program period, in the four Workshops aimed at the school team and in

the doubt's sessions.

Four online workshops were held with parents, addressing issues relating to the importance of developing assertive practices using loving-kindness and non-violent education for the healthy socio-emotional development of their children. This way, parents were trained and sensitized to understand new communication patterns, favoring an improvement in the expression of emotions and affection in the family environment.

## RESULTS

In the initial application of the Program, described in the present study, the proposal of the Fairy Tale of Behavior in the workshops with children was to stimulate the recognition of emotions, presenting them as a reaction, and of feelings, considered as an internal construction. Therefore, despite the immaturity to theoretically understand many of the contents, children were able to experience in practice the importance of the role of others in social interaction, in the search for self-knowledge and, consequently, correct perceptual distortions in the demonstration of affection, thus enhancing the self-control of children's emotions.

In this challenging perspective, the story stimulated conversation between guardians and educators about the emotions and feelings of their children and students, through a necessary and transformative practice. Feelings arising from emotions in imbalance (when not recognized and given new meanings) can harm children's psychological development and last for years.

The study of emotions and the affective formation of individuals has expanded the understanding of how, from a very young age, it is possible for affectivity to be managed in a way that enhances healthy development through balanced social interactions.

Therefore, it is extremely important for individuals and society that socio-emotional education and care for emotional skills are prioritized.

Furthermore, the Program is in line with global and national demands regarding the need to improve the development of socio-emotional skills from the beginning of the first school years, since in addition to enhancing the learning of regular content, emotional development is a neuroprotective factor.

In the anamnesis applied before and after the workshops, 36 emotional characteristics were evaluated for each child, based on statements from guardians and educators: anguish; anxiety; contempt; insecurity; insensitivity; fear; not believing in yourself; not valuing yourself; narcissism; disgust; obsession; pessimism; anger and irritation; stubbornness and evil; shyness; sadness; shame; lack of empathy; motor agitation; tantrum; compulsion; opposition; criticize others; impulsivity; misunderstanding; accommodation; isolation; hurt others; challenging posture; provocation; tics; attention deficit; difficulty learning; hesitation to speak; hyperactivity; others.

In the initial application, the most frequent behaviors reported by guardians and educators in girls were: anxiety (12), insecurity (9), fear (9), anger and irritation (6) and defiant posture (5). In boys, they were anxiety (7), anger and irritation (7), fear (5), disgust (5) and defiant posture (5).

At the end of the play therapy interventions, the results of the total sample found in the 23-anamnesis provided by the parents, showed an improvement in 76% of feelings and emotions of anxiety, anguish and mood changes, as well as in the remission of 80% of the irritability presented before of interventions.

The effects seen in the group with eight boys demonstrated that 83% of them progressed to

a frustration threshold and reduced repetitive behaviors and tics.

The most significant results in the group of 15 girls were a 91% reduction in irritability, 78% in anxiety and 85% of them showed a significant improvement in mood, according to their parents.

In short, the results found after the interventions showed that the applied method significantly improved all dimensions of behaviors, feelings and thoughts assessed in the anamnesis.

At the end of the Program, reports were collected from the teachers involved, regarding their perceptions regarding the work:

“The class became more empathetic, caring for the friend’s feelings and worrying about not hurting them became part of the routine” – teacher.

“I was surprised by the class, everyone was very well-rounded and had very high self-esteem” – teacher.

“After the project, the class became more collaborative and less competitive” – Teacher.

“Empathy was the highlight of the project” – Teacher.

“Some children have matured and started to express themselves more, others are recognizing that they need to achieve some goals” – Teacher.

“H. In the initial periods she cried asking for her mother’s presence and in the last few weeks she was already relaxed and talkative” – Team member.

“The children were more careful with each other, careful with the spaces and objects at school and I also noticed that they became more affectionate. I could see that they became more confident and confident in talking about their feelings, conflicts and emotions.” – Director of early childhood education.

During the four Workshops with the parents of the children who participated in the Program, it was possible to observe

that the more involved those responsible were, the greater the evolution and the more representative and expressive the children’s behavioral changes.

## FINAL CONSIDERATION

It was possible to notice that children who demonstrated greater willingness to assist in the proposed activities and share their feelings were more likely to achieve success in the psychopedagogical and socio-emotional sphere.

Global problems in children’s universe, regarding the management of emotions, require almost magical solutions. In order to guarantee a healthy process of socio-emotional learning, using fantasy and fun as tools for applying content and maximizing learning, the Program in question was carefully thought about the effectiveness of developing socio-emotional skills, their importance and strength.

The Fairy of Behavior’s Socio-Emotional Education Program understands education as an active, continuous process of (re) construction of oneself and the world.

The way in which it stimulates This process, through the perception, acceptance and assertive expression of emotions, provides the development of the confidence necessary for children to expand their capabilities and, at the same time, recognize and respect their own way of being in the world.

This was possible when carried out through a safe, fun and challenging environment, ideal for flourishing people capable of embracing sociocultural differences and ideological divergences, of taking care of themselves, others and the world, based on ethical and responsible standards. It is a practice based on the belief in education as a tool for liberating the power inherent in our own humanity.

It is concluded, therefore, that the method and techniques developed from playfulness



and enchantment proved to be effective and efficient in terms of improving socio-emotional skills, both for children and the school technical team.

Students were able to reduce behaviors considered dysfunctional, improving their relational and affective environment in the classroom, as well as their resources for self-regulation, self-esteem, self-confidence and, consequently, in academic life. The interventions carried out allowed the enrichment of skills that will serve the healthy development of psychic abilities and as a protective factor in facing difficulties throughout life.

Realizing the potential for improving socio-emotional skills of the method used, the technical team involved can evaluate which points could be improved and expanded so that the Program can be reproduced on a larger scale, maintaining its responsive capacity regarding the objective of developing such skills.

Having observed the results obtained in the initial testing, described in the present study, the structuring of the methodology as a Socio-Emotional Education Program was subsequently consolidated, in a much broader way. The team chose to maintain as the basis of all its materials and actions, Levi Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory and its importance in understanding the educational and maturational context of children; Jungian psychology, mainly with regard to personality studies on psychological types and archetypes according to Jung and research with fairy tales developed by his student Marie Von-Franz and the Systemic Theories framework in understanding the vision of man and how it is inserted into their cultural and relational contexts.

The structure of the program is aligned with the ethical principles established by the National Curricular Guidelines for Basic

Education, the BNCC (2023), contributes to the objectives that guide education in Brazil, aiming at the integral training of individuals and the construction of a fair, democratic society and inclusive.

Thus, the structuring of the methodology in the Program was designed to cover nine of the ten competencies foreseen by the National Common Curricular Base (BNCC), covered throughout the proposed workshops, namely: knowledge, scientific, critical and creative thinking, communication, work and life project, argumentation, self-knowledge, cooperation, empathy, responsibility towards oneself and others and citizenship. The digital culture competency, however, is already part of future planning for the Program.

All these skills were designed to be worked on over 36 workshops, guided by eight booklets. These are organized into cycles, according to the age groups of the children involved (Cycle one: 4 and 5 years old; Cycle two: 6 and 7 years old; Cycle three: 8 and 9 years old and Cycle four: 10 and 11 years old). The handouts function as guides, so that the educator plays the role of facilitator in the application of the material, which will be experienced in practice by the children through games, activities and psycho-pedagogical games.

The Program currently has a catalog of 17 games and structured and semi-structured psychopedagogical materials, focusing on the development and sharing of emotions and strategically designed to achieve the improvement of socio-emotional skills. The resources are personalized and connected to the archetypal and characterological aspects of the 8 elves, with the role of assisting in emotional support, collaborating in the recognition and reframing of perceptual distortions, as well as introjected emotions and feelings.

It was through the implementation of the Socio-Emotional Education Program with the

two groups of 29 children, in this initial study, that it became possible to rethink the need to expand the program and restructure, both with regard to the number of workshops - from 12 to 36 per year - regarding the need to train the educator with a workload of 100 to 140 hours per year, so that he or she can experience and be able to apply the methodology.

Another aspect to be expanded in the program was observed: a daily service shift for the educator, in order to guarantee the appropriation of the contents and offer assertive support to them, in the execution of the workshops carried out by them, with the students.

The virtual and synchronous Pedagogical Training, offered to educators, must be conducted by the technical team of psychologists. The so-called "Self-Development Journey" will be maintained with support materials structured in accordance with the themes presented and "Behaviour Fairy Help" to clarify doubts.

However, the participation of parents

and guardians also remains of fundamental importance during the implementation of the Socio-Emotional Education Program, requiring an increase in meetings from four to eight annually, extending the themes covered to family life.

The community is also a system that must be involved in the process, participating in events throughout the year and obtaining social return with the contributions made to the scientific literature on early childhood education, based on the data generated in the Program's applications.

The present study allowed us to understand the real needs of children in dealing with socio-emotional intelligence and the importance of deeply involving educators and parents in the themes of socio-emotional education programs in a participatory, playful, charming and empathetic way, in contrast to many existing models. that seek to reproduce, almost exclusively through handout graphic materials, the involvement of students.

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