ASSESSMENT AND MANAGEMENT OF SOCIAL SKILLS AND BEHAVIOR PROBLEMS IN PRESCHOOLERS CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES

AVALIAÇÃO E MANEJO DE HABILIDADES SOCIAIS E PROBLEMAS DE COMPORTAMENTO DE PRÉ-ESCOLARES COM DEFICIÊNCIA[1]

EVALUACIÓN Y GESTIÓN DE LAS HABILIDADES SOCIALES Y TEMAS DE COMPORTAMIENTO DE LOS PREESCOLARES CON DISCAPACIDAD

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ABSTRACT: This research aimed to compare how teachers assess social skills and behavior problems of preschool children with developmental delays and children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) and characterize teachers' self-assessment to perform academic activities and manage preschool behaviors with children with and without disabilities. Participants were 22 preschool teachers who had children with developmental delays and children with ASD in their classrooms. The data collected with the application of the Preschool and Kindergarten Behavior Scales (PKBS) and the completion of an interview were treated with statistical analysis, and qualitative data was performed through content analysis (FRANCO, 2008). The results indicated that the group of children with developmental delays had higher mean values on the social skills scale than the group of children with ASD. The teachers indicated a lack of knowledge and difficulties managing behaviors in both groups of children. It is concluded that, even though preschool children are in the development phase, early intervention proposals can result in positive actions for them. Such actions come from promoting and training school professionals and in partnership with the educational field.

KEYWORDS: Special education. Social skills. Behavior problems. Children in preschool age.

RESUMO: Esta pesquisa objetivou comparar como os professores avaliam habilidades sociais e problemas de comportamento de crianças pré-escolares com atraso no desenvolvimento e crianças com Transtorno do Espectro Autista (TEA), bem como caracterizar a autoavaliação das professoras para realizar atividades acadêmicas e manejar comportamentos na pré-escola com crianças com e sem deficiência. Participaram 22 professoras da pré-escola que possuíam em suas salas de aula crianças com atraso no desenvolvimento e crianças com TEA. Os dados coletados com aplicação da Escala de Comportamentos Sociais de Pré-escolares e da realização de uma entrevista foram tratados com análise estatística. Foi feita a análise de

conteúdo dos dados qualitativos (FRANCO, 2008). Os resultados indicaram que o grupo de crianças com atrasos no desenvolvimento apresentaram valores de médias na escala de habilidades sociais superior ao grupo de crianças com TEA. As professoras indicaram falta de conhecimento e dificuldades para manejar comportamentos em ambos os grupos de crianças. Conclui-se que, ainda que as crianças na pré-escola estejam em fase de desenvolvimento, as propostas de intervenção precoce podem resultar em ações positivas para elas. Tais ações são provenientes do fomento e da formação de profissionais da escola e se realizam em parceria com o campo educativo.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: *Educação especial. Habilidades sociais. Problemas de comportamento. Pré-escolares.*

RESUMEN: *Esta investigación tuvo como objetivo comparar cómo los maestros evalúan las habilidades sociales y los problemas de comportamiento de los niños en edad preescolar con retraso en el desarrollo y los niños con Trastorno del Espectro Autista (TEA), así como caracterizar la autoevaluación de los maestros para realizar actividades académicas y manejar los comportamientos preescolares con niños con y sin discapacidad. Los participantes fueron 22 maestros de preescolar que tenían niños con retrasos en el desarrollo y niños con TEA en sus aulas. Los datos recolectados con la aplicación de las Escalas de Comportamiento de Preescolar y Jardín de Infancia (PKBS) y la realización de una entrevista fueron tratados con análisis estadístico, y los datos cualitativos se realizaron a través del análisis de contenido (FRANCO, 2008). Los resultados indicaron que el grupo de niños con retraso en el desarrollo tenía valores medios más altos en la escala de habilidades sociales que el grupo de niños con TEA. Los maestros indicaron una falta de conocimiento y dificultades en el manejo de comportamientos en ambos grupos de niños. Se concluye que, aunque los niños preescolares se encuentren en fase de desarrollo, las propuestas de intervención temprana pueden resultar en acciones positivas para ellos. Tales acciones provienen de la promoción y formación de profesionales de la escuela y en alianza con el campo educativo.*

PALABRAS CLAVE: *Educatión especial. Habilidades sociales. Problemas de comportamiento. Niños en edad preescolar.*

Introduction

In childhood, having a good repertoire of Social Skills (HS) is of great importance for the establishment of healthier and more harmonious interpersonal relationships, promoting better adaptability to the different contexts of the child's life, according to social and cultural norms. For this reason, the theme is the focus of many scholars in the field of human development (ELLIOTT; BUSSE, 1991; ELLIOTT; GRESHAM, 1993). The term HS, according to Del Prette and Del Prette (2017), refers to a descriptive construct of social behaviors valued in a culture with a high probability of favorable results for the individual, his group and his community. According to the authors, as social behaviors, HS can be classified both by its topography and by functionality, that is, its effective function in a given situation

and for each phase of development (DEL PRETTE; DEL PRETTE, 2017). On the other hand, it is worth noting that deficits in HS can cause harm to the individual, negatively interfere in interpersonal relationships and also cause losses to psychological health (DEL PRETTE; DEL PRETTE, 2013).

Del Prette and Del Prette (2013) proposes a system with seven classes of HS considered as priorities in the interpersonal development of the child: self-control and emotional expressiveness; civility; empathy; assertiveness; the ability to make friends; solutions to interpersonal problems and; academic social skills. The authors add that HS can be learned throughout life and "the role of learning experiences, planned or not, in determining the interpersonal style that the child will develop and the possibilities of changing it is unquestionable" (DEL PRETTE; DEL PRETTE (2013), p. 51).

So, it is understood that formal educational contexts, such as school, for example, play a crucial role in the development, maintenance and improvement of children's social skills, particularly for preschool children with different developmental characteristics. Preschool is a privileged period of development, and some cognitive acquisitions such as perception, self-regulation capacity and memory are initially developed in this school phase and also function as indicators for parents and teachers in order to monitor the development of skills already acquired by children and also identify possible delays (MECCA; ANTONIO; MACEDO, 2012).

Although the delay in neuropsychomotor development may be a transitory condition and there is no consensual definition, in the Brazilian context the term is defined as "the non-progressive acquisition of motor and psycho-cognitive abilities in an orderly and sequential manner" (DORNELAS; DUARTE, DUARTE, MAGALHAES, 2015, p. 100).

Thus, within the school context, teachers are singular observers of behaviors emitted by their students (COSTA; WILLIAMS; CIA, 2012), whether if these are desirable or undesirable behaviors. They have access to privileged data on factors associated with the global development of their students, such as specific behavioral characteristics and those related to learning (VALLE, 2009).

However, teachers do not always have technical and scientific knowledge to identify and act when there are problems regarding the development of their students, especially when they involve some associated aspect, as in the case of Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). ASD is a neurodevelopmental disorder, developmental deficits range from very specific limitations in learning or controlling executive functions, even causing global damage to social skills or intelligence (AMERICAN PSYCHIATRIC ASSOCIATION, 2014).

Smith and Tyler (2010) add that in ASD are found some prevalent behavioral characteristics, such as: repetitive activities, stereotyped movements and resistance to changes in daily routine. These characteristics can significantly affect verbal and non-verbal communication, social interaction and, thus, contribute to the increase of the condition of social vulnerability for children affected by the disorder (SMITH; TYLER, 2010). In addition, behavioral problems are part of the characteristic picture of ASD and affect the daily tasks of these individuals (AMERICAN PSYCHIATRIC ASSOCIATION, 2014), because, in addition to limiting the child's participation in educational activities, it interferes in social relations, and causes interactive restrictions in various contexts of the child's life (MATSON; MATSON; RIVET, 2007).

Among the behavioral problems, there are those of the externalizing and internalizing type. Externalizers, according to Achenbach (1991), are those that express themselves concerning other people and have common characteristics such as the difficulty of controlling impulses, hyperactivity, aggressiveness and the presence of anger or delinquency. Internalizing behaviors are behaviors that are expressed in relation to the individual himself and are characterized by sadness, social retracting and somatic complaints and fear (ACHENBACH, 1991; DEL PRETTE; DEL PRETTE, 2013).

Behavioral problems compete with socially expected and accepted behaviors, particularly in the school context, whose demands can be grouped, according to Del Prette and Del Prette (2013), into two main tasks: 1. Establish relationships of companionship with colleagues and; 2. Meet academic expectations. In this sense, it is relevant to have an investment in the theoretical-practical field of Social Skills in school, both for research and intervention, based on three arguments: "a) the social function of the school; b) evidence of relationship between social skills and academic performance and; c) inclusion policies" (DEL PRETTE; DEL PRETTE, 2013, p. 63). Social skills are also relevant because they are equivalent to behaviors that prevent behavior problems, providing the occurrence of positive and probable interactions of social refinement through parents and teachers (BOLSONI-SILVA *et al.*, 2006).

For this reason, studies that investigate the social skills of children who are in the initial process of education, especially those with some disorder or delay in their development, are considered of great relevance.

The study by Haven *et al.* (2013) investigated associations between the quality of parent-child interactions and the development of social skills in 42 children aged between three and six years, 21 with typical development and 21 with ASD. In this study, cohesion was evaluated, represented as a sense of closeness, which is demonstrated by the level of affection,

cordiality, comfort and concern among family members. The Behavioral Assessment System for Preschool and Elementary Children and teacher evaluation scale were used as data collection instrument. Statistical analyses indicated that greater emotional support from parents and greater cohesion in the parent-child relationship were positively associated with better social skills indexes among children, regardless of the groups.

It is noted that, although there are a number of disruptive behavioral characteristics associated with ASD, it is possible that interventions to improve the quality of parent-child interactions have a positive impact on the social abilities of children with ASD. However, the question of the evaluator of the behavioral repertoire of children should be considered because there are differences in relation to the evaluation of parents and teachers. The study by Thompson and Winsler (2018) aimed to verify the level of agreement between parents and teachers in the assessment of social skills and behavioral problems of preschool children (N = 256) with low-income ASD and ethnic diversity. The results indicated that the parents classified the children, in general, with a more positive perspective, that is, with repertoire of stronger socio-emotional skills and fewer behavioral problems compared to teachers, data also found in Costa, Williams and Cia (2012). On the other hand, evaluation by parents and teachers may be associated with the characteristics of the school environment, since the social skills and behavioral complaints of young children with autism are higher in the preschool environment compared to their homes (THOMPSON; WINSLER, 2018).

More generally involved groups of children with other disabilities, the study by Demirkaya and Bakkaloglu (2015) compared the quality of interpersonal relationships of children with and without special educational needs with their teachers. The researchers used the Student-Teacher Relationship Scale and a preschool behavior scale. The instruments were applied to 40 teachers and 108 children. The data, of the applied scale, were compared using the *Mann-Whitney* test, and the variables that predict the student-teacher relationships were analyzed using the statistical regression analysis. The results indicated that students with special educational needs presented more conflict and lower proximity to their teachers than their peers without special educational needs. In addition, students with disabilities had higher averages of behavior problems compared to students without disabilities, which justifies a higher rate of conflict and less proximity to their teachers.

In assessing the repertoire of social skills, behavioral problems and academic performance of students with special educational needs of elementary school, Rosin-Pinola and Del Prette (2007) identified that the students had deficient social and academic repertoire and high rates of behavior problems. These identified losses, in addition to compromising the

students' academic learning, interfered in aspects related to inclusion. The authors indicated the importance of providing training to teachers on aspects that involve the diversity of the school environment and the specific learning conditions of students with special educational needs (ROSIN-PINOLA; DEL PRETTE; DEL PRETTE, 2007).

Initial and continued training for teachers would be extremely important, since the school context can be an enabling environment and pre-school a favorable moment for the implementation of socio-emotional skills in childhood. According to Valle (2009): a) children better absorb this type of content at this stage of life; b) in preschool there are distinct possibilities of social interaction (child-child, child-teacher); and c) teachers can preemptively stimulate the development of social skills and prevent behavior problems.

Therefore, it is considered valid to analyze which aspects should be present in the behavioral repertoire of the preschool teacher so that he can intervene effectively in the academic and behavioral demands of his students with different developmental characteristics, in view of the social role of the school in promoting conditions for the acquisition of academic and social skills, and issuing socially competent responses by children (DEL PRETTE; DEL PRETTE, 2013). In addition, to understand how preschool teachers themselves assess their competencies to work with children with typical development and some type of disability, such as ASD, for example, to create affective bonds, manage disruptive behaviors in the classroom and meet the academic specificities of this audience.

Thus, it is hypothesized that teachers could evaluate children with ASD with higher rates of behavioral problems and lower repertoire of social skills, since the very characteristics of defining this group show deficits in interpersonal relationships. Moreover, it is considered here, as the literature has shown, that both the repertoire of social skills and the academic performance of students with some disability is more compromised and that the related teacher-student with these groups of children also suffers more losses.

Thus, this study aimed to: compare how teachers assess social skills and behavior problems of preschool children with developmental delay and children with ASD and; characterize self-assessment of teachers to perform academic activities and manage behaviors in preschool with children with and without disabilities.

Method

The project was forwarded to the Ethics and Research Committee with Human Beings and approved by CAEE No.: 74765817.1.0000.5504, following all procedures determined by Resolution 510/2016 (CNS, 2016).

The sample was composed of convenience and the research developed in two nearby cities, located in the southwest of Bahia. As inclusion criteria, it was necessary for the teacher to accept participation and to have in his classroom students with the characteristics in question and according to the definition adopted for development delay. Participants were 22 teachers of preschool children (4 - 6 years old) who had children with developmental delay (n = 13) or children with ASD (n = 09) participated in their classrooms. Regarding gender, the group of children with developmental delays consisted of eight boys and five girls, with a mean age of 48 months. The group of children with ASD consisted of nine boys and no girls, with a mean age of 47 months.

The age of the teachers ranged from 25 to 51 years with a mean of 39.3 years (SD = 8.83), all female. Most of the participants had a degree in Pedagogy, 75% of them with postgraduate degrees in courses such as Psychopedagogy, Specialized Educational Care and Early Childhood Education. The time of profession ranged from 4 to 29 years, with a mean of 17.5 years (SD = 9.36). Each participating teacher was the common classroom regent in which she studied a child with ASD or with delayed development. These children, in addition to attending the common room, were receiving specialized educational care in multifunctional resource rooms.

The research was authorized by the education department of each city and by the directors of each educational establishment, who agreed to contribute to the research, and mediated the teaching staff about the proposal. The teachers answered individually to the instrument and to the interview, at a previously scheduled time, at the school itself.

Data were obtained from the administration of the Social Behavior Scale of Preschoolers (PKBS-BR) and from an interview. The PKBS scale consists of an instrument for assessing social skills and problematic behaviors in preschoolers validated in Brazil by Dias *et al.* (2011). The answers of this instrument are obtained in two scales, and Scale 1 consists of 34 items and three factorial scores: F1 - Social Cooperation, with 13 items (α = 0.896); F2 - Social Independence with 11 items (α = 0.812); and F3 - Social Interaction, with eight items (α = 0.853). Scale 2, called Problematic Behaviors, has 42 items and two factorial scores: F1 - Externalizing Behaviors, with 24 items (α = 0.936), and; F2 - Internalizing behaviors, with 18

items (α = 0.867). Cronbach's *alpha values* mentioned above belong to the sample of this study, and for the overall score, a reliability value of α = 0.691 was found.

To conduct the interview, two "open" questions were asked to the teachers: a) How prepared they felt to plan, apply academic activities and manage behaviors of children with typical development; and b) How prepared they felt to plan, apply academic activities and manage behaviors of children with developmental delays or with ASD. For each question, the teachers made a quantitative evaluation, because they had to point a value on a scale from 0 to 10 and then present a justification for the answer.

The data obtained were computed in the statistical program called *Statistical Package for the Social Sciences* version 20.0. Descriptive statistical analyses of the data were performed. To compare the social skills and behavior problems of children with developmental delays and ASD, the student's t-test was performed. The data from the interviews were treated by content analysis (FRANCO, 2008). The answers obtained in the interview were evaluated by two judges with knowledge about Social Skills and previously trained for the emerging subcategories. The divergent responses among the judges were reevaluated and the discrepant answers were discarded.

Results and Discussions

Social skills and behavior problems of preschool children with developmental delay and children with ASD evaluated by teachers.

Table 1 presents the evaluation performed by teachers regarding the repertoire of social skills and behavior problems of preschool children with developmental delay and children with ASD.

Table 1 - Characterization of social skills and behavior problems of children with developmental delays and ASD, according to the teachers in the PKBS assessment

Overall Score - Variables		Score Variation	Groups	Mean (Standard Deviation)	t
Scale 1 Social Skills	Factor 1- Social Cooperation	0-39	DD	16,6 (6,5)	0,61 ns
			ASD	14,5 (7,6)	
	Factor 2 - Social Independence	0-33	DD	18,9 (5,2)	1,98*
			ASD	14,2 (5,8)	
	Factor 3 - Social Interaction	0-24	DD	11,2 (4,9)	1,0 ns
			ASD	9,3 (6,6)	
Scale 2 Problematic Behaviors	Factor 1 - Externalizing Behavior	0-72	DD	39,9 (15,9)	0,64 ns
			ASD	35,3 (13,0)	
		0-54	DD	26,1 (9,1)	0,72 ns

| Factor 2 - Internalizing Behavior | ASD | 29,3 (9,9) | |

Source: Prepared by the authors. * p<0.05; **p<0.01; p<0,001 ns: non-significant

Legend: DD - Development delay; ASD - Autism Spectrum Disorder

In general, it is noted that, in the evaluation of teachers, children with developmental delays presented higher mean values in social skills factors. However, for the scale of behavior problems, children with developmental delay presented higher mean values in the scale of externalizing behaviors and lower mean values in the scale of internalizing behavior problems.

According to the condition of ASD itself, it was expected that children belonging to this group presented a repertoire of social skills with lower mean values than the group of children with developmental delays. This data corroborates the study by Freitas and Del Prette (2014), which evaluates the repertoire of social skills of different groups of children with special educational needs of elementary school. The authors identified that the group of children with autism presented repertoires of social skills that were more deficient compared to the other groups.

However, it is noted that the group of children with delays in the development of the sample obtained a more negative evaluation in relation to externalizing behavior problems. They are probably children who have behavioral problems, who compete with adequate academic and socially appropriate behaviors (DEL PRETTE; DEL PRETTE, 2017). In addition, it has been frequenting the referral of children from preschool to specialized educational care who are not yet diagnosed, but who have a high frequency of behavior problems (GUERRA *et al.*, 2015). This issue should be the target of the attention of families and the school as a whole, since when the child is referred to this service, he ends up receiving an unnecessary "label" that can impair his development trajectory. Thus, if there were the knowledge that the issue is behavioral and if the family and the school were aware of behavioral management techniques, many referrals of this group of children to the resource room could be avoided.

When comparing between groups the repertoire of social skills and behavior problems of children with developmental delay and ASD, in the teachers' view, there were statistically significant differences only for Factor 2 of the Social Skills scale (Social Independence; $t = 1.98$; $p < 0.05$). That is, for most of the variables analyzed, children with developmental delays and ASD have very similar characteristics in relation to the repertoire of social skills and behavioral problems.

Although, it is worth noting that the group of children with developmental delays presented a behavioral repertoire related to social independence better than children with ASD,

since presenting developmental delay suggests that the child did not achieve proficiency in the execution of a series of skills that should have already achieved, considering the group of children of similar age. Nevertheless, it can be assumed that the difficulties of communication of children with ASD may have been a factor of weight for this result, since in preschool teachers expect children to use verbal commands to express their needs, such as going to the bathroom, in addition to expressing their moods and other issues.

In addition, it is also possible for children with ASD to present behaviors such as not doing the proposed activities, not following the verbal instructions of their teachers and all this being interpreted as a problem related to social independence itself. Marteleto *et al.* (2011) stress that language is an important resource for alternative solutions, especially negotiation. Because children need to develop skills that enable them to use behaviors that help them in social interaction and in the manifestation of their feelings and desires and, thus, can contribute to a good repertoire of social skills.

It would be interesting, through continuous and specific training, to offer complementary courses to teachers on the characteristics of ASD and on education procedures that would value exchanges between teacher-child and child-child. The literature has shown that such procedures are effective for children with ASD to obtain social independence and autonomy to develop cognitively (BOSA, 2006). In view of this, it is suggested that teachers in their relational exchanges with young children should offer a model of social behavior corresponding to the social rules and norms of their environment. Brás and Reis (2012) provide that, as an educational mediator, the teacher can enhance interactive exchanges of experiences and experiences in an environment that promotes the expression of opinion, feelings and emotions for children.

Self-assessment of teachers to perform academic activities and behavior management in preschool in students with and without disabilities

Table 2 presents the means and standard deviation of the participants' self-assessment regarding performing academic activities and handling behaviors in children with and without disabilities.

Table 2 - Self-assessment of teachers to perform academic activities and behavior management of children with and without disabilities

Self-assessment	Children with Typical Development M (D.P.)	Children with Disabilities M (D.P.)
Carry out academic activities	8,2 (1,37)	5,4 (1,65)
Handling behavior	7,75 (1,44)	6,42 (1,76)

Source: Prepared by the authors
Legend: M= mean; D.P.= standard deviation
Values: 0 to 10 (The teachers assigned a grade for themselves, which ranged from 0-10). N= 22 (teachers)

In the self-assessment of teachers, values of higher averages for the category "Performing academic activities" (Average = 8.2; D.P. = 1.37), followed by the category "Manage behaviors" of students with typical development (Average = 7.75; D.P. = 1.44). The results also suggest that, in general, these teachers have difficulties to perform academic activities with children with disabilities, and that they need more knowledge and/or specific skills to manage behaviors in the classroom with this group. Rosin-Pinola and Del Prette (2014) stress the need to provide advice to schools on relevant educational social skills to address the diversity of the school environment and the learning specificities of students with disabilities.

Additionally, it is likely that the quality of teacher-student interaction with disabilities may also be impaired, since, according to Demirkaya and Bakkaloglu (2015), students with special educational needs have more conflict and less proximity to their teachers than students with typical development. Consequently, students have fewer social skills of social independence and are more likely to engage in conflict.

In addition to this quantitative indicator, the application of the instrument also allowed the complementation of this information with qualitative data on participants' self-assessment regarding performing academic activities and handling behaviors in children with developmental delay and disabilities. These data concentrated information on the themes that arose about needs involving training to propose diversified methodologies to contemplate the

diversity of students and also techniques that involve behavioral management in the classroom and the need for continuing education. Table 1 below provides an overview of these data.

Table 1 - Needs pointed out by teachers to perform academic activities and behavior management of children with disabilities

Needs	Subcategory	Freq.	Illustrative Speech
Carry out academic activities	Specific continuing training on disabilities	11	"The degree does not give sufficient basis for special educational development"
	Propose diversified activities	04	"Constantly it is necessary to reinvent the contents and methodologies"
	History of life and learning of students	03	"It's very difficult for us teachers, it's not just the child (*with* disabilities), it's all their context"
	Support and collaborative teaching	02	"It is important to emphasize that it is necessary to help other professionals trained to work with the class teacher"
Handling behaviors	Knowledge to deal with indiscipline	04	"You need to learn more to know how to deal with situations of indiscipline"
	Creating affective bonds	03	"Sometimes they are just needy, in need of attention; and we don't see it."
	Manage behavioral crises	02	"There is no right way to deal with autistic student behavioral oscillations. Such as intervening correctly and at the right time"

Source: Prepared by the authors

It is evident, through the participants' statements, that these preschool teachers (N = 22) who are working with students with disabilities feel specific needs to know more about the deficiencies, their characteristics and how to teach academic content. They also understand the need for alternative methodologies to arouse the interest of students and to have a specialized teacher to work in partnership with them. Literature has shown that there are many benefits for students with disabilities (DAVID; CAPELLINI, 2014; SAINTS; MENDES, 2008; SILVA MENDES; GALVANI, 2017) and for students, in general, when establishing a successful partnership between a common class teacher and professor of Special Education (VILARONGA; Mendes, MENDES, ZERBATO, 2016). Furthermore, if the teacher regent feels supported by another professional to deal with these specific issues of disability, this can also contribute to reduce stress (LIMA *et al.*, 2016) and help with teachers' mental health issues (FERREIRA; OLIVEIRA; VANDENBERGHE, 2014; MENDO-LÁZARO *et al*., 2018). The need to act with issues that we do not know (e.g., not knowing how to teach a child with ASD) can generate anxiety and anguish in these professionals and even incur requests for leave of work for mental health issues.

For the aspects related to behavioral management, the main statements talked about the need to learn to deal with issues related to students' indiscipline and to identify the reason (the causes) of their problematic behaviors, as we saw in the teacher's statement below: "*sometimes*

they are just needy, in need of attention and we do not see ". In an intervention research to evaluate the effects of a program to teach teachers how to deal with child behavior problems, Costa (2010) identified that teachers had difficulty identifying whether the child's behavior problem was linked to the need for attention or the fact that she did not know how to behave differently. That is, they did not have positive models and did not know how to do differently, or even if the child behaves "badly" because it has positive consequences when acting like this (e.g., the child tans, screams and the teacher leaves her without doing the activities).

In addition to the need to learn how to deal with behavior problems, there are promising proposals for courses to teach social skills and educational social skills to teachers in general (CASALI, 2019; CINTRA; DEL PRETTE, 2019; ROSIN-PINOLA, *et al.*, 2017) and working with students with disabilities (LESSA, 2017; ROSIN-PINOLA; DEL PRETTE; DEL PRETTE, 2007). These initiatives have shown the importance of including this theme of the quality of interpersonal relationships in teacher training courses, since it is a model of behavior for its students and a multiplier of knowledge. There is also recognition of the importance of developing socio-emotional skills by children as part of the Early Childhood Education curriculum (BRASIL, 2018; COLAGROSSI; VASSIMON, 2017; COLPO; ZANON, ZANON, PEZZI, 2021; VALLE, 2009) that should be developed by the school.

Final considerations

Data from the repertoire of social skills and behavior problems of preschool children with developmental delays and ASD evaluated by their teachers showed that: a) the means of all social skills factors were below the reference mean of the instrument, regardless of the group of children; b) externalizing behavior problems were slightly above average for both groups. There were statistically significant differences (of low magnitude) in the social independence factor of the social skills scale, and the group of children with the autistic spectrum considered to have more difficulties in this regard.

It is important to point out that children in preschool are still in the development phase, and that the early intervention work needed by groups of children with developmental delays and with some disability can produce very positive results in the developmental trajectory of these children. However, investments are needed in the promotion and training of professionals who work at school or in partnership with the school.

The teachers' self-assessment data on knowledge and safety to develop academic activities and manage behaviors in the classroom revealed that teachers find it more difficult to

work with a group of children with disabilities than with children with typical development, in both categories. They also indicated the need to receive specific training on disabilities, how to develop activities that maintain the attention and interest of students with disabilities, and how to deal with problems of indiscipline of these students in the classroom.

A limitation of the study was the sample size that does not represent a significant number of teachers in the municipalities and, consequently, which prevented the generalization of the results. No longer, the instrument used was validated for children with typical development and not children with developmental delays and ASD. In addition, it is a reporting instrument that was evaluated by a single informant (teachers). It is suggested, therefore, that an evaluation with a larger sample of children made by multiple informants could offer support for new interpretations and, thus, enrich the data collected by the study.

Finally, it is noteworthy that these data are relevant for the reflection on how to conduct continuing education and in-service training courses, especially for these teachers who are working with children with disabilities and point out specific training needs.

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