

# Youth Protagonism: Promoting a Culture of Peace at School Through Socio-Emotional Development

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## ABSTRACT

Numerous situations in schools highlight the urgency of work focused on socio-emotional development. Educational institutions should incorporate subjects into their curriculum that promote a culture of peace. Schools should serve as collective environments for practicing dialogue and respecting for diversity. Method: a teamwork strategy was structured to help students learn respectful coexistence and to develop conflict-solving skills among peers. This doctoral research employed a qualitative-quantitative approach, using the case study method to understand the importance of such school project. Preliminary results: this study elucidates the needs of adolescents and describes how teamwork can effectively teach peer conviviality and social skills. The final analysis of the thesis is ongoing but contributes to the argument for socio-emotional development in schools. It highlights the need to implement student training projects that promote youth leadership, conflict resolution, and a culture of peace. After the implementation of the help teams, 59% of the students recognized that the school has student teams to help resolve peer conflicts. Additionally, some students who had social difficulties increased their engagement at school throughout the project.

## 1. Introduction

Outraged by the way some teenagers interact with each other, particularly by the lack of humanity in some relationships, I decided to study the school coexistence, especially during adolescence. Thus, my doctoral research aims to establish support teams in a school, among students from 6th to 9th grade, with the objective of developing socio-emotional skills. This process involves a set of social, emotional and behavioral skills, enabling students to use the accumulated knowledge to resolve conflicts and exercise their leadership roles in favor of ethical coexistence at school.

Understanding the importance of these support teams in developing emotional skills and the potential changes in relationships between students, as well as their perception of the school's role in resolving conflicts, are key research objectives. We must ask ourselves some important questions, which are also my doctoral research questions, Does the implementation of support teams imply:

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- 1) The perception by the students of being protagonists in a space to discuss coexistence problems?
- 2) The formation of autonomous young people who can act to deal with conflicts through peer mediation?
- 3) The perception of the student protagonist regarding a positive school climate?

Alongside partially addressing these questions at the end of the research data analysis process, which is expected to conclude in early 2025, this article aims to provoke reflections on the development of new narratives throughout the process.

## **2. The role of education and the culture of peace and non-violence**

This paper starts by providing an overview of the role of education in socio-emotional development, including key documents that support this mission. It also covers the history leading to the establishment of a culture of peace and non-violence in the researched school, the implementation of support teams and youth leadership, followed by the methodological framework, the discussion of results and the conclusion.

When problems and difficulties arise in student interactions, schools often focus on controlling or preventing conflicts. However, it is more effective for schools to develop strategies that promote the well-being of their students, rather than merely addressing conflicts (Vinha et al., 2017).

It is important to clarify various educational documents related to student education and the promotion of a culture of peace within the school environment. From 2001 to 2010, the United Nations General Assembly established the International Decade for a Culture of Peace and Non-Violence for the Children of the World (Noieto, 2008), which aimed to emphasize the promotion of respect for life and human dignity as core elements of a culture of peace and non-violence and highlighted the role of education in integrating these values into educational institutions.

Law No. 13.663 (2018) was incorporated into the National Education Guidelines and Bases Law (LDB – No. 9.394/96), to include, among the duties of educational establishments, the implementation of measures to raise awareness, prevent and combat all types of violence, with a focus on bullying and the promotion of a culture of peace. Additionally, Law No. 14.811 (2024) was published in Brazil, which incorporates the crimes of systematic intimidation (bullying) and virtual systematic intimidation (cyberbullying) into the Brazilian Penal Code. However, like Anti-Bullying Law No. 13.185 (2015), Law No. 13.663 (2018) does not specify the actions schools should take to combat and prevent bullying beyond implementing awareness campaigns.

Despite efforts, the culture of peace and non-violence remains far from widespread in our society. Instead, violence is deeply ingrained in our culture, thoughts and attitudes, influencing our daily behavior. As Diskin and Roizman (2021, p. 20) note, “Violence has become a daily reality in schools [...]. One of the most challenging tasks for schools is to implement a culture of peace in the school environment”.

Based on this approach, schools must integrate the learning of socio-emotional skills into the curriculum and invest in actions that promote well-being and a culture of peace (Martínez, 2018).

## **3. The narrative and the context that led to an awareness of the culture of peace**

In the school environment, there are countless life histories. Many life experiences are happy,

while others are marked by episodes of sadness and pain. Therefore, education focused on self-awareness, empathy and respect can bring benefits to students who are often victims of painful narratives that cause suffering and trauma in their interpersonal relationships.

Social relationships occur within cultural diversity. Each human being has their own histories, thoughts, beliefs, and cultures. In this context, the development of a culture of peace and non-violence aims to foster assertive communication, recognizing that words can negatively impact the quality of human relationships.

The boomerang is a toy made of hard, curved wood that returns to the thrower's hands after being launched. The word "boomerang" was the theme of a narrative where a classmate asked another, "What is the difference between your father and a boomerang?" The questioner himself then answered, "The boomerang comes back".

This question was asked to a student whose life history was marked by a terrible car accident that resulted in the death of his father. The words spoken by the offender extended beyond the school walls and deeply affected the victim's family, who were outraged by the offender's lack of humanity.

Given this reality, we must consider the kind of school environment we want to create, because, unfortunately, the situation described is far from an isolated incident. There are ways to reduce the number of students impacted by harmful narratives. Exclusion, mistreatment, and threats often plague students, who, out of fear of retaliation, may hesitate to seek help.

Considering this, assertive communication should be taught in schools just like Algebra, because while Algebra equips us to solve problems, assertive communication helps us avoid creating them. Teaching mathematics or any other subject is different from teaching us to understand one another. Educating for human understanding is the spiritual mission of education, serving as both a guarantee and a foundation for the intellectual and moral development of humanity. Understanding can prevent judgment, "[...] if we learn to understand before condemning, we will be on the path to humanizing human relations" (Morin, 2000, p. 100).

Just as wars sever bonds between nations, harmful narratives can also incite conflict by devastating lives poisoning the soul and, in some cases, leading to a form of death while one is still physically alive. According to Galtung (1969/1985), psychological violence inflicts suffering comparable to that caused by physical violence.

Difficulties in getting along often arise when we become intolerant of others' viewpoints, engaging in arguments or even resorting to violence to resolve conflicts. In our haste to address the problem, we act impulsively, harming others with words, gestures and attitudes, which can lead to fights and wars. Our goal is to break this cycle of violence (Diskin & Roizman, 2021).

In a community divided into isolated groups, diversity can become a source of discrimination. However, if the community recognizes the interdependence of human relationships, diversity can enrich it. The outcome will be a society free from prejudice, composed of individuals who share ideas and foster reciprocal relationships (Capra, 2006).

In other words, education is essential for shaping attitudes and values that promote a culture of peace and non-violence among students and throughout the school environment. To address this context, we can rely on the National Common Curriculum Base (BNCC, 2018) and on theorists who emphasize the importance of enriching relationships, human interactions and youth protagonism.

The National Common Curriculum Base (BNCC, 2018) outlines ten competencies to be

developed throughout Basic Education, integrating the acquisition of knowledge, skills and the formation of attitudes and values. Notably, socio-emotional competencies highlighted by the BNCC (2018) are designed to guide young people's practical learning and enhance the skills they use daily in their social interactions. This document advocates for skills such as empathy, dialogue, conflict resolution and cooperation, which foster positive interactions, respect for others and adherence to human rights without prejudice.

Learning to coexist is an essential part of any educational process. Education, both within the family and in formal settings, plays a crucial role in teaching individuals to adhere to societal rules and values. Therefore, we must consider what kind of communal experience we wish to cultivate and prepare students for.

Developing socio-emotional skills involves recognizing that socio-moral values are deeply intertwined with this area of knowledge. These values such as justice, respect, honesty and solidarity are universally desirable and can be cultivated through intentional, systematic and planned actions within the teaching and learning process.

In teaching values, school education must emphasize dialogue, the development of empathy, cooperation and conflict resolution. These competencies, outlined by the BNCC (2018), aim to prepare students to solve problems, work collaboratively, express their opinions and respect others.

Given this context, educational work with emotions can be seen as a process of developing skills across social, emotional and behavioral domains. One effective strategy for preventing discomfort in the academic environment is fostering teamwork.

Encouraging teamwork can instill in students a sense of cooperation, empathy, and agency. This involves having the "[...] ability to act within a specific context and the strength to transform it according to their values and needs, in an active and participatory manner" (Feijó, 2008, p. 12).

Focusing on skills related to emotional education is crucial for promoting students' independent thinking and potential, which can reduce interpersonal conflicts and create a positive academic atmosphere, thereby enhancing the teaching and learning process. Therefore, schools should be environments where moral values are analyzed and studied, rather than merely imposed or followed (Vinha et al., 2017).

In line with this assumption, Martínez (2018) describes the school environment as an ideal setting for structured systems of peer participation and support. These systems enable individuals to manage social interactions effectively and assist their peers in resolving conflicts.

When the school becomes a welcoming space that allows students to address practical problems and actively participate in the school context, it fosters youth protagonism. This involvement is evident through students' active participation in classroom activities as well as cultural and collective initiatives. Students develop positively by building their identity and self-awareness with autonomy and commitment, feeling a sense of belonging and shared responsibility for the community's well-being (Diskin & Roizman, 2021).

Being a protagonist means actively engaging rather than merely observing. It involves having the autonomy to make informed choices, expressing oneself, and having a voice. Students' voices should be heard in managing social interactions. Their leadership role must be acknowledged, and they should be entrusted with the responsibility of resolving conflicts among peers that arise within the school environment.

Discrimination, prejudice, and suffering are often more effectively addressed through the

support of peers than through adult involvement in the school environment (Tognetta, 2020). Therefore, helping others is a leadership act and an expression of love!

Adolescence, fraught with prejudices and stereotypes, is a period of significant changes that, depending on relationships and contexts, “can become a painful and distressing process for young people and their families” (Feijó, 2021, p. 13).

This phase is viewed as a complex period in human development, characterized by unique behaviors. “The intensity and richness experienced by and with today’s youth need to be understood and articulated with a focus on their capacities, resilience and opportunities for expression” (Feijó, 2021, p. 13).

The Child and Adolescent Statute – ECA (1990) defines adolescents as individuals between the ages of 12 and 18. While numerous scientific theories examine this age group, I will use the age range specified by the Statute to define the population for this work. However, it is important to note that educational institutions spanning from childhood to adulthood can also benefit from these resources in fostering a culture of peace and reducing structural violence.

The metaphor of the boomerang is used to discuss the narrative of a young person who offends. However, structural violence in educational institutions, which Galtung (1969/1985) describes as often silent and difficult to perceive like the air we breathe is also a boomerang. If the context does not foster dialogue about differences, it ultimately turns against those within it. People internalize these inequalities and violence, and, in turn, reproduce them in various ways.

Given its central role in education and its significant influence on students' actions and thoughts, the school must actively monitor and address the various forms of violence present in society. This ensures that schools do not become breeding grounds for violence and helps expand a culture of peace in a tangible way. In line with Morin (2005, p. 288), “[...] we mutually co-produce each other: individuals shape society, which, through culture, shapes individuals”.

School violence can indeed mirror societal violence, as school is where humanity intersects. Therefore, rather than focusing solely on individual academic learning, the educational institution should emphasize a model that prioritizes collectivity and the development of socio-emotional skills. However, as Morin (2015, p. 54) notes, the school “[...] teaches us to live only in a fragmented manner, falling short of its essential mission”.

Based on this premise, schools should focus on educating for emotions, as emotions and feelings play a crucial role in adolescents' engagement with culture and their understanding of their reality. Additionally, fostering conceptual thinking helps regulate how individuals experience, think, act, feel and express their emotions.

Learning to coexist and understand others begins with self-awareness and an understanding of the relationships between individuals establish with their environment. As noted by the Brazilian Ministry of Health (Ministério da Saúde, 2010, p. 8), “[...] life is not just what happens within each individual, but primarily what occurs between people, in the bonds they create, which shape them as agents who can affect and be affected”.

Morin (2007) argues that we are not taught about the human condition or how to understand one another. It is the mission of education to illuminate our roots and teach us to respect other cultures and our interdependence. As Morin (2005, p. 66) puts it, “To be a person is to be autonomous, while also being dependent. It is to be someone provisional”.

Therefore, a key aspect of our study is reflecting on the school's role in developing socio-emotional competencies, particularly in teaching students how to get along with others, foster

self-awareness, and manage their emotions.

In summary, it is within the collective environment of their peers that adolescents could develop and establish themselves as individuals. A project that encourages managing social interactions and embracing positive values and social competencies enables students to interact constructively with each other and themselves. This helps them learn to handle their emotions without subjecting their peers to hurtful narratives that can cause suffering and trauma in their relationships.

#### **4. Seeking collective solutions in the school**

It is important to emphasize that schools should become democratic and inclusive without losing their purpose, which includes teaching boundaries and respect. In addition to pedagogical work, it is important to consider student experiences, which also contribute to education. Certainly, "[...] the development of personality, in its intellectual aspect, is inseparable from affective, social development and the moral relationships that constitute school life" (Piaget, 1975, p. 69).

In this context, learning to coexist should be taught in schools in light of the multicultural environment that enriches this setting. In fact, the school is an environment that requires educating students comprehensively, and learning to coexist is not only fundamental but also transversal to the educational intervention itself (Martínez, 2018).

This work needs to be integrated into lesson plans with socio-emotional content as part of the curriculum and the students' skills development. The educational institution should introduce organized peer support systems in its pedagogical work and provide students with positive values that will address the problems faced by students in a horizontal manner (Martínez, 2018).

The proposal for teamwork can strengthen friendship bonds, promote a space where students hear opinions different from their own, deal with cultural diversity, cope with adversity and develop a sense of belonging. This requires group work and the development of socio-emotional competencies, which are essential given the challenging reality in which our youth are immersed.

The implementation of Help Teams can assist us in this process. It consists of a peer support system, legitimized by the school and supervised by adults. The goal is to manage coexistence and assist in resolving coexistence conflicts within the school (Martínez, 2018).

Students trained for Help Teams handle school issues such as isolation, exclusion, shyness, intimidation, and conflicts between peers. The implementation of Help Teams in a school includes the development of socio-emotional competencies and requires training, which is divided into three parts: mobilizing students, training the teams and monitoring the work. This training can be provided and supervised by the school's teachers, developing a repertoire of social skills such as active listening, teamwork, managing interpersonal conflicts, group decision-making, and discussing coexistence (Martínez, 2018). The premise of this training, in addition to developing socio-emotional skills, is youth leadership and peaceful coexistence among students (Tognetta, 2020).

#### **5. Method and participants**

The implementation of Help Teams in the researched school was adapted from the book "Passo a passo da implementação de um sistema de apoio entre iguais: As Equipes de Ajuda" (Tognetta, 2020).

The work was based on a qualitative-quantitative approach, using the methodological strategy of a case study. The field research was conducted in a private school, with students from 6th to 9th grade.

The Help Team project in the research school began in 2023, meetings occurred once a week and the training was divided into three phases, 1) Preparatory tutoring actions to choose the members of the Help Teams; 2) Training the students of the Help Teams; 3) Monitoring the Help Teams (Tognetta, 2020).

The purpose of the tutoring classes (first phase) is to encourage students to understand cooperation between peers to prevent and act against bullying at school, as well as to discuss fair coexistence in the school environment. The actions undertaken in the tutoring classes ranged from understanding the moral values we would like to have in the school to understanding the phenomena of bullying and cyberbullying (Tognetta, 2020). The materials used in this phase include videos, stories, games, among other resources, which are available in the book mentioned above. At the end of this phase, the students who expressed a desire to participate in the training classes did so.

The activities included in the implementation and training classes for the members of the Help Teams (second phase) involved role-playing activities, discussions of moral dilemmas, the stages of help, ways of approaching a conflict, feelings and their meanings and assertive communication. Many students who participated in the training of the Help Teams expressed a desire to take on a leading role, in other words, the desire to be a protagonist. In this regard, we provided the opportunity for youth leadership based on the criterion of voluntariness. All the resources used in this phase are available in the book.

The monitoring of the Help Teams (third phase) has occurred every 15 days and consisted of meetings where the protagonists have shared the situations they encountered at school and discussed with the group, along with the school administrators, the most assertive way to function as protagonists in solving such situations.

## **6. Results**

In this part, results are categorized into two parts. Part one, before the implementation of the Help Teams, the students' perception was that the school did not have trained students to help their peers resolve conflicts. Part two, after the implementation of the Help Teams, results revealed that the students perceived that the school had trained students to help their peers resolve conflicts, the students had a slight increase in confidence in their peers and the students realized the benefits of being a protagonist in a place where coexistence is discussed.

### **6.1. Students' perceptions about help teams and their relationship before the implementation of the help teams**

As previously mentioned, this is an ongoing doctoral research and preliminary results are already visible in the result of a social relations and coexistence questionnaire applied before the implementation of the Help Teams at the school studied. Out of 292 students, 221 answered the questionnaire.

The question below asked the students if the school had student teams trained to help resolve conflicts between peers. Survey data showed that ninety percent of the students answered that the school did not have student teams trained to help resolve conflicts between peers.

21 - Does the school have help teams made up of students to help resolve conflicts between classmates?

221 ANSWERS

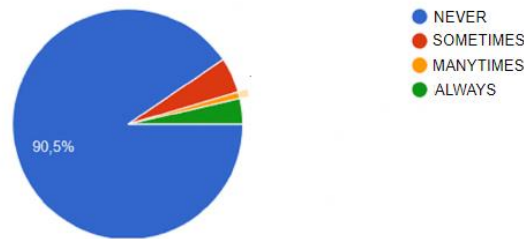


Figure 1. Students' perception of the school having support teams trained to help resolve conflicts between peers. Source: Doctoral research in progress

The other question below asked students if they trusted a friend and asked him for help in case of conflict.” Survey data showed that a third of the students said they did not trust their peers to help resolve a conflict.

25 - Do students trust me and come to me for help when they get into a fight or have a disagreement with their classmates?

221 ANSWERS

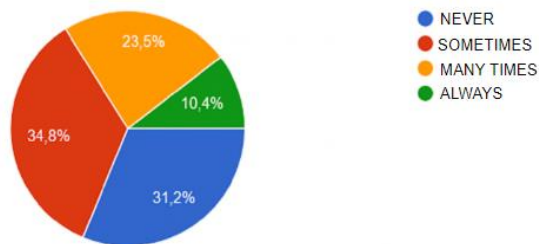


Figure 2. Students' sense of trust in their peers. Source: Doctoral research in progress

The same outcome was perceived during the questionnaire application, in which the students commented on the issues, “I’m afraid to answer that because you see what you do”. “There could be a Help Team here”. “I feel sorry because I’ve already done what you’re asking”. “Tense, either you have done it yourself or you have experienced it”. “I regret not having noticed someone suffering”. “I feel like I’m helping someone or changing an environment”. “I feel comfortable answering because I think this type of research is important, especially in schools”.

During the discussion of the social relations and coexistence questionnaire results, there were touching comments from the students, “Many people are happy at school, but from the answers there are a number of people who don’t feel well and aren’t happy”. “The results were good, but we can improve this so that everyone is well.” “I think it is good to ask a friend for help”. “People think that verbal abuse is less violent, but it hurts and happens more often”. “Most of them are happy at school, but there are some who are unhappy and that matters”. “There are people who do not welcome others because they do not know how to”. “Sometimes we don’t ask a friend for help because we’re embarrassed or afraid”. “Sometimes our classmate is sad and needing support, but we don’t realize it”.



## 6.2. Students' perceptions about help teams and their relationship after the implementation of help teams and youth protagonism

The social relations and coexistence questionnaire was reapplied six months after the implementation of the Help Teams. Out of 292 students, 225 answered the questionnaire. The most interesting result was from the question below that asked if the school had student teams trained to help resolve conflicts between peers. Survey data showed that fifty-nine percent of the students answered that the school had student teams trained to help resolve conflicts between peers.

21 - Does the school have help teams made up of students to help resolve conflicts between classmates?

225 ANSWERS

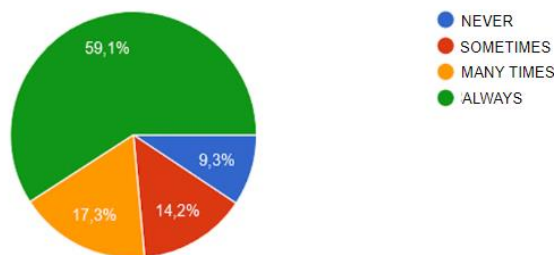


Figure 3. Students' perception of the school having support teams trained to help resolve conflicts between peers. Source: Doctoral research in progress

The other question below asked students if they trusted a friend and asked him for help in case of conflict.” Survey data showed the students had a slight increase in confidence in their peers compared to the result before the implementation of Help Teams.

25 - Do students trust me and come to me for help in situations where they get into fights or disagreements with their classmates?

225 ANSWERS

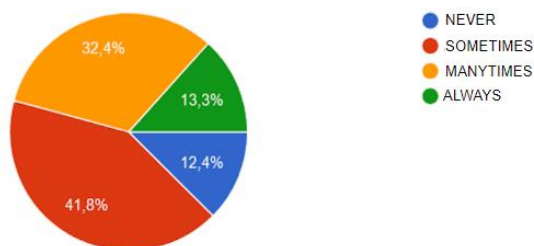


Figure 4. Students' sense of trust in their peers. Source: Doctoral research in progress

In relation to youth protagonism, a protagonist's perception was reflected in interview as he said,

I believe it is a privilege for a student protagonist to learn to coexist in both society and school. In the Help Team classes, we can discuss the problems and try to solve them. In the support team classes, we discuss problems and try to solve them. I think that coexistence at school and the experiences we have while studying improve significantly. I noticed that when there is a problem, it is easier for the support team to resolve it. I think that coexistence at school has improved considerably because there are many more trained people to help classmates who need assistance. I think Help Teams work (9<sup>th</sup> grade student).

## **7. Discussion**

The discussion of the results to date takes into account the research questions: The implementation of Help Teams implies, 1) The perception by the students of being protagonists in a space to discuss coexistence problems? 2) The formation of autonomous young people who can act to deal with conflicts through peer mediation? 3) The perception of the student protagonist regarding a positive school climate?

Through the students' narratives while answering the questionnaire, it was observed that they care about others' feelings, and they reveal concerns about their behavior towards their peers. The moment of applying the questionnaire led students to reflect on themselves, which we can observe as the development of self-awareness. They saw themselves in the questions. The questionnaire, itself, can serve as a tool for self-knowledge. The construction of knowledge develops internally and then externally. Thus, "The more questions the teacher asks, the more students will reflect on the object of knowledge, which in this case is the analysis of the coexistence problems faced by the group" (Tognetta, 2020, p. 96).

There are some students' comments that elucidate their feelings, "I'm afraid to answer that because you see what you do". In his response, he recognizes that he could have done something undesirable to his classmates. "There could be a Help Team here". This student highlights the importance of having a project that focuses on relationships in schools. "I feel sorry because I've already done what you're asking". His use of "I feel sorry" indicates regret for causing harm to someone and a desire to do things differently. To help someone, first and foremost, you need to be well, and we know how difficult this process can be. That's why self-awareness becomes so necessary. One of the school's missions is to humanize. Thus, "The problem of understanding becomes crucial for humans" (Morin, 2000, p. 93).

When a student is confronted with questions about interpersonal relationships and coexistence, they stop and reflect on themselves and their environment. It helps the student understand that their coexistence takes place in a collective space. "To know the human being is, first and foremost, to situate them in the universe and not separate them from it" (Morin, 2000, p. 47).

The students' narratives tell us a lot about themselves, "Tense, either you have done it yourself or you have experienced it". It is explicit here that at school they experience or suffer insults. "I regret not having noticed someone suffering". This comment clearly indicates a lack of skill in observing the surroundings and noticing cases of conflict among peers. "The human condition should be the essential subject of all teaching" (Noieto, 2008, p. 31).

The questionnaire awakened the sense of help, as can be seen in the students' speeches, "I feel like I'm helping someone or changing an environment". The sense of helping someone just by answering a questionnaire implies recognizing an environment that values socio-emotional development. "I feel comfortable answering because I think this type of research is important, especially in schools". He appreciates this type of work at school. It implies creating a school that looks beyond academic subjects. Socio-emotional development can help us to see our humanity. "Interrogating our human condition involves first questioning our position in the world" (Morin, 2000, p. 47).

The same was observed during the discussion of the questionnaire results. Several students' comments showed concern about the school environment and their relationships, "Most of them are happy at school, but there are some who are unhappy and that matters". "Many results were good, but there is room for improvement". "I think it's better to ask a friend for help than an adult". "People believe that verbal aggression is less violent, but it also hurts and happens frequently". "Sometimes we don't ask a friend for help because we're embarrassed

or afraid". These strong testimonials show that interpersonal relationships need to be handled with care. "Teaching about understanding will be the foundation for developing a culture of peace." (Noleto, 2008, p. 32).

The students also emphasized, "Sometimes our classmate is sad and needing support, but we don't realize it". "There are people who do not welcome others because they do not know how to". It is the school's role to develop socio-emotional skills; we need to learn to understand each other for the sake of a healthy and harmonious environment. "Educating to understand mathematics or a particular discipline is one thing; educating for human understanding is another" (Morin, 2000, p. 93).

It is essential to emphasize the student's perception when he realized that the school had a support team. When we compare figure 1 to figure 3, it was clear that the students recognized that there were trained students available to help. It is important to highlight that the same questionnaire was reapplied six months after the implementation of the Help Teams.

I will tell a case of youth leadership to support the students' perception of recognizing the Help Teams. The protagonists, themselves, witnessed peers mocking a student who was required to undergo academic recovery. Through dialogue, they immediately warned their peers not to do that. Next, they created a method for calling students to recovery in a private manner, meaning that the student would receive their recovery notice privately. Youth leadership fosters entrepreneurship and the creation of innovative solutions within the school environment. "Participation suggests mobilization: having a voice and a guaranteed space in the decision-making system in different spheres, aiming for an active place in the production" (Noleto, 2008, p. 44).

The leaders planted a seed that will serve as an example in the formation of their successors. "The implementation of this form of youth protagonism deals with the need to create groups of students in schools who are trained to act collaboratively, observing, helping and preventing problems" (Tognetta, 2020, p. 203).

Another important result occurs when we compare figure 2 to figure 4, survey data showed the students had a slight increase in the sense of trust in their peers compared to the result before the implementation of Help Teams. This could lead to a significant increase over the course of this process. The key to achieving this lies in training students who know how to assist their peers with respect, wisdom, and discretion. "Trusting relationships will be built over time and with the experiences of the members of the Help Team and the community" (Tognetta, 2020, p. 190).

An important result was reported by the leader (9<sup>th</sup> grade student) during the interview, he recognized it as a privilege to be a member of the Help Teams. He mentioned learning to coexist not only in school but also in society. Learn to coexist happens when the mobilization of all socio-emotional skills involved in the learning process "[...] can be understood in the personal realm: the student who knows, applies themselves in projects, solves problems, evaluates and creates" (Martínez, 2018, p. 350).

The interviewed leader added that during the process, they discussed and tried to solve problems. The use of "we can discuss problems" indicates his perception in a space for sharing coexistence issues. Thus, "Discussing coexistence issues, learning more effective ways to resolve conflicts, and having space for sharing anxieties, sadness, and concerns are responsibilities of today's school curriculum" (Tognetta, 2020, p. 28).

The interviewed leader also said, "When there is a problem, it's easier for the Help Team to solve it." It is clear that the student learned to discuss coexistence issues and has a trained group to resolve them. It is important to note that the Help Teams are made up of students

from 6th to 9th grade. “Students should be the protagonists of their performance. They should be given space. They cannot be the problem, but part of their solution. The most effective and direct part” (Martínez, 2013, p. 56).

When the interviewed leader said, “I believe that school coexistence has improved considerably because there are many more trained individuals available to assist classmates who need help. I think Help Teams work”. He recognized an improvement in relationships and admitted that this is due to the development of socio-emotional skills that the school provided to the students. This could lead to an improvement in the school climate. It's known that school climate “Influences the school dynamics, which in turn is influenced by it, and thus, it impacts the quality of life and the quality of the teaching and learning process” (Vinha et al., 2017, p. 51-52).

We believe that we are just at the beginning and that greater results will be achieved throughout the process. The research results analyzed to date reinforce the urgency of focus on socio-emotional development in schools, which should aim for the implementation of a culture of peace in the curriculum. Practices of discussing peer coexistence and respecting adversity respond to addressing pain or suffering present in schools. Help Teams function as a strategy that can assist students in coexisting in a healthier, fairer, and more harmonious environment.

## **8. Conclusion**

The benefits that this system can bring to participating students range from recognizing the advantages gained from learning socio-emotional skills for their own lives to a sense of belonging in their educational environment and within the workgroup (Martínez, 2018).

From this perspective, it is an important project for improving coexistence among peers and for the individual student, who develops self-awareness, confidence in interacting within their group, and overall physical and mental health. This enables a positive impact on the school climate. “[...] 84% say that being part of a Help Team has changed their way of thinking, acting and analyzing situations [...]” (Martínez, 2013, p. 212).

Thus, the implementation of Help Teams becomes a resource in building a culture of peace and non-violence in schools, in developing socio-emotional skills, and in fostering youth leadership. Learning from this perspective would transform the school, the family, and the social context. The importance of engagement among adolescents and support from educators for their social development was considered essential in the practice of this project (Martínez, 2013).

The results so far show that students are engaged in this type of intervention, react positively to this learning, and develop personally. Although preliminary, the results are robust and alert us to the importance of embedding a culture of peace in the teaching process. Recent findings highlight the impact that a hostile school environment has on students. There are laws to ensure a fair, harmonious, and healthy environment; however, researches point to the urgency of incorporating the development of socio-emotional skills into the school curriculum.

Therefore, incorporating training that encompasses learning based on ethical interactions among students, human development and youth leadership will provide students with the conditions they need to transform their environment and take care of themselves, reducing their vulnerability associated with their age group.

Basic education, anchored in the implementation of a culture of peace through group work, will be able to ensure that this boomerang returns to the hands of adolescents as if they were

in a healthy game, improving interpersonal relationships and, consequently, the intellectual and psychological dimensions of our adolescents.

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