

INVESTING IN SOCIO-EMOTIONAL SKILLS DURING EARLY CHILDHOOD TO ACHIEVE CAPABILITIES AND FIGHT POVERTY: OVERCOMING SOCIOECONOMIC VULNERABILITIES IN BRAZIL THROUGH CRIANÇA FELIZ

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Abstract

This paper aims to discuss early childhood social-emotional development to achieve capabilities and reduce poverty and inequality. Social-emotional skills provide the necessary cognitive tools to support individuals during choices and decisions that will affect socioeconomic status. Therefore, the connection between the socio-emotional skills approach and the capabilities must be established. When developed and mastered, social-emotional skills improve opportunities and promote new capabilities to achieve desirable results (capabilities to function). If this development starts during early childhood, it ensures the right to exercise agency power, improving future economic results. For that reason, developing these skills in disadvantaged populations is a necessary condition to promote freedom and equality of opportunity, ensuring inclusive socio-economic development. The goals of "Programa Criança Feliz" (PCF), an early childhood social-emotional development program for disadvantaged children launched in October 2016 in Brazil, are analyzed in this paper through the connection between socio-emotional skills and the capabilities approach. This program integrates public policies that reduce the weakness of will and provide skills to overcome socioeconomic vulnerabilities in Brazil. Therefore, this paper contributes through the analysis of PCF, and the connection of the development of socio-emotional skills during early childhood to achieve capabilities and fight poverty.

Keywords: Socio-emotional skills; Capabilities Approach; Early Child Development; Criança Feliz; Poverty.

I. THE DEVELOPMENT OF SOCIO-EMOTIONAL SKILLS TO OVERCOME SOCIOECONOMIC BARRIERS

Socio-emotional skills are necessary tools to perform the basic functions of life in society. Through their development, individuals can overcome difficulties, define goals, develop new capabilities, and achieve results that will generate a diverse collection of internal motivational tools. For that reason, promoting the development of these skills is more than a political economy strategy: it is a way of developing the collective

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structure of society and promoting socioeconomic inclusion. For example, as a public policy strategy, socio-emotional skills can become a tool for helping individuals and communities in vulnerable conditions achieve previously unattainable opportunities to bring them closer to overcoming socioeconomic difficulties. Consequently, the development of socio-emotional skills can promote the reduction of poverty.

When we connect the figure of purely rational and maximizer Economic individuals with complete information set to make optimal choices together with the understanding of their different behaviors in society, it is possible to realize that non-cognitive aspects are as relevant as purely cognitive ones. This means that this relation makes up an idea of a Homo "Emotional" Economicus, which means individuals who consider their emotions as relevant and use them to make Economic decisions.

Through this mindset of Economic individuals, socio-emotional skills would be composed of both non-cognitive and cognitive aspects, making them not only influenced by emotions but also partly composed by them. Through the lens of bounded rationality, emotions are essential to developing the connection between external and internal decision-making environments (Bechara and Damasio, 2005). That is, the manner to develop emotions is directly dependent on the possibility of achieving the Economic results necessary to overcome situations of socioeconomic vulnerability.

In this perception, emotions are also crucial to understanding an individuals' behavior and decision-making process and the existence of motivational weaknesses factors, like weakness of will.¹ These weaknesses make some choices and decisions more difficult: individuals do not deliberately act against their best judgment but are unconsciously driven to act against their best intentions.² Indeed, poorly developed socio-emotional skills, resulting from the poor development of non-cognitive aspects, can promote restrictions of freedom and choice, making individuals less able to pursue specific goals, even if the options are available (Côté, 2020).³ In other words, we believe that the development of socio-emotional skills goes beyond the perception of having the opportunity to make choices: it is directly related to the capability to make them.

There are diverse ways to develop socio-emotional skills, but we choose to highlight and discuss the aspects related to one specific external influence: family interaction. Related to this perspective, Tim Kautz, James Heckman, Ron Diris, Baster Weel, and Lex Borghans (2014) suggest the existence of three fundamental social elements: first, the role of families and the external environment of society; second, the natural development of skills resulted from the necessities of life in society (e.g., adaptation, communication, and survival); and, finally, the development of new skills through pre-existing or developed ones. Based on the literature (e.g., Doyle et al., 2009; Kautz et al., 2014), we suggest that some periods are more critical and fundamental for developing these socio-emotional skills, which is the case of early childhood.⁴ During the period between zero and six years old, external aspects predominate over internal ones, making the development of individuals' capabilities fundamental due to the presence of positive externalities. Orla Doyle, Colm Harmon, James Heckman, and Richard Tremblay (2009) highlighted that the transmission of inequality factors, such as poverty, occurs during early childhood and results from the environment where individuals are inserted. In this sense, the absence of interventions and strategies during this period of life can be decisive for these inequality factors enduring forever.⁵

Although programs and public policies can coexist with similar purposes to the one provided by this article, such as programs to encourage school education, we understand that the degree of richness and efficiency is lower and present high implementation and maintenance costs. Strategically working, socio-emotional skills since

¹According to Nicolas Côté (2020), weakness of will represent an intentional change in action, resulting in a new decision contrary to the best initial individual judgment.

²Richard Holton (1999) proposes that although individuals had decidedly chosen A and begin the course of action with this predetermined direction, something unconsciously causes them to change their end in the middle of the road, and they ended up doing B.

³A matter of degree and not a bivalence of being or not available. In other words, the availability and opportunity of options does not necessarily imply that individuals will be able to accomplish them. Even if individuals can access opportunities and make decisions, they may not be able to fulfill them. The development of socio-emotional skills strengthens important aspects and characteristics resulting that, once the opportunities are available, individuals can be effectively able to perform them.

⁴Early childhood can be understood as the most receptive stage of human development. The reason, according to neuroscience, is that this the best period of brain's plasticity and malleability, resulting that negative externality can be more efficiently altered (Doyle et al., 2009). Some studies, for example, explore the necessity to work on the development of socio-emotional skills during the pregnancy period (Heckman and Masterov, 2007).

⁵The point is different from the idea that investing in socio-emotional skills on future periods does not produce positive results, but that these results can be better developed when they are worked during early childhood. Investments in adulthood ages should be ideally complementary to investments made during the first years of life. The development of socio-emotional skills from early childhood helps to compensate and overcome risks tasted during vulnerable situations, factors that compromise individual and collective capacities – such as poverty, socioeconomic inequality, lack of access to opportunities, nutritional deficiency, scholar inefficiency, lack of security, individual protection, and others. Negative socioeconomic externalities, such as teenage pregnancy, crime, low levels of education and unemployment, are some of the results of the difficulties to overcoming vulnerabilities from breeding environment.

early childhood are a useful tool to fill the gaps and costs of negative externalities promoted by socioeconomic vulnerabilities and have fewer costs, as will be addressed ahead. In other words, social-emotional skills enable individuals to improve and develop new capabilities, achieve, and realize opportunities that will help them break the bias promoted by their family's generational cycle of poverty – what we can call a "birth accident" (Heckman; Masterov, 2007).⁶ This perspective can promote social inclusion, reduce poverty and socioeconomic inequalities, and achieve inclusive socioeconomic development on a collective scale.

II. CAPABILITIES' ROLE IN COLLECTIVE AGENCY POWER

The capabilities approach is a comprehensive framework that aims to access the quality of life in different spaces, reflects on fundamental social justice, and highlights freedom to achieve well-being as an essential objective of development. The approach's key question to ask is "What is each person able to do and to be?", understanding "each person as an end" (Nussbaum, 2011, p.18), to emphasize the concern not only with average well-being but with the opportunities available to each person. The search for individuals' well-being and freedom is also a quest for social Justice, as their achievements can be thwarted by social circumstances that inhibit their choices. The virtues of life in society are subject to the free will of individuals and the collective availability and ability to achieve them. Social programs and public policies are directed at the search for the community's well-being, and they influence the achievement of individual results. Therefore, they are vital for ensuring this fundamental kind of justice.

Martha Nussbaum (2001, 2011), departing from the perspective of legal-moral-political philosophy, avenues a list of Central Capabilities, bearing in mind the human dignity requirements. Nussbaum's list stands on protecting central areas of freedom, which make life worthy of human dignity, the ones that individuals should have the right and freedom to achieve, elements that are fundamental for life in society.⁷ Ingrid Robeyns (2005; 2017) suggests understanding the capabilities approach as a tool for the analysis of individual and collective well-being, a framework for the analysis of public policies that promote the enhancement of individual's capabilities in society as a common organism. Although she does not have a theory related to justice aspects, we can understand that Robeyns also accommodates the debate on the search for justice by proposing the capabilities approach as an instrument for measuring poverty levels and socioeconomic inequality.

Another approach's concept is 'functioning', defined as "beings and doings", regarding the multiple states of human beings and various activities that such a person can undertake, so related to a person's ability to "be" or "do" in society. The functioning and the capability to function are dependent on the opportunities and possibilities of choice available (Sen, 1993). They reveal a set of values in life, such as working and studying, that relate to the constraints to free choice. The various alternative 'functionings' shape the capability set, which leads us to the central concept of capabilities (capacities + abilities) as the representation of real opportunities to achieve functioning. Robeyns (2005) makes us aware of the different definitions of capability. Still, to the best of our knowledge, all of them underpin the relevance of considering individual heterogeneity and social and economic constraints in choice opportunities.

Another perspective to distinguish functioning from the capability to function comes from Martha Nussbaum (2011). Nussbaum (2011, p.24) defines 'functionings' as "an active realization of one or more capabilities" or as "the beings and doings that are the outgrowths or realizations of capabilities". Bearing in mind that external social (and economic or cultural) circumstances and personal features influence the choice of the functioning or inhibit it, we realize two unfolding concepts: internal and combined capabilities.

The internal capabilities include personality traits, intellectual and emotional capacities, states of body, all of which are "states of a person". Despite being related to innate equipment, they are distinguished because the internal capabilities require training or developed traits and abilities shaped thru social, economic, familial interactions, therefore "not fixed, but fluid and dynamic" (Nussbaum, 2011, p.21). More complex and holding the internal capabilities are the combined capabilities, regarding the "substantial freedoms", the combination of

⁶Term used to express the heredity of vulnerability situations (its generational family transmission). This means that individuals do not choose to be in a situation of poverty, but already born in it.

⁷Among the topics of the list: right to life; body health; body integrity; freedom to feel, think and imagine; feel and express emotions; develop practical reason; affiliation; self-respect and the right to non-humiliation; right to play and study, and others. The joint union of these items results, also according to Nussbaum (2001), in three types of fundamental training. The first, which is called "basic", refers to the capacities inherent to individuals and necessary for the development of the most advanced capabilities – e.g., speech and reasoning. The second form of training is the "internal", responsible for more mature capacities such as freedom of expression and choice. Finally, recognition that even if individuals have the two previous capacities developed, they can also taste limitations to complete actions – such as the motivational weaknesses.

opportunities created by a "combination of personal abilities and the political, social, and economic environment". Internal capabilities are a concept closer to Heckman's understanding of "capabilities", like skills or potential for achievement (Nussbaum, 2011, p. 194).

To further understand functionings and capabilities we need to enhance how the approach explains the relationship between resources and the achievements related to beings and doings: the concept of conversion factors. According to Amartya Sen (1993), the conversion factors influence the means to achieve a purpose. These factors can be, for example, personal, social, or environmental. They can help individuals perform an action and cooperate in developing individual capabilities. The conversion factor could be understood as one's capacity to transform a resource into different functionings (Comim, 2021). Therefore, they are a valuable metric for social diagnostics, while the conversion process refers to how the conversion factors are combined to beget opportunities, i.e., combined capabilities.

The concepts we have marshaled so far indicate that discerning functionings, capabilities, or capability to function is not such an easy task. To reach the goals of this paper, we understand 'functionings' as achievements, a set of results, and capability to function as the potential to be achieved the role of potentialities to function, or the capabilities set that shapes one's capabilities. In addition, Nussbaum's concept of combined capabilities suggests that internal capabilities, even having an extensive range of capabilities to function, are not enough to have the opportunity to function. The conversion factors and the conversion process are necessary to understand how a society thwarts or promotes the development of capabilities and how to avoid deprivation and stimulate achievements and opportunities.

Our contribution relies upon the argument that the development of socio-emotional skills can enlarge the capabilities to function and, therefore, the capabilities set. The latter is part of the internal capabilities, promoting and enhancing the capabilities and driving individuals to achieve results, which will help them act intentionally, making opportunities available.

As Sen and Nussbaum usually do, let us illustrate the argument with a hypothetical situation. Joana is a vulnerable socioeconomic female who has cognitive skills to apply to an undergraduate course. From the general perspective of the capabilities approach, Joana would have the real opportunity to enter college and achieve the expected results if she could have economic conditions to support the fees and other costs during the course, social conditions to be motivated to study. Had she had all these conditions despite refusing access to an undergraduate course, her choice could have been a free one, and we could say she could have combined capabilities to choose. Unfortunately, even if Joana can apply and be successful at being a college student, it does not mean she will. She can just ignore this, not because she made a free choice, but because she could stop believing in herself. It is necessary to have a set of additional motivations that help people, such as Joana, not only in their choice and decision but in their effective action, surpassing, for example, their set of fear or weaknesses of will. It is important to have a set of capabilities to function that influence and develop her socio-emotional skills so that she rationalizes and understands the motivation for both entering college and effectively completing the course.

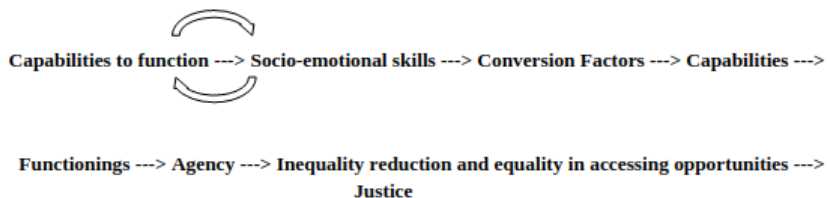
To better understand what we are pointing out, we figure out the process for the influence of conversion factors on the individuals' ability to "be" and "do", their functionings, providing the development of capabilities and, consequently, access to the opportunities. The following process is based on a general approach. Although we draw the process as a flow in line, we recognize the dynamics are not linear.

Conversion factors ---> Functionings ---> Capabilities to function ---> Equality in accessing opportunities

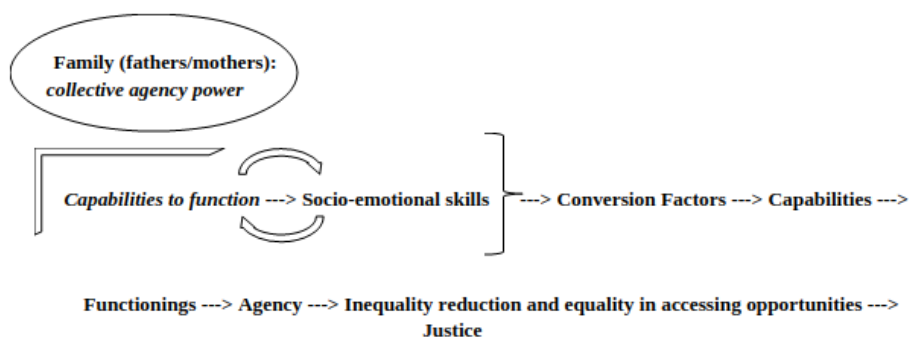
We now include the relation between the capabilities to function and the development of socio-emotional skills. This process influences the conversion factors (personal, social, and environmental), influencing the means necessary for individuals to act. In this way, the conversion factors cooperate in developing individual capacities (capabilities) required to overcome the barriers imposed by socioeconomic vulnerabilities and, in turn, achieve the expected results. In other words, by promoting the development of capabilities, the development of functionings, the individuals' ability to "be" and "do" is also influenced. Enabling individuals' ability to overcome their motivational weaknesses (weaknesses of will, in this case) and, given the equality of opportunities proposed by capabilities and functionings. Finally, we obtain the autonomy and freedom promoted by their agency power. In other words, only after developing their motivational capacities do individuals become able to act rationally, doing their best intention: making choices, making decisions, and achieving results. These are the interrelationships that we believe are necessary to promote agency power: the power to control the external aspects of life in a society that results from external collective influences and the development of its internal individual aspects.

Capabilities to function ---> Socio-emotional skills ---> Conversion factors ---> Capabilities ---> Functionings ---> Agency ---> Inequality reduction and equality in accessing opportunities ---> Justice

In addition to our argument, now we try to insert dynamics into the drawing process. The capabilities to function influence the development of socio-emotional skills, and socio-emotional skills influence the development of capabilities to function. Therefore, this process becomes a cycle of mutual development and improvement.



During early childhood, the initial step towards developing the proposed process starts from families' external influence (fathers and mothers). The exercise of parenting during the first years of life should be dedicated to stimulating the development of cognitive and non-cognitive (socio-emotional) abilities. Capabilities experienced in adulthood result from the capabilities experienced during childhood. In other words, the decision-making process and the individual agency power achieved in adulthood depend on the experience and reproduction of the collective behavior of families during childhood. We named it collective agency power.



Considering some important aspects such as the structure of society and individuals' collective capacity, the necessary means to achieve social justice through opportunities, capabilities, and freedom of choice and the strength of will (the opposite definition of weakness of will), one of the ways to achieved desirable and expected results arises from public policies focused specifically on similar strategies to the one proposed above. That is, public policies focused on developing socio-emotional skills are an essential means of achieving the capabilities necessary to break the generational cycle of poverty. Although, in principle, it does not start from the same motivations exposed throughout this article, a practical example of how these strategies work can be observed through the Programa Criança Feliz (PCF) in Brazil. The PCF is an early childhood development program awarded in 2019 by WISE (World Summit for Innovation for Education) to recognize its innovation, social contribution, adaptability, and scaling-up.

III. BRAZIL'S PROGRAMA CRIANÇA FELIZ

PCF was established in Brazil on October 5th, 2016, Decree No. 8,869, Law No. 13,257 of March 8th, 2016, and coordinated by the Ministry of Social and Agrarian Development (MDSA). Its goal is to address the inequities that prevent young, socio-economically vulnerable children (during early childhood) from achieving their full development potential. As a program, PCF was born because of the global scenario regarding the development of care during this specific age (ECD - Early Childhood Development), resulting from the UN (United Nations) Sustainable Development Goals, and presents an intersectoral public action to address the Legal Framework of Early Childhood through nutritional and psychosocial supplementations combined with national income distribution

programs, such as the "Programa Bolsa Família" (PBF). The primary strategy of the PCF is to expand understanding of the importance of family participation in child development. In this way, it becomes an important tool to address generational inequalities, vulnerabilities, and situations of poverty, guaranteeing children's rights and social justice.

According to the discussion presented in the previous sections, PCF unites the set of fundamental tools for the development of socio-emotional skills during early childhood through collective agency power, which means that the program aims at the development of children's skills through the development of their families' parenting skills. Given its initiatives, we can define that the main objectives of the program are: to support and guide families on the exercise of parenthood, strengthen family affective bonds, ensure home protection for the child's development; promote possibilities for the development of the child's basic competencies (e.g., memory and language); promote the development of socio-emotional and psychosocial skills; promote mechanisms to achieve individual agency power through the development of collective agency power; support women regarding their necessities to connecting with child's care; guide men regarding their responsibility and involvement in child's development; provide guidance and information regard access to public services (e.g., health and basic nutritional needs); become a safe source of information and communication between families and government.

The PCF procedure relies on trained regional volunteers. These volunteers are responsible for periodical visits to women during pregnancy and mothers under social vulnerability situations. Each municipality has a permanent unit of the National Unified Social Assistance System (SUAS), also called Social Assistance Reference Centers (CRAS). A representative supervisor is responsible for guiding up to 15 volunteers' home visits. Each of these visitors is responsible for monitoring up to 30 children or mothers still in the gestation phase through the training received.⁸ Looking through a more amplified lens, the program aims to promote the integration of other regional public policies such as education, health, and well-being – which is also promoted by the government's spheres through SUAS.

Already existing for six years, the results of statistics analyzed – developed using the data provided by 2021 "Balanço das ações de Desenvolvimento Social" – indicates that the program was implemented in 2.872 Brazilian municipalities, visiting 56 million houses, have at least 1.2 million children attended and more than 306,000 pregnant women. Based on the last review, at least 3.5 million children under the age of 3 years are from families that are also beneficiaries of PBF. PCF has recently scaled up to also include children with disabilities (Dos Santos, et al., 2020). According to the data, the reasons for the program's expansion are due to local government investment transfers to states and municipalities: around R\$ 860 million (approximately US\$172). Even with this considerable amount of investment, however, one of the main advantages of the program, together with its cascade structure, is its inexpensive costs providing scaling up's opportunities.

As the largest country in South America, Brazil has more than 210 million inhabitants distributed around its 5.570 municipalities spread over 26 states and Federal District. Between 2017 and 2018, approximately 37.5% of these inhabitants lived under financial and social vulnerabilities distributed by: blacks and browns representing 43.7% of the population, children from zero to fourteen years 46.6%, and households with the fifth-lowest monetary income per capita, 57% (IBGE, 2021). Primary education among the vulnerable population was composed of students also located inside the group with the fifth-lowest income. In fact, Brazil has an extreme inequality in public education compared to the private sector, offering little institutional support for early childhood and having school cycles starting only after early childhood. According to the data recently published by IBGE (2021), considering the effects of COVID-19 in addition to already precarious household conditions and teaching structure – infrastructure, basic technological access, and low investments – families and children under vulnerable situations also began to face the absence of institutional centers who had activities interrupted due to the severe global pandemic crisis. During all this pandemic and economically troubled scenario, and even with all necessary adaptation (e.g., remote care and monitoring and interaction through mobile messages), the PCF did not interrupt its activities and remained an essential point of support to vulnerable families, daily reaffirming its importance in socioeconomic development. The expansion of mobile phones' use and messages facilitated and favored its communication and adoption, as the study developed by Gabriela Buccini, Sonia Venancio, and Rafael Pérez-Escamilla (2021) has already highlighted, also allowing the expansion of the program. In fact, the PCF is now one of the most extensive early childhood-oriented social intervention programs globally, according to the authors (Buccini et al., 2021).

However, despite this worldwide prominence, the PCF was not a pioneer in this type of intervention. In 1986, in

⁸According to data, the schedule activities of volunteers in each region has two blocks of 40 hours of training divided between the WHO/UNICEF CCD methodology and a manual containing the home visits methodology, which was developed based on the Better Early Childhood program (Brazil, 2016). The intention behind the structure is to provide a cascading development between federal agencies: federation supporting states, and states supporting municipalities.

Kingston, located in Jamaica, a particularly relevant program was developed with similar strategies and intention: to assist children in situations of inequality. The PCF supported 129 children between 9 and 24 months of age with psychosocial and nutritional supplementation during the intervention.⁹ Further studies provided follow-up of participants at 7, 11, 17, and 22 years of age. The performance in cognitive tests of the children who participated in the intervention was significantly higher than the result obtained by the children who comprised the control group. The data showed that children in vulnerable situations who received support from the program got results such as those who did not face similar situations of poverty and socioeconomic inequality (Walker et al., 2005). The continuity of the follow-up also showed that the results remained even more significant as the participants became older. At the age of 22, the results demonstrated reasonable rates of cognitive ability development, reduction of educational withdrawal rates, and participation in crimes (Gertler et al., 2014).

Kingston, however, was just an experiment. Despite the critical results, there was no economic structure that would prove its escalation at the level of public policy, which is significantly different from the PCF. In the case of Brazil, much of the incentive and maintenance of the PCF occurred due to the political structure of the country, primarily through the efforts of the former Minister of Social and Agrarian Development of Brazil during the government of Michel Temer (2016-2018) and former Minister of Citizenship of Brazil at the beginning of the Bolsonaro government (2019-2020), Osmar Terra. Given the country's year and socioeconomic moment, the PCF was designed in a context of political transition, facing a scenario of severe instability after the impeachment of former President Dilma Rousseff in 2016 and high budget cuts on social impact programs. For that reason, its legal institutionalization results from a strong political strategy and social participation, which was essential to ensure permanent financing and maintenance (Buccini et al., 2021).

Therefore, despite the expansion and the important motivation aligned with the proposal for the development of socio-emotional skills, the PCF presents some limitations and barriers that are also a consequence of its form of implementation. According to the data presented in the study developed by Buccini et al. (2021), for example, because it does not have a financing structure between states and municipalities that allows consistency in monthly financial transfers, the program presented difficulties to fulfill the number of home visits both because the family was unable to receive volunteers, given the challenges of the transport system, as well as for the problems related to registration and monitoring in SUAS (responsible for controlling the expansion and quality of services). The cascading development of volunteers also presented difficulties due to the accelerated program's expansion, and the consequence was the lack of enough trained instructors, affecting the quality and capacity of the intervention and, consequently, endangering the effectiveness of the program. The results presented by Buccini et al. (2021), for example, demonstrate that the development of cascading training is a fundamental element for maintaining the quality and fidelity of the evidence based on WHO/UNICEF CCD methodology around the municipalities.

However, considering the alignment with the themes developed in this article, one of the main points of attention to the program is related to the role played by fathers and mothers and how this can affect the development of collective agency power and, consequently, the development of children's socio-emotional abilities.

IV. DISCUSSION

One of the highlights of PCF is regarding the instruction of women as mothers according to its official manual (Brazil, 2016). Dos Santos et al. (2020) performed a follow-up of the program by interviewing families of 3,242 children attended by the program distributed over 30 municipalities in six states. Mothers are the respondent in about 99% of the interviews. Mothers are also responsible for answering the information about the fathers even when they do not live in the same household. While the fathers had, on average, 30 years of age, 65% predominantly brown skin color, and had on average 8.5 years of schooling. The mothers had an average age between 26 and 27 years, approximately 72% with brown skin, and had on average 9.3 years of schooling. In more than 90% of the cases, the mothers were the official caregiver of the child. In 3% of the cases, the caregiver role belonged to grandparents. Fathers take over this role in only 2% of the cases. Dos Santos et al. (2020) also showed that only half of the fathers had a daily job, and more than a quarter did not work in any professional activity. Around 98% of the families were enrolled in the PBF. More than 70% of pregnancies were not planned, and approximately 28% of

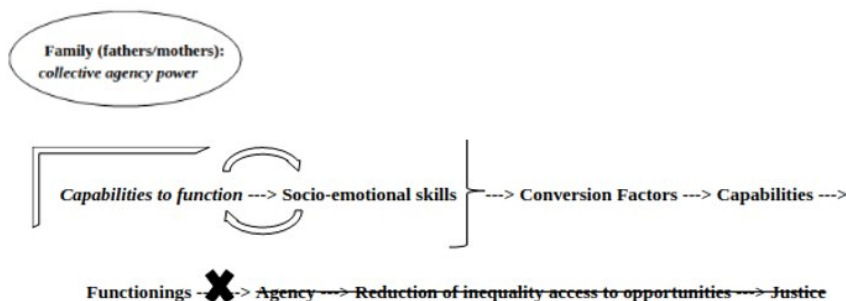
⁹During the two years of the experiment, volunteers with background in medical care and health weekly visited children from the study. During one-hour sessions, mothers and children were encouraged to develop basic cognitive and non-cognitive skills, mainly related to parenting aspects. Among the indirect actions of the study (aimed to promote future continuity), mothers also worked on the development of important capacities skills to interact with the child. In addition to intellectual capacities, the intervention was also provided psychosocial and nutritional support to repair and compensate the dietary deficiencies of the family.

the mothers had depressive symptoms (Dos Santos et al., 2020).

This data draws attention to some critical points that need development through the PCF. Three are fundamental to this article. The former is related to **i) the limitations of gender stereotypes developed during early childhood**, pointing out a difference between who takes care versus who takes charge. Children being cared for primarily by mothers raises a warning about the need for fathers to participate in the care process. In addition to the importance of both parents interaction to boost the full development of socio-emotional skills, the father's absence creates the image that only the mother is responsible for caring for the house and children. In contrast, the father is responsible for work and income. From an early age, children are exposed to a set of mental rules that put limits to their behavior and role in society. Limiting the development of skills fundamental to adult economic life. for example, for girls they may undermine acquiring survival and basic defense skills to protection, higher degrees of education, work opportunities, achieving management positions in the labor market and, consequently, having financial independence and higher levels of income (which when combined can help to avoid household violence); and, for boys, they may be related to dedication to household tasks, support and be both physical and emotional available for his family, practice activities considered artistic and more social, and others. Considering the relationship with both systems presented by Daniel Kahneman (2003; 2011)¹⁰, children develop a set of invisible rules – also called shortcuts or rules of thumb – that relate to the image of their parents (male and female) and their perception of society with the behavior, choice, and role they should play when they reach adulthood.

The second fundamental point is related to **ii) the emotional limitations of child development**, motivating the development of weaknesses of will rather than avoiding it. The depressive state evidenced in the data and the excessive weight that the mother carries in being the main caregiver of the child and the home, not counting the absence of support and participation of the father's figure, can influence the development of socio-emotional skills in children, causing the reverse effect: suppressing the development of basic skills, such as communication, and increasing fear, guilt, demotivation, and others.

Finally, the third point is related to **iii) the reduction of women's agency power**. As mentioned before, agency power is directly linked to the control of external aspects of life in society and, consequently, autonomy. By having individual responsibility and commitment to the development of children, mothers' dedication is only directed to this end. The set of hours dedicated to this journey – in many cases a double or triple journey, considering the single-parent home, work cycles, and the low level of income – produces a chain effect that results in worse positions in the labor market, less paid positions, lower schooling requirements, etc. The absence of women's agency power interrupts the collective agency power's cycle, producing a rupture in the presented flow and preventing the reduction of inequality of access to opportunities and the reach of justice.



Of course, the PCF is one of the leading examples of the effectiveness of strategies aimed at developing socio-emotional skills in early childhood, also constituting itself as fundamental to achieving justice in society. However, both its maintenance, feasibility, sustainability, and performance are related to the three points mentioned above. Although it is not the program's focus, these issues are directly associated with it and reveal the necessity to be considered in this type of intervention. Thus, in the next steps, we point out the need to improve the methodology and the way that the program is acting and interacting with families and children.

¹⁰Based on Daniel Kahneman (2003; 2011), the relationship between the two personality-thinking factors can also be understood by defining two systems: the first one, called System 1, is intuitive, spontaneous, natural, and unconscious; the second one, System 2, is rational and intentional. In other words, the former generates the impressions and thoughts regarding different situations and objects; while the second generates the explicit and intentional judgments guided by the aspects of reason. System 1 is non-cognitive (impulsive) and System 2 is cognitive (rational).

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