

The 12

Transferable Skills

from UNICEF's Conceptual and Programmatic Framework

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The 12

Transferable Skills

UNICEF promotes and supports the implementation of initiatives – programmes, public policies and research – to foster the development of transferable skills in education systems across Latin America and the Caribbean. These initiatives respond to the need to improve (i) education and learning for knowledge in societies; (ii) personal empowerment for development, inclusion, and access to life choices; (iii) results in active citizenship to increase social cohesion, peace and stability; and (iv) results in employment and entrepreneurship for economic development.

Transferable skills are those that are needed to adapt to various life contexts and that people can potentially transfer to different social, cultural or work settings. Transferable skills include cognitive, social and emotional skills, which enable children and adolescents to continue lifelong learning and become active and productive citizens. Transferable skills operate in coordination with other skills (foundational, job-specific and digital skills) and help them to relate and reinforce each other.

Developing transferable skills can and should be a lifelong process that can take place through different modalities and in a range of contexts. These skills can help to ease the transitions from childhood to adult life and from school to work. This is especially important for Latin America and the Caribbean, where secondary school completion rates are still low and the transition to the labour market is complex for adolescents with low levels of education.

The region has experienced many advances and reforms in education, including greater coverage of preschool education, better access to formal education, and an increase in completion rates at the different education levels. Yet there are still 10.5 million out-of-school children and adolescents in the region.ⁱ Moreover, greater access to education has not translated into relevant learning achievements that significantly reduce the persistent challenges of economic and social inequality affecting countries.

Overcoming these challenges requires increased emphasis on the inclusion of transferable skills (fundamental, transferable, digital and job specific) in regulatory frameworks and public policies for education, while strengthening efforts to measure such skills. This implies the need to promote curricular reforms, train teachers, implement innovative teaching methodologies, and ensure the availability of the necessary human and financial resources.

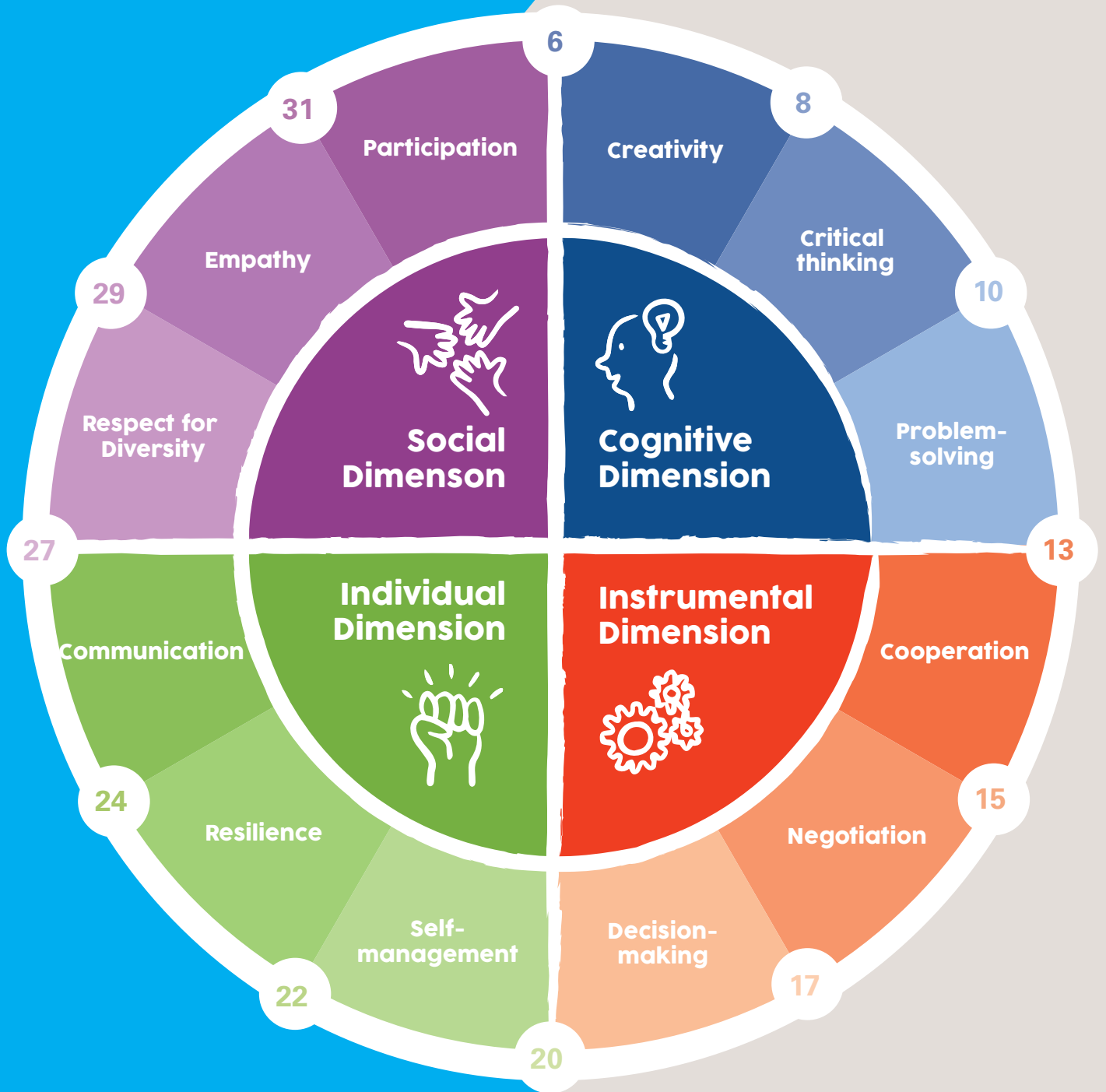
Consolidating transferable skills as early as pre-primary and into secondary and post-secondary education will ensure a holistic development and better learning achievements, support the employability of young people in the process of transition from school to work, strengthen economic growth, and contribute to more egalitarian and equitable societies.

The UNICEF [Global Framework on Transferable Skills](#)ⁱ is based on the four dimensions of learning as defined in the [Learning: The treasure within](#)ⁱⁱⁱ report, namely cognitive, instrumental, individual, and social, from which the set of 12 transferable skills unfolds, as proposed here in this document from a holistic approach.

The cognitive dimension (learning to know) includes learning skills such as creativity, critical thinking and problem solving. The instrumental dimension (learning to do) includes skills for employability such as cooperation, negotiation and decision-making. The individual dimension (learning to be) includes personal skills such as self-management, resilience and communication. Finally, the social dimension (learning to live together) includes skills for active citizenship such as respect for diversity, empathy and participation.

We hope that this publication, which is a synthesis of the Annex to the discussion paper: [The Importance of Transferable Skills Development in Latin America and the Caribbean](#)^{iv}, will contribute to promoting the inclusion of the 12 transferable skills in the region's teaching and learning proposals, considering the interrelationships between these four dimensions.

Content



Cognitive Dimension Skills





Creativity

Creativity is one of the basic life skills. It is defined as **the ability to generate, articulate or apply innovative ideas, techniques and perspectives**, either individually or through collaboration.

- Ideally, it should be actively promoted from an early age through teaching methodologies and educational activities that encourage imaginative play.
- Because it is essential for innovation and adaptation, creativity is a critical skill for education and work, and for performing in all daily life environments.
- Creativity is a natural element that is part of any learning process, regardless of age or environment.



Creativity

and the four dimensions of learning



Cognitive dimension

Contrary to popular belief, creativity is characterized by orderly and organized reasoning rather than undisciplined or chaotic processes.

Creativity can be learned at any age through the education curriculum and pedagogical approaches that emphasize reasoning skills over the acquisition of objective information.

Since creativity encourages divergent thinking, which involves more than one correct answer, it is closely linked to critical thinking.



Individual dimension

Creativity is closely related to self-esteem and self-worth; promotes the development of individual talent, motivation and determination; and fosters adaptive and flexible responses to everyday problems. It also increases coping skills with problems, leading to personal empowerment.



Instrumental dimension

This skill encourages the development of innovative solutions to diverse problems and is applicable to all fields and areas.

In the field of entrepreneurship, creativity is key because it stimulates innovation and problem solving, which contributes to making people's efforts more effective.

In a world increasingly mediated by technology, creativity offers new resources to solve old and new social, political and economic problems. In turn, new technologies encourage creative solutions and allow the reimagining of more inclusive and equitable futures.



Social dimension

Creative skills are best fostered in collaborative and social settings rather than as individual attributes.

In the social environment, creativity stimulates connections between different cultures and values, and is relevant to addressing complex community challenges, paving the way for positive social transformation.



Critical thinking

It is the permanent ability to ask questions, identify assumptions and evaluate facts, which allows to broaden our view and understand that behind what is seen as apparent, there are many more aspects to question and reflect upon. It is a fundamental skill to understand a world in constant change.

- Critical thinking facilitates complex mental processes that involve separating facts from opinion, recognizing assumptions, questioning the validity of evidence, asking questions and verifying information, as well as listening, observing, and understanding diverse perspectives.
- Not only is it important for academic performance, but its absence in the education system limits students from an early age to acquire the necessary skills to face complex problems, changes in life projects, and decisions related to the transition to the world of work.
- Critical thinkers become key people because they create better work environments, contribute to economic growth, and help build stronger communities.



critical thinking

and the four dimensions of learning



Cognitive dimension

Critical thinking plays a central role in all school subjects and academic disciplines. It must be taught in an explicit and concrete manner since students trained in this skill achieve superior performance, compared to those who do not receive this type of instruction.

This skill enables students to evaluate, question and synthesize new information so that, acting as genuine critical thinkers, they transcend simply agreeing or disagreeing.



Instrumental dimension

As workplace demands become more complex, critical thinking enables people to conduct analysis, solve problems, make effective job decisions and undertake changes to improve teamwork and individual performance.

In the professional world, it contributes to the creation of healthy and safe environments, reducing cases of mismanagement, as well as the incidence of accidents and conflicts.



Individual dimension

Critical thinking can raise the decision-making process to a conscious and balanced level.

It becomes an important characteristic that successful people preserve throughout life and due to which they can improve their quality of life, happiness and personal fulfilment.

Critical thinking comprises various attitudes, including open-mindedness, curiosity, the desire to be well-informed, flexibility and respect for others' viewpoints.



Social dimension

From a social perspective, it implies understanding and choosing personal options, being aware of the collective repercussions and respecting the decisions of others.

A lack of encouragement in the development of this skill can have repercussions at the community and social level, when inappropriate decisions are made that can affect different layers of society.

In the digital age, and in the midst of hyper-information, this skill is essential to separate the true facts from the false, so that the circulation of online information is useful, verifiable and responsible, and has a positive impact on communities.



Problem-solving

Problem-solving is the **ability to identify a problem, take logical steps to find the desired solution, and monitor and evaluate** the implementation of the solution.

- It is related to other cognitive skills, such as critical thinking and creativity, and is highly valued in academic, work and life settings.
- It is a flexible and adaptive skill that indicates openness, curiosity and divergent thinking, based on the observation and accurate recognition of the environment.



Problem-solving

and the four dimensions of learning



Cognitive dimension

Problem-solving is a widely recognized and essential academic skill that is developed through problem-based or inquiry-based learning.

It is key to science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) subjects, while in the social areas it fosters the search for appropriate solutions to diverse social networks.

Loosely defined problem scenarios require students to use different brain skills and greater creativity, as opposed to the “well-defined” scenarios that are often favoured in formal educational settings.



Instrumental dimension

In the workplace, it is positively valued that people assume responsibilities autonomously, take the initiative to identify and solve problems, and improve processes through teamwork.

This skill has a special value for life because it allows children and adolescents to face various difficulties of coexistence within the classroom, the family and in social and work environments.



Individual dimension

The development of this skill increases empowerment and self-perception about individual achievements.

It allows autonomy and the capacity for action in the face of adversity to be translated into lower levels of stress, so this ability effectively favours individual wellbeing.



Social dimension

This skill contributes to active citizenship, as it helps to identify solutions to problems faced by communities. In this way, collaborative community problem-solving is more likely to offer sustainable solutions.

It is particularly relevant in contexts of social conflict as it contributes to the exercise of rights, while offering solutions that strengthen the common identity, thus strengthening social cohesion.

Instrumental Dimension Skills





Cooperation

It is the **act or process of working together to achieve a common purpose or mutual benefit.**

- Cooperation demonstrates the ability to work effectively and respectfully with diverse people or teams, make commitments, build consensus to make decisions, assume shared responsibilities in collective tasks, and value the opinions and individual contributions of others, based on a strong individual identity.
- The motivation for cooperative relationships is more social than individual and is aimed at achieving a common goal that goes beyond personal benefit or gain.
- Cooperation is based on shared values and identities, emotional connections, trust and common commitment, all of which are essential for teamwork.



Cooperation

and the four dimensions of learning



Cognitive dimension

In classrooms with a collaborative work approach, positive interdependence and non-competitive behaviours are promoted. This leads to higher quality learning that is better retained than learning resulting from individual processes.

Furthermore, it also helps students to develop social skills, resolve conflicts and learn to work as a team for the benefit of the whole group.



Instrumental dimension

Cooperation demonstrates the ability to work effectively and respectfully with diverse teams, assuming shared responsibilities while valuing the individual contributions of other members.

In the world of work, cooperation is a valued skill that promotes respect for the opinions of others, the building of consensus and agreements, and the establishment of roles to achieve the desired results.

In conflict management, the cooperative approach, unlike the competitive one, achieves a win-win situation for all parties, which translates into higher levels of productivity, facilitating constructive solutions instead of hindering.



Individual dimension

Cooperation is important for self-identity and depends on strong self-control and self-awareness skills. In turn, self-identity enhances the ability to participate in collaborative work with others.

Developing this skill contributes to setting goals, managing uncertainty and building relationships, all of which lead to personal empowerment.



Social dimension

Closely related to problem-solving, respect for diversity and empathy, cooperation favours collective interests over individual interests, thus helping to solve many of the problems faced by organizations and societies.

Cooperation is also critical for active citizenship and social cohesion because it is based on shared values, attitudes and identities, as well as on emotional connections that involve trust.



Negotiation

Negotiation can be defined as a **communication process between at least two parties to reach an agreement on interests perceived as divergent.**

- It is based on the ability to participate in processes while being cooperative and using respectful and assertive communication skills.
- Negotiation is closely linked to communication, particularly active listening skills and decision-making skills.
- Negotiation, from an 'integrative' approach, is based on cooperation instead of competition, to reach mutually beneficial agreements acceptable to all parties.
- In a multicultural context, inclusive negotiation can help to overcome misunderstandings and improve relationships.



Negotiation

and the four dimensions of learning



Cognitive dimension

Negotiation skills can be taught and learned through observation and practice, using interactive techniques. These include role-playing in real-life scenarios and peer negotiation, allowing students to question, listen, debate, and reach solutions accepted by all parties.

The benefits of learning negotiation skills go far beyond the educational environment, since they prepare children and adolescents to handle with respect and assertiveness different situations in the family, the workplace and life in general.



Instrumental dimension

Valued in the world of work, negotiation plays an important role in employability, as it lays the foundation for positive interactions at work and contributes to build safer and more empathetic work environments.



Individual dimension

Negotiation help children and adolescents to be assertive when making decisions that have positive impact on their wellbeing.

The development of negotiation skills in adolescents better prepares them to preserve their mental health, sexual and reproductive health, and their overall wellbeing.



Social dimension

Negotiation involves the search for mutually beneficial solutions through cooperative, rather than competitive, partnerships and relationships.

Negotiation in its social dimension translates into a way of achieving objectives in interaction with others. It implies the expression of needs and mutual recognition in the search for cooperative solutions.



Decision-making

Every day, people make decisions that can affect their present and future, as well as their individual, family, school and community wellbeing. This skill can be defined as a systemic process of choosing a **preferred option or course of action from a set of alternatives, based on specific information and criteria.**

- It does not necessarily imply a linear process that entails defining an objective, collecting information, analysing options, evaluating and deciding upon and implementing the decision. It can also follow an informal dynamic or be based on intuition, reasoning or a combination of the two, considering that decision-making is done in an instant with the future in mind.
- It is considered a vital skill related to critical thinking, cooperation and negotiation.
- This skill is influenced by factors such as access to information, past experiences, age, personal and cultural beliefs, among others.



Decision-making

and the four dimensions of learning



Cognitive dimension

Decision-making can be taught and learned through collaborative tasks based on communication, creativity and critical thinking, which encourage students to identify the pros and cons of balanced and informed decisions.

It is desirable to offer children and adolescents opportunities of choice during their learning journeys, so that they learn to value the process and the results obtained by exercising this skill.

When decision-making is explicitly taught in the early years, it paves the way for better informed risk-taking in adulthood.



Instrumental dimension

Decision-making is critical for strong performance in the workplace, in competitive and changing economies.

It involves analysing information and different opinions, as well as solving problems from the perspective of the different parties involved in each production context.



Individual dimension

Decision-making is at the root of all human action, seeking to balance the options to manage contingencies of daily life, rather than simply selecting one risk over others.



Social dimension

An empathetic decision-making process is based on human rights, trust, respect, fairness and care. Thus, the process considers safety, social norms, consequences and the wellbeing of others.

Individual

Dimension Skills





Self- management

Self-management can be defined as **the ability to recognize and control emotions, feelings and impulses**. It includes various interrelated skills with applicability in family, school, work and social settings.

- Self-management is a cognitive process that regulates intense emotions. Impulsivity, risky behaviour, and a volatile temper are behaviours that can be addressed through the development of this skill.
- Self-management varies widely between individuals, and although its development begins in early childhood, it can continue to improve in adolescence and early adulthood through a more comprehensive approach, as it encompasses a myriad of related skills.
- Self-management fosters self-efficacy and self-awareness, which contributes to improving relationships and quality of life in general.



Self-management

and the four dimensions of learning



Cognitive dimension

Self-management enables people to have better responses to difficult situations that involve stress and disorders related to anxiety, depression and violence.

Aspects such as persistence and perseverance are of special interest, as they allow an individual to continue to master a skill despite challenges, obstacles and distractions.



Individual dimension

Self-awareness about emotions and feelings allow people to recognize strengths, weaknesses and preferences, as well as to identify when experiencing stress.

It is a vital skill for personal fulfilment and empowerment, as it improves autonomy, capacity for action and sense of self-care.

Self-management is related to an individual's ability to set goals and actively self-manage life planning, leading to better control of emotions and social performance.



Instrumental dimension

Self-management contributes to concentration, emotional regulation and stress mitigation, favouring coexistence, as well as collaborative work and the maintenance of good relationships with co-workers in the workplace.



Social dimension

Self-management enables individuals to live well with others, developing and practising behaviours and attitudes that are respectful of diversity.

People with this ability are more autonomous, confident, and feel positive about themselves, therefore, can relate with respect, tolerance, and empathy towards others.

These traits make it possible to achieve collaborative processes, and even the construction of community groups that work for the promotion of human rights and social cohesion.



Resilience

It can be defined as **the ability to navigate successfully in changing and adverse circumstances, allowing people to overcome the different difficulties that arise in daily life and regain emotional balance.** It allows the development of positive behaviours in the face of stress, threats or conflicts.

- The concept of resilience is conceived as the skill by which to address difficult problems in an active, conscious and constructive manner.
- It encompasses coping skills, steadfastness, perseverance, and determination to recover from difficulties, stress or changes.
- Being resilient does not mean being protected from difficulties or distress; it means facing adversity in a constructive way, recognizing, and taking care of mental health.



Resilience

and the four dimensions of learning



Cognitive dimension

Since it is the result of developmental process in childhood and adolescence, resilience can be improved at school. It helps students maintain a positive perspective on education in adverse situations.

Although, by itself, resilience does not necessarily lead to academic achievement, determination and perseverance applied to long-term goals contribute to overcoming difficulties in education.

Resilience is encouraged by promoting active reflection and participation in learning processes (in any formal, non-formal or informal education setting), by being able to predict and prepare for difficulties and ways to overcome them.



Individual dimension

Resilience allows people to cope with stress, recognizing its origin and effects, in order to control it with changes in lifestyle or strategies to reduce stress.

This skill includes the ability to positively reassess a situation, regulate emotions, plan, and make use of social resources and support.

It is based on self-efficacy and empowerment to preserve in personal development, even in difficult and stressful times. In stressful situations, it helps people resist falling into discourses that lead to conflict, and can also be helpful in protecting and defending oneself and finding ways to move forward.



Instrumental dimension

Resilience is a key skill in professional settings, particularly in the event of rejection or difficulties finding or sustaining employment.

During prolonged unemployment, resilience can provide the necessary momentum to keep searching and/or finding new alternatives.

This ability also enables coping with conflictive situations or stress. In contexts of high social, economic or employment instability, where various difficulties arise, resilience contributes to the development of creative ways to maintain or rebuild livelihoods.



Social dimension

Since social, environmental, economic or political emergencies can introduce abrupt changes in a community, due to the combination of physical risks and conditions of social vulnerability, resilience skills contribute to risk mitigation, facilitating the understanding, management and reduction of potential contingencies.



Communication

Communication can be defined as **the ability to share meaning through the exchange of information and common understanding**, which is key to all other skills.

- Communication that includes a verbal, non-verbal or written exchanges between two or more individuals, can occur through a variety of languages and media. Communication skills are fundamental for the realization of different key aspects of human development, such as learning, social inclusion and wellbeing.
- Its exercise and development occur throughout life, with early childhood being a critical stage for its development and encouragement. The evidence shows that an adequate environment and early affective interactions are essential to develop communication in its different forms and languages.
- Communication skills are essential for the knowledge society and are promoted through interactive teaching and learning methodologies, favouring active participation in contexts of freedom of expression and respect for diversity.



Communication

and the four dimensions of learning



Cognitive dimension

The development of a wide range of communication skills involves interactive and participatory learning, allowing for active listening and questioning.



Instrumental dimension

In the world of work, effective communication is key to finding and keeping a job, as well as engaging in teamwork and interacting with others.

Mastering communication skills (speaking effectively, listening actively and asking questions) includes using different modalities and choosing the correct method to convey the message.

Efficient communication is based on critical thinking and higher-order reasoning and inference skills. It is also based on the interpersonal and self-management abilities that are essential for successful collaborative work.



Individual dimension

It is related to the expression of opinions and feelings, which favour the construction of interpersonal relationships and social cohesion.

The ability to express opinions and wishes, ask for help and advice is important for individual fulfilment and interpersonal relationships.

Adequate communication in various contexts is essential for lifelong development as it enables individuals to reach their full potential and achieve a sense of empowerment and individual effectiveness.



Social dimension

In the social sphere, communication skills are instrumental for active citizenship and freedom of expression. It also contributes to the functioning of society, through actions at the individual, family, community and social level.

Communication makes it possible to discuss, choose and clearly explained a point of view, while considering the points of view of others.

The accelerated technological transformation has created the need for communication skills in new languages that allow effective communication with diverse and interconnected social groups.

Social

Dimension Skills





Respect for diversity

Based on the understanding that, by virtue of their human condition, people participate in a common world, respect for diversity can be defined as **the ability to recognize the uniqueness and differences of each individual.**

- It is related to the ability to listen actively and implies openness to other perspectives and willingness to perceive others as subjects worthy of respect. This is closely related to the principle of equality and involves using critical thinking skills to identify the underlying causes of inequity and to find constructive ways to address it.
- Individual differences based on ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, socio-economic status, age, physical ability, religious, political and other beliefs, require this skill to go beyond tolerance and understanding, as it involves recognizing and actively promoting the equal value of all people.



Respect for diversity

and the four dimensions of learning



Cognitive dimension

Respect for diversity is essential to ensure equitable and inclusive education, helping prevent discrimination and promoting a positive environment conducive to better learning processes and outcomes.

In educational settings, respect for diversity can be fostered by developing different skills to deconstruct stereotypes and listen respectfully to others.



Instrumental dimension

In the world of work, respect for diversity includes accepting diverse levels of competence, as well as differences in gender, ethnicity and religious beliefs. It helps to prevent discriminatory practices, foster respect among colleagues, reduce conflict and increase productivity.

It is an essential skill for cooperation and, since it allows teams to be more creative and innovative in different environments, it is an asset in the knowledge economy.



Individual dimension

As a central element of the individual dimension, this skill is a fundamental part of human development as it allows people to test their assumptions and better adapt to heterogeneous and diverse societies and communities.



Social dimension

Respect for diversity leads to social cohesion through respectful interaction and communication.

This ability plays a key role in conflict management and resolution, promoting reconciliation and perceiving people with different points of view as equals.



Empathy

It can be defined as the **capacity to understand the feelings of others without judging them and being able to experience them for oneself.**

- By encouraging collaboration, solidarity and responsible behaviour towards people and the environment, empathy constitutes an important asset in promoting sustainable development.
- It is a key concept in developmental psychology and in cognitive and social neuroscience, which involves internalizing rules that protect others, enabling the recognition of others, their situation, and their needs.
- Empathy develops early and rapidly, possibly as a personality trait that continues into adulthood. Therefore, parenting skills and early learning strategies play an important role in the development and promotion of empathy throughout life.



Empathy

and the four dimensions of learning



Cognitive dimension

Empathy is fundamental for academic success and is developed through a combination of emotion, cognition and memory, which involves emotional perception, the strengthening of personal identity and the ability to connect with others.

In the school environment the development of this skill is key to meaningful teaching and learning processes that promote critical thinking, problem solving, cooperation and communication.



Individual dimension

Since human beings are social by nature, a good part of the brain is dedicated to understanding one's own and others' emotions. Therefore, empathy is central to emotional literacy and underpins perception, as well as smooth interpersonal and social interactions.



Instrumental dimension

This skill encourages the construction of personal, social and employment ties that, based on respect and collaboration, provide opportunities to participate in inclusive processes of social, cultural and productive development.

Since empathy translates into attitudes that recognize others, which is key in caring environments, and plays an important role in building healthy professional and work relationships.

People in management or leadership roles who incorporate this skill are characterized by respect for others and the promotion of healthier and more productive environments.



Social dimension

Empathy plays a key role in the dynamics of human relationships and in citizenship education, as it motivates altruism and leads to better social cohesion through collaboration and solidarity.

It is closely linked to respect for diversity, as it contributes to recognizing people's common humanity and fosters active tolerance.

Adults with empathy skills can provide a safe emotional space for children and adolescents to exercise their right to be heard and understood.



Participation

It is defined as **the action of taking part and influencing processes, decisions and activities.** It is an act of individual and community empowerment because people who participate often exercise their human rights, while contributing to the collective wellbeing.

- It has been widely recognized in international instruments and is a guiding principle of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, stipulating that when decisions affecting children and adolescents are made, they have the right to be heard, to freely express themselves, to share and receive information, as well as to participate as citizens and agents of change.
- Active participation enables opinions and ideas to be valued, which gives children and adolescents a sense of control and capacity to exercise their rights and strive for greater achievements.
- More importantly, students who participate in decision-making in their schools, exhibit higher self-esteem and a greater capacity for social interaction, thus contributing to a healthy school environment where learning is conceived as a shared responsibility.



Participation

and the four dimensions of learning



Cognitive dimension

Participation helps students initiate and engage in actions that motivate student leadership.

It also strengthens student–teacher relationships and improves the classroom environment by increasing awareness of the different learning styles and alternatives ways of learning.



Instrumental dimension

Participation is a key component in the world of work, as it contributes to the empowerment and active involvement of workers in the regulation of functions.

From a rights perspective, participation in the workplace is based on an equitable relationship between the parties.

This implies the absence of coercion, safe and secure employment conditions, as well as respect, dignity, income and fair benefits.



Individual dimension

Everyone, including children and adolescents, can participate in various ways; participation is not awarded at a certain age but is learned through practise.

A meaningful participation cycle reinforces maturity and personal growth by increasing confidence, which results in more effective participation.



Social dimension

In the social dimension, this skill implies the assumption of an active role to improve community, economic, political and environmental contexts.

Participation is a critical skill in building active democratic citizenship. Communication skills, along with critical thinking, are essential for full participation in the civic and political life of a society.

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Endnotes

- i. UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 'Data: Number of out-of-school children, adolescents and youth of primary and secondary school age', <<http://data.uis.unesco.org/>>;, accessed 27 December 2021.
- ii. United Nations Children's Fund, *Global Framework on Transferable Skills*, UNICEF, New York, 2019.
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